GUATEMALA

COUNTRY READER
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GERALD A. DREW
Consular Officer
Guatemala City (1936)

Consular Officer
Guatemala City (1942-1944)

Gerald A. Drew was born in San Francisco, California. A career Foreign Service Officer, Drew received a series of short-term postings while working in the Latin American Division. His first temporary post was in Guatemala in 1936. What follows, are letters written by Drew to his wife, Doris Hunter Drew during his months in Guatemala.

Wednesday October 14, 1936
Guatemala

Enjoyed your letter from Mazatlan. Hope you reached cooler climes before long. I know that when I went up on the Chaumont, we had cool weather, at least two days out of San Diego. Congratulations on winning the prize. You neglected to say what it was. Perfume? Do you remember that I pointed out a man walking around the deck & said I thought I knew him? It was Summerlin. I have never met him but must have seen pictures. If those stupid oafs had been able to dig me up a passenger list, as I asked, I would have spotted him, of course. As it was I almost

went up to speak to him. The son came around to the Legation here that day looking for me. I had met him in San Jose, C.R.

All quiet here as before. Have been dragged around to play bridge a bit more than I would like, but otherwise all quiet. Dinner and bridge at Myers Saturday. Sunday I took Mrs. Schlasier out to the lake in the morning. Played bridge here with Mrs. Des [Desportes], Tewks [Tewksbury, who later served with Jerry in Ecuador.] and Mrs. Hodgson all afternoon & evening on Sunday. Quite a session. Monday George Echeverria had a lunch which lasted until six, when we (Irma and I) went to a k.t. [cocktail] party at the Cornews & then back to join the luncheon party. It lasted until one a.m., when we wound up eating black beans at a Mexican restaurant. What a day! Last night Mrs. Des and I were asked to play bridge with the Myers/Davis/Fordham/Armstrong club. Drinks at Davises', dinner at Grace Inn, & bridge at Myers. Pouring rain, as it has been ever since you left. Everyone says the dry season will soon be here, but no real signs yet. They all claim to have seen ducks flying south. About the day after you left San Jose—the port [in Guatemala]—was flooded by sea and rainwater, and no cars could get into it. We were lucky.

While I think of it, don't forget to send flowers –a plant or whatever you like—to my parents for their anniversary, the 18th. Of course you may not have this by then, but if you do... I am really quite comfortable here, though I haven't yet become accustomed to the narrow bed. Have I told you of the many fiendish noises emanating from the military school across the street? The sentries clap their hands every five minutes, all night long, though people say they can do it in their sleep. The idea seems to be to show they are awake. The first bugles go off at four a.m., when there is a slight let-up until six, when they really hit their stride until about nine. During the few intervals in the bugling one hears the shots of target practice going on. Several mornings a week they add variety by having a full band execute airs. I actually slept until 8 this morning, but have been getting up at six as a rule. Don't see how Mrs. Des stands it.

Nothing new about my movements. Think I told you the new man is due about the 18th. I'm skeptical—I seem to be the only person able to make fast moves. All the others I have known manage to dig up leave or some reason to delay them. After this session I am going to get hard-boiled and let other people worry about my vacations. Let me know how you get along on funds, though I would rather not have to send you anything until after the first, when I get my pay again. Living here is certainly cheap, and I haven't been using my own car much. Bridge has been rather profitable. In anticipation of Managua I am putting in an order for some WHITE shirts (get it), pyjamas and undershirts. I know how it is in the tropics where one sweats more. We can order direct from the Arrow factory much cheaper than through Emily [Plaidell, Dodo's friend and personal shopper in New York], as they give us wholesale prices. Chacon the packer is through with Mrs. O'D's stuff and I'm having him start tomorrow on the china, etc. She only had 72 cases—she is so d__ efficient about everything it has been quite a nuisance. If only she weren't so bossy and high-handed! Mrs. Des is furious at her for the way she has been ordered around by her. She [Mrs. Desportes] hasn't her red hair for nothing. Still as sweet as ever. If she were a few years younger you would have been taking a risk at leaving us together.

It really is a shame about Birney [the Desportes' son]. He is a nice lad but his sole interest in life is tap dancing. He doesn't seem to have a single friend—sees no one but his mother and the

servants. I can't even persuade him to ride downtown with me. As for his lessons—not interested. Well, it's none of my business.

Heard from Campy. Am writing to [Willard] Beaulac to get some assurance that the Dept. will give him a chance to tell his side of the story when he gets up to Washington. He sounded pretty sick and blue. Really, his case has kept me awake nights.

This has been most disjointed, but I have been stopping every two minutes to sign mail or dictate things. Pouch going out. Shall do better in my next. Of course I miss you already, sweet.

Wednesday, October 21, 1936

I am tempted to start with a slight tone of reproach, as I was disappointed not to hear from you in the mail which came in Monday, but having in mind all the fuss and bother you must have had getting from the boat to Ross, and once there, installing your *famille nombreuse* in the new quarters, I shall refrain from more than expressing the hope that tonight's airmail carries some word from you. The last letter from you was written on the boat on the 11th as you were coming in to L.A., to the accompaniment of hymns from the passengers and I think very possibly with the additional handicap of a goma (hangover) from which Madame seemed to have been suffering. It sounded as though the Saturday night had been a very gay one. If you managed to have such a lovely time on the boat with 3 babes and Lola around your neck, what will you do when you can park them all safely in Ross under the six watchful eyes of the Hunters?

No startling developments to report here. Work in the Legation is actually nil. Last Saturday the Wells had a party—supposedly a "surprise" for him on his birthday. Tewks – Davis – Denby – a Guatemalan married to an American girl, and Burbank and his beautiful blonde wife. We bridgers shouted our way through the din from the nons—who played some game that sounded like a world series baseball effort. The Wells all have strident voices, and with a few snifters under their belts do they let go! Little Mildred is a too precocious brat for 13. Hope none of ours get to be as bad at that age. She was the leading spirit of the party, running the card game & telling one and sundry just where to get off. I brought them a box of miscellaneous groceries from the stock left over—caviar – olives – beer – tomato juice – some wine, etc. Dean was as tickled as a two-year old at Xmas. Had lunch with Denby one day – Did you know Mrs. D. had been operated on for appendicitis soon after she arrived in S.F.? She was at the St. Francis Hospital but I imagine has gone home by now. If not, you might send her some flowers or go see her when you're in S.F. He was apparently much concerned—phoned to her several times. Seems really devoted. Despite anything they may say about his past, I really like the fellow.

Had a bridge evening with the Davises the other night. They—and particularly he—held every card in the deck—one slam after another—but as we—Mrs. Post and I—managed to get in some juicy sets, we only lost $2.30 each. Did Aileen love it? She rubs me the wrong way. Mrs. DesP wants me to go to Antigua with her. She has never been—but Mrs. Davis has invited herself along, and I don't fancy being at such close quarters with her for a whole day. The Robert Smiths had a k.t. party the other day. I arrived to find only Schaeffers & Herreras—later the Lynches came, and that was all. Strange, no? I believe that is a true and complete account of my social activities since I last wrote. Not quite so heavy as the week before, and much more to my liking.

I'm taking Mrs. Des to see *Anthony Adverse* Sunday. The American Club is having a hard times party [a favorite kind of costume party in the thirties, with people dressing like hoboes], but I think I'll skip it. No one in particular I crave to go with, and it will probably be quite a brawl. Mrs. Des and I have been housekeeping vigorously, with painters around and actually getting some work out of the staff, including lazy Julio, much to her amazement. She really had let things slide terribly, and seems to appreciate my help in jacking up the servants. I wish she would take a little more interest in the cuisine. Juan isn't such a nifty cook in my opinion, and gets no advice from her. He only goes to market once a week, and then I don't see how he can spend more than a few dollars. Hardly any vegetables appear on the table, and those canned. Chicken every day because Birney likes it. Never a decent roast. One particularly tasty dinner consisted of canned broiled tripe, cold beets and grits—the latter a southern dish we get daily, which looks and tastes like thick cream of wheat. Haven't had a salad, but on request have managed to have a couple of avocados served up. I can't understand it as they all seem to like their groceries. I wish they would take in Angelina. As it is, the government is paying for every last one of their servants, and when Manuel has to go out we can't even get one of them to switch-hit in the office for a few hours. I shouldn't complain about the fare, though—as it is free, and better than I would get at the hotel, and of course I am ever so much more comfortable here. She is unfailingly considerate and kind. I think she has been lonely, and welcomes company.

Pappa Marsh is back. Bears no particular news. Tewks is all steamed up about going to Korea. You will probably hear from him. He will be in S.F. from the 8th to the 25th of December. Told me of all the flattering things he had to say about DesP and me at the Dept. Maybe. Seems to have lost some of his dislike for O'D. He saw Joe [McGurk] at the Dept., who only left for Japan at the end of September. I wonder if he got in touch with any of my family. Don't repeat to anyone you might write to here, but the old boy plans to get married in S.F. to a widowed cousin and take the bride with him. Why not? He must be lonely and if she has known him a lifetime & still loves him it might work.

I believe since my last to you I have had word about the arrival of the new Secty. [This refers to the title of a Foreign Service officer serving as third, second, or first secretary of a Legation or Embassy—not to the clerical secretarial position.] He may take a Grace boat out of New York on November 7, arriving here the 17th, but probably won't sail until the 21st, which wouldn't bring him here till December 1st. If I then have to stay on with him for two weeks it is going to hold up my arrival in Managua. It doesn't particularly matter to me, but I don't want to be held down here until too late to get leave before I go into the Dept. Am going to try to cut down my time in Managua & Tegoose (Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital).

Don't know about staying here all that time [meaning the DesPortes house], though Mrs. Des says I must stay. Think I shall pull out to the hotel when he [DesPortes] comes back the middle of November. What thinks you?

Shan't try a 4th page. Don't expect another letter for a week. Wednesday seems to be the best day to write. Tell Deirdre I received her very interesting letter and to let me have more. Hope this finds you all well.

November 4, 1936 – Guatemala

What with helping FDR get elected I put off this now weekly effort until today, and then got tied up with O. Gaylord on guess what? Rugs—of which I am buying $100 worth—until now it is six o'clock and this is going to cost me double—all of 33 cents. But then you are really worth at least that—even so far away. The dry season must at last be upon us—it has turned cold and windy and has that wintery snap in the air. I'm stepping out to Simpsons' tonight and fancy I shall wear my heavy blue coat at least. Last night Mrs. D. had some 20 in after dinner to listen to election returns. Mostly official family plus Bob Smith & Fordhams, who seem to be greatly interested in the results. It certainly was a landslide. I am really pleased. I have hopes he will cut out some of the foolishness now, spend less and accomplish even more than during the last 4 years. I would love to send a radio to Myers (off for a cure at Hot Springs, or maybe to get away from Margot, who stays behind) saying just "raspberries." To get back to the election—the party bridged and radioed & drank & ate at midnight & went home about 2:30. You can imagine how tickled Mrs. D. was. She had threatened to get herself lit but didn't.

Marsh has a letter from the consul in Teheran about [real Persian rugs] with prices. Believe it or not, a 9 X 12 for about $14. Freight might double it. They are so low he thinks there is a catch, but we can't see what it is. Anyhow we are going ahead—Mrs. D. & Irma & O Gaylord-- & putting in an order. I am ordering one 9 X 12, one 8 X 10, two 6 X 9 & six 3 X 5. The works won't cost $150, and I think it's too good an opportunity to be missed. He will make it plain what we expect and trust to luck. It is hard to pick your colors. I am not specifying much except for soft tones of blue, green, & blue & rose. We should be pretty well fixed for Washington. Sorry I won't have a chance to consult you about prices, colors, etc., but if we don't like them we could sell them for 5 or 10 times the cost, or exchange them there. Hope we find there is no catch. They can be stored here until my stuff goes to Washington.

Haven't done much dissipating since my last letter. Took Miss G. out to Amatitlan to the k.t. party to dedicate the new club house of the light company. It was cold and drizzly. That night—Saturday—had dinner with a friend of Geo. Echeverria—four men—Guatemalan food—good but hot & heavy. Stayed up burping until 3 a.m. You should have been here—some of my best. My tum-tum by the way has been much better. Almost no burps—can you believe it?

Poor Campy! Had the most pitiful letter from him. Wishes he had died under the knife, etc. etc. My letter was the first and only word of cheer he had had. I wrote Beaulac, you know, pleading for a chance for him to get squared—tell his side of the story & perhaps get his army record clear. Beau was on vacation & turned the letter over to [Larry] Duggan, chief of L.A. [the Latin American Division at State; Beaulac was Jerry's predecessor as Central America desk officer], who at last wrote me "Dear Jerrying" me to my surprise, & noncommittedly said he didn't know whether the Sec. State would be able to see Campy if he came to Washington, & they were all sorry, etc. etc. A typical State Dept. letter, but I'm afraid I'll be that way myself one of these days. It's a wonder my soft heart—Did you know I had one?—hasn't got me into more trouble than it has. At that, I hope not to lose it. By the way, Campy now plans to come up the West Coast on an Army transport on his way to Wyoming. I wish you could put him up at Ross for a few days. Give him a good time. Let Nell [Mary Lee/Tia/Dicky] (not you) make love to him & try to cheer him up. Why don't you write to him c/o Gorgas Hospital, Ancon, Canal Zone? Be

cheery and tell him to let you know when he's coming, etc. If you have to spend money on any hot-spotting [night club sorties, etc) I might even be able to raise the week's allowance—my blood money, as it were.

Have seen the Lynches a bit—both very friendly. She is as Pritchish as ever and his face as red. [*Pritchish* probably refers to their mutual Cal friend Marion Pritchard, "Pritch," but I don't know what aspect of her persona this "adjective" refers to.]

And what of D's tonsils? Will be glad to hear when out. Don't like the afternoon temperature. If it continues have her examined for TB. I don't think there's a chance, but--!

I've asked John to tell me what he thinks of her general appearance when he next sees her, but I specifically told him I didn't ask him to intervene in any way. I think it is unfair to him & besides, you & your family have made all arrangements about doctors, & too he isn't a baby doctor. Do you agree? What are you going to do about all these question marks, or will they be like the arrow that fell to earth I know not where? I hope not!

And what of the strike? So far the United Fruit & Grace boats seem to be coming in here, but I imagine it won't continue long. You might send me an occasional clipping on that or any other subject you think might interest me. My dear one—your letters all sound so distant - aloof - hurried, written in snatches while Dicky waits, or in doctors' offices. Can't you do better? If you sometimes have something not for prying eyes (get me?) you could send it to the Dept. in Washington, marked "Via pouch to Guatemala."

Orders! Attention! Please buy me one dozen plain, cheap white hankies, with or without a "D." Also, what about some of those woven names. I am going to be moving about & in hotels etc. and it might be a sound idea. If not too expensive what about ordering me a gross. Either initials or name, as you like. What with my new shirts coming, white suits, etc., I can use that many. Also—keep an eye out for pyjams. In sweaty Nicaragua I shall need more than I have now and I seem to have lost several trousers. Remember, woman, no damn collars—I take about a "C" I think. Try Hastings. You can charge things there I am sure as I and John are old customers. I have a good friend there whose name begins with a B--& might be Jewish. An old student of my father. Ask John. For help in pyj. size, I wear a 42 undershirt, 16-34 shirt & 34 drawers, and like my women hot. Don't buy cheap ones. They are always skimpy & don't last. If in doubt buy me one pair... I could stand about 2 or 3 more. If you like, bill me for any items I may order – or charge to Hastings or Atkins. You might like to keep straight on your allowance, and besides then you won't have any alibis. I can send you $125 until the operation & doctor bills are paid anyhow. Also, as to pyj. colors, white, blue or tan. Suit yourself, as you may have to sleep with them some distant day.

How's the stomach? Work on it please! I have had to deny that any blessed event impends. Blushes. Is everything still all right? No miracles. Don't stand for too much from Lola. Threaten her with deportation at her expense if she gets too tough. When you do get to writing letters, don't forget we will be in Washington someday & write some of the old friends there—Blanche – Maggie – Katherine – Louise Heath – Young – Helen Daniel, etc. etc. Well, babe, here goes my thirty cents. Must bathe & dress. And now some real letters—

Friday the 13th [November] - Guatemala

Just had your post-operation letter and am so glad it is all over. Must have been as hard on you as on her [Deirdre's tonsillectomy]. But it doesn't sound as though it was very serious. Should think a few upset days could be expected. Hope she continues to pull out, and do have the check-up made that I spoke of. No harm done if it comes out favorably.

Just finished getting news over the radio & having a session of double solitaire with Mrs. Des—at which she invariably takes my money. Doesn't seem possible, but this is the second quiet home evening in a row. Tomorrow she is having a dinner of 12, and Sunday the fair starts off at 8 p.m. What a blow.

Tubby Silliman got into town today—just passing through. He heard other versions of the Campy affair not as favorable to him. Also the other side we have heard. Don't know what is what, but in any case I have done just about all I can for him.

Ben Zweig is back in Tegoose. He flunked the exams. Leslie Johnson passed. Brains don't seem to tell. Sorry about Ben but I had no hopes for him.

Heard from Wm. [William] Corcoran, now in Sweden, who received our wedding present—an old faience candelabra which Rovira bought with the ten-spot. It arrived the day before the shooting broke out. It is still in the Consulate safe at Vigo—as he practically had to flee for his life. He was too active in the affair & the Whites [Russians] suspected him of supporting the Reds. Just like him to get in a jam of some kind. He is wild at the Dept. for transferring him, but it may be as well they did.

Denby came to say goodbye this morning. He is flying up for a brief visit with his wife. I promised to phone you, as he may have done before you receive this. Despite any past I really like him and I think he is very fond of her.

While I think of it—Have you any ideas for a present for Mrs. D? I would like to give her something decent when I leave. It would seem banal to give her any of the local articles except possibly some sort of an antique table or what-have-you. Think it over and keep an eye out when in S.F. No silver, as she has so much already. Maybe $15-$20.

Speaking of silver, I have been mulling over the idea of going by train from Guatemala to Mexico City when I am ordered to the Dept.—or rather, when I go on leave—principally to get a look at the country. That idea set me thinking about maybe picking up some bits of silver there, and then the big inspiration came to me. Maybe you could park the chubs & meet me and do a week or two in Mex. City & environs & home. How does it sound? All very far off but worth keeping in mind. If John could get away he might drive you down & we could motor back together, etc. etc.

Still no news about future movements. Am getting very restless to move on. Will soon feel like a traveling salesman. Gibson, the sec. in Tegoose, has been assigned to the Dept., which makes me

wonder if they may not renege on having another C.A. (Central America) man there next year. In any case I imagine they will send me there [to Tegucigalpa] from here rather than to Managua—to help out until a new sec. arrives. Doesn't matter to me as long as they don't keep me there. Every report I hear on the place makes it sound worse.

I hear that SRL says he won't be in Costa Rica long as he expects a big promotion. Hope he gets Spain. He talks about being the first ambassador to Colombia.

Got bill for Wedgewood. About $70. Did we forget to order demi-tasse cups? It is almost midnight and I still need to catch up, so shall finish this in the a.m. It is really an extra one anyhow. In my next—on Wednesday—I shall be able to give you news of the new sec. I still think he is stiff-necked, from his letters—but we shall see. Until morning, my sweet.

Continued Saturday noon.

Re rugs: Don't get excited. If you don't like them we can sell them for several times what they cost. The price quoted is about 10 cents per square foot, when they ordinarily cost at least one dollar per square ft. in Persia. Figure it out. They are so cheap it is hard to believe, but in ordering them we made it clear that we only wanted them if of the usual type, standard quality, etc. etc., otherwise to return the money. Denby ordered $500 worth. One more crack from you and I won't let you even look at them.

You might put the enclosed note for D. in the envelope so she will think it is just for her. I do hope she is all right when you receive this. Am sure she will be.

Note: When taking pictures of the children, don't put their faces in the bright sun. Put them in shade but with plenty of reflected light so they don't squint.

Must close to give this to the brave Manuel. Lots of love and my best to the family.

November 19, 1936 – Guatemala

We have just had the snappiest little quake I have felt for a long time. It lasted quite a while, so we finally trooped out into the street in back of the office. No damage done, but it was pretty stiff. It always makes the heart turn over no matter how hardened one is to them. [And both Gerry and Doris had experienced the San Francisco Earthquake & Fire of 1906, although at the tender ages of 3 and 5.]

Well, the new secretary and family are here and are quite all right. I got up at 4:30 Tuesday and drove down with Julio. Went out on board where they were waiting. It took some time to get the car ashore, but we arrived here about 2:00, having lunch with Mrs. D. at the Legation. He is 40ish, tall, rather serious and I think rather on the efficient side, but I feel will do very well. Speaks quite decent Spanish. His wife is jolly and natural—very pleasant—and the 17-year-old daughter a knockout. About the prettiest trick I've seen in years. Beautiful blue eyes and light brown curly hair. Sweet & immature, but in a few years—I'll take ½ a dozen. Two nice boys, 13 & 10, as lively as a pair of monkeys. They are in the hotel, looking hard for a house. He seems to

worry a lot about funds. Considering that he has almost $100 per month more than we did, I don't see that he has to. As he is two grades ahead of me, I would have had to turn over to him, but the Dept. wired that I was to remain in charge until the Minister's return [DesPortes], which will be on Sunday the 22nd. The same wire also said that I would soon get orders to proceed to Managua. When Mr. D. arrives I am going to take it easy and let them worry about the office. Hope to get in a couple of trips—over to the Salvador border & possibly one to the Mexican border.

Received your nice long letter with one from D. Yes, you are doing much better by your hero & I have no complaints. So glad D. is better. I worry though about the afternoon temperatures. Don't let it go. And please stop worrying about the rugs. If we don't like we can sell for plenty more than we paid. The money has gone anyhow, so it's too late to stop it. I still think it wasn't a bad move. Said letter of yours—postmarked the 14th, 4 p.m. in Ross, was delivered at the Legation the evening of the 16th—about 48 hours. Not bad. They have changed the airmail schedule again just as I had about memorized the old one. I think the loss of the Douglas in the crash left them short of planes. It now appears there will be 2 trips to and from the north & 4 south, using red Fords twice a week. I'm going to hold out for a Douglas when I sail to Managua. Anyhow, I'm tossing this into the mail with hopes it will leave sometime.

Well, I suppose I must come clean on my schedule since my last. Let's see—no, no battleships or movie queens have come my way. You told all except how or when you got home, but I'm sure you were safe with Whitey. Was he plastered as of yore? Saturday Mrs. D. had 12 for dinner – Lynches, Steins, Mrs. Armour, Simpsons, Mrs. Jessup, & Mr. & Mrs. Colombia. Usual thing—bridge, etc. Sunday at 8 I had to be at the opening of the fair—the Prexy arrived at 9:00. Tuesday after my long day I was out with the bridge club at the Davises' until about 2:30. Quite a session. I got so furious there I almost walked out when they all, led by Mrs. Meyers, started razzing Kitty over you-know-what. Also Mrs. M. announcing that she & Charlie were going to take out Canadian citizenship on account of the election. I was wild—all in front of the Fordhams & Armstrongs. [These people were undoubtedly not FSOs, and the Fordhams & Armstrongs may well have been British; it would have upset Gerry to have them hear such disloyal talk from Americans.] Since Tuesday all has been quiet. Mrs. D. and I stepped to the fair last night. It is quite good. The scenic railway & other attractions are having "un succes fou." Unfortunately it has been cold & nasty with smatterings of drizzle and rain ever since it opened. I've had to pile vicuna rugs on me at night & heavy blue coat for going out nights.

Not to be read out loud: My father wrote rather wistfully that he hadn't seen the babes since they arrived, but they hadn't been asked to come to Ross. I agree it is foolish of them to stand on ceremony and of course D. has had all the tonsil trouble, etc. But do try to arrange for the family (mine) to see the babes once in a while. They could always drive over on a Sunday as it would be easier than for you to drag the brood over there. Say nothing, of course.

As for my commissions, don't worry about mail. Just send them to Dept. via pouch, as they will know where to forward things. I suppose it would be simpler for me to order from Emily. Shall do so in the future if you prefer.

Otherwise all is quiet here. All offices have been closed since Monday. Haven't gone to the races as they invited ministers only to sit in the Pres. Box. So I have just stayed away, being a mere charge. Rather a strange procedure, but I shall recover, as I have never been too keen on the ponies anyhow. Aileen D. has of course been betting furiously, & probably successfully.

From now on don't expect my letters to be very regular, as I may be tripping, and of course may be off to Managua any day, plus disarranged plane schedules. You see I'm springing my alibis in advance. Once again Manuel is champing at the bit [to take the mail] so shan't try to fill out this page. Not to mention the fact that the well of news seems to have run dry.

Thank D. for her nice letter, which I enjoyed very much. Tell her I hope her throat isn't hurting any more.

Give my love to the chubs and your family and much of same for you.

Guatemala – November 28, 1936

I feel as though I was cut off in the middle of a sentence. I refer to the abrupt ending of my letter of Thursday when we had word the Borders were on the plane and I had to rush to move things out of my room and depart for the Hotel. Mrs. D. pleaded with me to let her fix up a back room but it would have been a bother & the guests might have been embarrassed if they found out I had given up my room for them. You may remember Borders—a little fellow from Mexico who has a little stutter or hesitation in his speech. At any rate, I did a presto-changeo & cleared out, with Mrs. D. inclined to be very upset. He also urged me to stay on. In a way I felt better about leaving after nearly 2 months as the star boarder. I wanted to leave when Mr. D. came back, but she wouldn't hear of it.

We had a Thanksgiving dinner here for 18, including the minister to Paraguay, one Finlay Howard, Gentry, 2 Tewks, 3 McKinneys, 2 Davis, 2 Wells, etc. The usual evening mit bridge. Tonight I'm taking George, Irma, & Mrs. Schlasier up to San Rafael for dinner. Tomorrow George is having a big dinner somewhere—apparently for me. After that no dates until Managua. Am very bushed. Went to Schaeffers for dinner last night. It was quite amusing, to my surprise. She is very jolly. We teased Ernesto, Tewks got to kicking chandeliers, & even Mrs. Kraske (wife of German minister) did a rumba with him. It was late. Haven't slept well in the hotel. Apparently I miss the bugles we have here all night long.

You ask about Xmas presents. I really have no ideas. Do stay away from anything bulky, pliz, as I shall be living out of trunks for quite a while. I could stand a few neckties. Also, there is a book I would like—*The Caribbean since 1900* by Chester Lloyd Jones, published by Prentice-Hall Inc., N.Y., $5.00. And second choice, The American Language by H. L. Mencken, Knopf, $5.00. You might mention books to my family (if they ask).

I almost got reckless and bought a new morning suit, but they are rather high here and the one I have can do until Washington. If I need one there I can get a ready-made one for less. [This is the "striped pants" attire, worn with top hat, for ceremonial diplomatic events.] Also I may fly down to Costa Rica for Christmas/New Year session, where I could have one made cheaper. Mr.

DesPortes is going to take a trip through C.A. & may join up with me. Sounds like a gay time in the old town, no?

Just had an interruption from a fat Jewish tourist friend of DesP. My Saturday afternoon calm was rudely interrupted. I got a new Panama [straw hat], quite a good one. If & when I receive shirts ordered from Arrow and your shipment—hope it went via pouch—I will be all fixed. I am about to tear out and make some PPC calls [*pour prendre conge*, the goodbye calls on fellow diplomats, as mentioned earlier], and then to the Post Office to mail this & one to the family. Not as long as I expected, but plus the last one with check should hold you till I catch my breath in Managua. Let me hear about Thanksgiving. Hope D. and all are well.

ROBERT F. WOODWARD
Deputy Chief of Mission
Guatemala City (1944-1946)

Ambassador Robert F. Woodward was born and raised in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He entered the Foreign Service in 1932. Ambassador Woodward's career included Deputy Chief of Mission positions in Bolivia, Guatemala, Cuba, and Sweden. He was ambassador to Costa Rica, Uruguay, Chile, and Spain. Ambassador Woodward was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1987.

WOODWARD: I was about to be assigned to Costa Rica as the Deputy Chief of Mission, and I had a conversation with the chief of Foreign Service personnel at that time, who was a man named Nathaniel Davis, a very, very sound citizen. He was known as Pen Davis, and Pen Davis was thoroughly well liked, and respected. And as I was discussing with him going to Costa Rica, he said, "I think maybe we better send a fellow who is older than you are to take hold in Costa Rica," because he didn't have much confidence in the man who was then Ambassador. So I was assigned to Guatemala as Deputy Chief of Mission. The Ambassador who was there at the time was a man named Boaz Long, a man of vast experience, and a very conservative gentleman. He spoke Spanish perfectly, came from New Mexico, and he had even been in charge of Latin American relations in the Bryan administration of the State Department in 1916. Here it was 1944 and he'd come back in the Democratic administration. He'd been Ambassador to Ecuador, and he was then Ambassador to Guatemala. I arrived in Guatemala about Thanksgiving time in 1944.

Well, when I was already assigned there but had not arrived, there was a coup d'etat in Guatemala. The long time dictator, Ubico, had voluntarily left office because he felt hurt and unappreciated along about the first of July of 1944. He had been dictator for about thirteen years, and run the country pretty well even though he was a dictator. He was known as a great friend of the Indians, and of course the Indians are well over half the population of Guatemala. He'd been succeeded by a protégé, a man named Ponce, President Ponce. President Ponce was overthrown in the last week of October, and at the moment Ambassador Long was up in the United States. The Chargé d'affaires was a very able young man, named Bill Affeld who had been a schoolmate of mine at the University of Minnesota. He was the man that I was going to replace, but Bill had

handled our affairs excellently during this coup d'etat. As a matter of fact he had been present when Ponce finally capitulated under the aegis of the Papal Nuncio. For the representative of the United States filling the shoes of the Ambassador, to be on this capitulation--on this change in Governments--was slightly dubious. But he had conducted himself in a proper way, and I admired what he'd done there.

Anyhow, when I arrived Boaz Long had come back from his leave; I was there from November of 1944 until January of '46. It wasn't very long. A little group, one was a captain, one was a lieutenant colonel, and one was a local businessman, a triumvirate, who had led the coup, and who took over the government. The businessman was a young firebrand named Jorge Torriello who ran a electrical supply business in Guatemala City. The captain of the army was Captain Arbenz who had been a student in the military academy. It was right across the street from the American Embassy and which was headed by an American army officer, and who knew Arbenz very well because he'd been a student there. The third man of this triumvirate was a very rough, provincial army lieutenant colonel, who was an effective and very popular army leader but not much respected by the other two members of the triumvirate who considered themselves to be more sophisticated intellectuals. That is, Torriello and Arbenz. Anyhow, the three men came out with a lot of pious declarations when they took over the government, including a promise that they were going to have very prompt elections.

Well, just a few weeks before this coup occurred, in anticipation of the possibility that there would be an opportunity to resume political activities, after Ubico had left the government, (Ponce was not much known or much respected) a man who had been a rather popular political leader, and who had been exiled--I guess mostly voluntary exile--was a school teacher named Arevalo, had come back to the country with the idea of getting back into politics. He'd received a great ovation at the airport, welcomed by a group of enthusiasts who remembered him from earlier days. He'd been out of the country for a rather large number of years, if I'm not mistaken eight or ten years. He was a professor of economics. He'd been a professor at the University of Tucuman in northern Argentina, and he'd also been in Chile for a while teaching. He was a rather elegant fellow who talked in rather flamboyant terms about...what was the term he used for his theory of government--"spiritual socialism". He had rather obviously applied the adjective "spiritual" to appease the fears of people who were afraid of the term socialism.

Anyhow, here he was in the wings at the time this triumvirate came out with their pious declarations they were going to have elections. Well, they had their elections about Christmas time, having taken over I think the 20th of October. Of course, Arevalo, who had a lot of publicity, was elected. These fellows were not enthusiastic about Arevalo at all, and they rather deplored the fact that they'd gotten themselves trapped by the fact that they had committed themselves to elections. (In Cuba, Fidel Castro also said he was going to have elections but he didn't trap himself, he never had the elections.) But these fellows were conscientious enough so they thought they had to go ahead and have the elections. Anyhow, they were cooperative, and they reconciled themselves to this, and Torriello was made Minister of Finance, Arbenz was made Minister of Defense. And the third man, whom we thought was probably the most promising fellow to be president eventually, because he was very popular in the army, was given a new position as "Chief of the Armed Forces". And he was a rather rough amiable fellow, a sort of street-smart type.

They also had had a constitutional convention, the very first thing they did. They started discussing a new constitution and they created a new position which was supposed to protect the democratic integrity of the government. It was called Chief of the Armed Forces. And the Chief of the Armed Forces was given certain constitutional authority to ensure that there were democratic elections. It was a permanent job under the constitution, and this man that I'm describing was made Chief of the Armed Forces. Whereas Arbenz, the younger man, was made Minister of Defense. Well, this government took over under Arevalo on the 15th of March of 1945, and the United States sent a special emissary as we usually did to inaugurations. The emissary was none other than the American Ambassador to Cuba, Spruille Braden. I remember going out to the airport and Spruille came over in his Air Attaché's plane from Havana--Havana was not terribly far away from Guatemala City. He arrived there in the nick of time to go to a special reception that was being given to all of the special emissaries in the presidential palace, and they, of course, had to be garbed in their formal finery. Spruille got out of the airplane and under the wing of the airplane where there was more room for him to change his clothes, he changed into his formal `morning clothes' out at the airfield, and we drove him in to the reception. Anyhow, he was there for several days huffing and puffing about, as was his wont. He was very filled with himself. Anyhow, nothing particularly happened and the inauguration went off in the normal way.

So I was there while the government of Arevalo continued...this was '45. Shortly after President Arevalo came into power his Secretary of Foreign Affairs, who was a highly respected lawyer in Guatemala City, came out to see Ambassador Long at his house which is very, very unusual in Guatemala because in these small countries, at least particularly in my experience in Guatemala, they are very careful not to give any indication that they are kowtowing to the U.S. because they are independent, sovereign countries, and they're all equal. As a matter of fact, Sumner Welles added to this by making the representatives to every country in Latin America Ambassadors. When I first came into the Service there were many Ministers rather than Ambassadors. Anyhow, they're all equal so the Foreign Minister made this very unusual step of coming out to call on Long. I didn't even know that he'd done this until after Boaz came back into his office, which adjoined the residence. He called me in, and he said, "The Foreign Minister just came out to see me. He sat down there and he wept." He said, "There are a group of hotheads in this government who don't like you Mr. Long. They think that you are a carry-over from the days of Ubico." He said, "I don't know whether they're going to harm you in some way. It worries me terribly. I feel I must tell you that you might be in danger." Well, Long was telling me this and he didn't give any indication as to what the next step was going to be but a day or two later he told me that he had decided he'd better go up and consult about this in Washington. So Boaz went to Washington and never came back. In other words he was in danger and the Foreign Minister had advised him.

A few days after this happened President Roosevelt died. I was Chargé d'affaires and there was a most impressive outpouring of grief in all the countries of Latin America. There had been tremendous sympathy for President Roosevelt in the war effort. There is, of course, a Latin American tendency to identify these things with personalities. It's true in our own country but I think a little more so there. There really was a very genuine expression of sorrow at the death of President Roosevelt. We had some memorial services.

It so happened at this time that an old politician who had been a diplomat in the Hoover administration was then making a brief visit to Guatemala. His name was Roy Tasco Davis.

Roy Tasco Davis was at that time in charge of an agency of our government which was called the Inter-American Educational Committee which sponsored and assisted American schools throughout the hemisphere. He was making the rounds of American schools and laying plans for programs, and changes in the amount of financial support here and there. He was in Guatemala at the time of Roosevelt's death. He was staying with us in the house we had...the Deputy Chief of Mission's. I'd known him pretty well in Washington. He'd been a Senator in the State Senate of Maryland, and he was an accomplished politician, a speaker, and a very jovial fellow. So we were going to have a memorial service in which there would be a Protestant preacher, a Catholic priest, a Jewish rabbi, and a spokesman for the U.S. government. Well, I thought, here's this man who is a very accomplished speaker, and I'm a very amateur, rather timid speaker. At that time I was particularly timid, and I asked Roy Tasco Davis if he would be willing to make the speech for the U.S. government. Roy said, "Yes, I'd be glad to do that even though I'm not a Democrat. I'm a Republican, but I'd be glad to do it." So we had the service. It was a very solemn service, and very largely attended. And when Davis made his speech he wound it up with a peroration in which he said, as he looked up at the ceiling, "After all, to live in the hearts of those who love you is not to die." Of course, he had everybody in tears.

When we got back to our house for lunch afterward, my wife Virginia said, "You know Mr. Davis," (I guess we all called him Roy because we knew him well) "...that was a beautiful peroration. Where did you get that? How did you happen to think of that?" And Davis said, "As a matter of fact I read it off a tombstone in the pet cemetery out in Gaithersburg." A couple of years later we were going past that cemetery and she said, "Let's go in and see if we can find that peroration of Roy Davis's." We went in and we found it after a lot of hunting, and we were very much impressed with the eloquence of all these tombs. You know, people express their emotions spontaneously, more over their pets than they do over human beings, and that pet cemetery had some absolutely beautiful sentiments. People absolutely love their pets. Well, anyhow, we found it and the dog had died only about two or three months before the date of Roosevelt's death. So Davis had been out there quite recently before his trip to South America.

Then a new Ambassador was named, Boaz Long, of course, having left. (Boaz at that time was 69 years old and getting a little bit long in the tooth for an Ambassador, when one considers that Foreign Service career people were expected at even the very highest grade, which at that time was Career Minister, to retire at 65. And if they're not Career Ministers, they retire at 60.) Anyhow, Boaz Long had stayed there until he was 69, and the new Ambassador was a man named Edwin Kyle, who had been Dean of the Agricultural School of Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College, better known as Texas A&M, a very highly respected school in Texas, and he'd been the Dean of Agriculture. And he was 69 when he was appointed as Ambassador. I eventually discovered how he happened to be appointed. This is rather interesting from the viewpoint of career versus political appointees.

Kyle was not only Dean of Agriculture, but he was a great friend of the football team, and he was known throughout the college as being a great supporter and enthusiast for the Texas A&M

football team, which was a damned good football team and winning a lot of games. So the president of Texas A&M had either died or resigned, and there was a vacancy in the presidency. And there was a great push on the part of the people with whom Kyle was popular to make him president. Well, the trustees of the college were not as enthusiastic about making Kyle president as the football enthusiasts were. So they appealed to the great Texas Senator who was at that time Chairman of the Foreign Relations of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate, Tom Connally. Not the Connally who was known recently, but the Senator who had hair curling down over his collar, and was a very good chairman of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee during part of World War II.

Q: *It was Connally, Vandenberg and George were the main powers in the Senate in those days.*

WOODWARD: Anyhow, Connally was prevailed upon by I suppose the trustees of Texas A&M to find an embassy for Kyle so they could put in the president they wanted at Texas A&M. And that's how we got our new Ambassador. But Kyle was a sensible fellow. He was a rather pleasant egotist in that I remember he had been called the Friend of the Americas when he, as an agriculture expert, had been sent on a mission...part of the many wartime missions of sending experts around to consult and give advice with their counterparts, and he'd been sent on an agriculture mission. He was called, in the State College, the name of the town where Texas A&M is situated, "the Friend of the Americas". As a matter of fact, during the time he was there, I found one of these little desk ornaments put out by Pan American Airlines, which had a sort of ark-like wooden base with holes for the flags of all the American republics. I had a little brass plate made to put on the base saying: To Ambassador Edwin J. Kyle, Friend of the Americas, and gave it to him. He took this quite seriously. It was really kind of a prank on my part because I was just pandering to his ego. He was very proud of this, and he put it in a prominent place on his desk as Ambassador. But he was a good fellow, and an enthusiastic hunter and a great fisherman, a great family man. He got all of his Texas relatives down. But he'd also done one very great thing in agriculture. He collaborated closely, and was partly responsible, for the creation of what everybody has now at Thanksgiving, which is the broad- breasted turkey. The broad breasted turkey was a completely new breed of turkey, which had an immense amount of meat on its broad breast. He was very proud of this achievement, and well he might be. It has been a great thing, you get a lot more meat from a turkey. Well, he got one of these for a banquet he was going to have and it wouldn't fit into any oven it was so big. Well, we had quite a problem with that turkey but we finally got somebody to cook it in a restaurant. But we solved that problem fairly easily.

We got called in on the most odd problems. I remember one day I was sitting in the office, as I say it adjoined the residence there, and Mrs. Kyle, a very nice woman, sent a message that she wanted to see me right away. She said, "I've got two problems at the moment. The cat is up on the roof, a one story building. I can't get him down, I just don't know what to do about it." And she said, "What's more, the tap on Mr. Kyle's bathtub doesn't work properly." So, first I got a ladder and went up and retrieved the cat-- it was very easy because the ceilings were not high, and the roof was fairly close and I got the cat off the roof very quickly. And then I went to work on the faucet on the bathtub and I was a pretty good plumber. I fixed all the minor things, and have for years in my own house. So I fixed that for her.

Q: *Such is the work of the Deputy Chief of Mission.*

WOODWARD: And as a matter of fact, on that day a very strange phenomenon...I heard a noise on this one-story roof as though somebody were rolling a steel drum across the roof. I thought, "What in hell can that be?" And damned if it wasn't an earthquake. It was a small earthquake, and it was making this noise--there wasn't any drum up there at all, but it somehow created this noise. It was like a rumbling as though there was something going across the roof. It's earthquake country, they have frequent little tremors, and there had been some in the history of the place--some absolutely dreadful earthquakes. The city of Guatemala had been virtually destroyed--there was one after I was there that virtually destroyed it. And the Antigua had been destroyed. And there was an `old Antigua' nearby which had been totally destroyed, except the remnants of an old, old church, just a little bit of ruin. There was a dead volcano not far from the town of old Antigua which had cracked open in an earthquake and the crater had been filled with water. It was a lake because it had filled up over the years, a large volume of water, and the crack let all the water out and that devastated old Antigua. That's why there was nothing but a ruin there. The whole place was absolutely wiped out by this deluge. And then they established the new Antigua but then they became afraid, after an earthquake had damaged a couple of the big churches--destroyed them--they decided they better move it up to Guatemala. Both those places had been the capital. And then it was called Antigua, and the completely ruined one was called Antigua la Viejo.

There was a lot of speculation of just what Arevalo meant by his numerous utterances about "spiritual socialism". There was concern about just what he was up to, whether he was really a ‘dangerous’ President or not.

But before his term came to an end someone, and you can guess who, contrived to kill the man who was the popular army officer who was Chief of the Armed Forces Lt. Colonel Arana--the one who was supposed to be the `watch dog' over Colonel Arana was killed so he could no longer be a contender in the next presidential elections. The result was, that in the next election Arbenz was elected president. An attempt had been made to kill Arevalo before he finished his term, but he escaped. In any event Abenz came into power, and this was long after I left Guatemala.

Q: *Why don't we leave that because what I'd like to do is concentrate on your experiences. You went from Guatemala to Havana. Who was the Ambassador then?*

THOMAS MANN
Counselor
Guatemala City (1954-1955)

Ambassador Mann was born and raised in Texas and graduated from Baylor University with a Bachelors degree in Liberal Arts and a degree in Law. After practicing law in Laredo, Texas, he joined the Department of State in 1942, where he served in many senior capacities, dealing primarily with world trade, economics, and Latin American

affairs. His senior assignments include: Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (1957-1960), and Inter-American Affairs (1965-1966) and Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (1965-1966). He also served as US Ambassador to El Salvador from 1955-1957 and Ambassador to Medico from 1961 to 1963. Ambassador Mann was interviewed by Joe B. Franz in 1968.

Q: Let's go back, Mr. Mann. You went to Guatemala as counselor to the Embassy in 1955. This war right after the overthrow of the Communist- oriented regime, right?

MANN: Yes. Two or three weeks after. I came from Greece.

Q: Did that present special problems?

MANN: Well, the Castillo government, the man who overthrew Arbenz, was riding the crest of popularity at that time. He had a lot of support from the people. The biggest demonstration that local people said ever took place, took place spontaneously to welcome him into the city. The problems were those of helping him organize an economic program and a social program to deal with problems of the country. We worked, during the time I was there, largely in the economic and social field.

Q: Would you care to comment on whether the revolution against Arbenz was CIA-directed, inspired?

MANN: No, I wouldn't comment on that even if I knew, because I don't think one should. But I will say that I really don't know a great deal about the pre-revolutionary period because I was in Greece for a year while all of this was going on.

L. MICHAEL RIVES
Political Officer
Guatemala City (1955-1957)

Michael Rives was born in New York in 1921. He received a bachelor's degree from Princeton University in 1947 and joined the Foreign Service in 1950. Mr. Rives' career included positions in Germany, Vietnam, Laos, Guatemala, France, the Congo, Burundi, Cambodia, and Indonesia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1995.

RIVES: Early '55.

Q: *Then you went where?*

RIVES: Guatemala.

Q: *Wow!*

RIVES: Ambassador Norman Armour was ambassador, and he asked for me, but by the time I got there, he'd been transferred.

Q: *So there you were in Guatemala! You served there from when to when?*

RIVES: '55 to '57.

Q: *What was your impression of Guatemala at the time? This was the Eisenhower period...*

RIVES: It was a period of calm in Guatemala. Peurifoy had managed to throw out Arbenz... Castillo Armas was President. My impression was that he was trying to do fairly well. Ambassador Sparks, who was my Ambassador, was in touch with him a great deal. Things were relatively calm.

One of my duties--I was junior officer in the Political Section--was to be plot officer. I received anybody who had any plot. My instructions from the Ambassador were to never nod or shake my head, because no matter what I did, they would take it to mean the U.S. Government would support it. So about once a month he would be called in by the President, Castillo Armas, who read off the names of all the people who were coming to see us. And the Ambassador could honestly say, "My God! I know nothing about it; I don't have anything to do with it."

Q: *Who were these plotters?*

RIVES: Every kind used to come in. Some were deliberately sent in there to see if the U.S. were playing games, that sort of thing. They'd come in, they'd talk round about how bad the government was, the need for change, that sort of thing, and see the reaction of the Americans.

Q: *So you learned how to keep a real poker face?*

RIVES: That's right. I also was in charge of biographic reporting, for which I got a commendation, thanks to the senior local employee in the visa section, who came from one of the best families in Guatemala. He knew absolutely everybody, and he and I would sit down and talk for hours, and he would give me all the hot poop about everybody.

Q: *This points out an interesting thing... Particularly in that period, we were able to get extremely well-placed and talented people in our local staffs all over the world, and we gained by this.*

RIVES: Yes. The telephone operators and some other jobs were held by perfectly gorgeous Guatemalan young ladies from the best families, because it was the only place their families would allow them to work. So if I would want to see the Foreign Minister, I would call up and get nowhere. Then I would go down to see one of them and say, "How about it?" So they would call up and say, "Mingo (who was the Foreign Minister), Mr. Rives wants to see you." So I would go. It was very nice.

Q: *Did you find after Peurifoy had led that very well-publicized ouster of President Arbenz, which is still called up from time to time, about American interference (that was when?)...*

RIVES: Just before I left [Laos]. It must have been 1954, I guess.

Q: *Just shortly before you arrived, then.*

RIVES: Yes.

Q: *Was that rankling? How did the Guatemalan people feel about that?*

RIVES: I don't remember it ever being discussed by anybody while I was there. Of course, Ambassador Armour came in and filled a gap. He was so good. I'm sure he soothed everybody's feelings down there. And, as I say, Castillo Armas was doing a fairly good job.

Q: *I don't know Central America, but one has the feeling that there are there are some families that run things and really sit on the ...*

RIVES: It's still like that, I think, in Guatemala today. It's largely the Spanish descendants and the Mestizos, those of mixed blood. In those days, I must say, I wasn't aware of it as much as we've become aware of it now. The Indians were really very downtrodden. It was for two reasons: One, they were looked down on, and I think still are; two, they wouldn't come out of the mountains where they live. For instance, our banana people, United Fruit, kept trying to hire them, give them work and get them on the plantations, but apparently most of them got terrible tuberculosis and [other diseases] the moment they got out of those mountains and went down to the jungle areas.

Q: *What was your impression of the society there in Guatemala?*

RIVES: Well, it was very stratified. There were the rich people at the top; half way down you had the people of mixed blood; and at the bottom you had the Indians.

Q: *What was American policy?*

RIVES: We were trying largely to get them to become a little more democratic. I know the Ambassador used to have long talks with Castillo on this. And we had a lot of Congressional visitors down there from time to time talking to the people. The only problems we ever had with Americans were with United Fruit, who controlled the railroads, and things got so bad at one time that the Ambassador ordered the head of United Fruit to come down from Boston. After that things changed a little bit, but not that much.

Q: *What was the problem with United Fruit?*

RIVES: They just ran things. They had the biggest plantations; they owned the railroad: that rankled, obviously, for the Guatemalans felt they wanted to own their own country.

Q: *Did you find that United Fruit gave the Embassy a rough time, too?*

RIVES: No. From what I could see, United Fruit had improved a great deal, plus after Arbenz they had lost probably millions of acres that had been taken from them. Of course, the Guatemalan Government hadn't done anything with it, really. The thing the Guatemalans had such difficulty understanding was what a company like United Fruit can do for them if both sides work right. Their plantations were perfectly beautiful. I went down and visited them. But they were run in a semi-colonial way. You know, there were compounds where all the Americans lived, with commissaries, swimming pools... And then on the side were the peasants, so to speak. But they had been raising wages under pressure from the Embassy, and things like that, so things were better.

Q: *As the provincial coup officer, were there any attempts...?*

RIVES: Not while we were there, no. But shortly after I left, Castillo Armas was assassinated.

Q: *You left there in '57 and went to Paris, at last. You were in Paris from '57 to... ?*

HOWARD FRANK NEEDHAM
Information Officer, USIS
Guatemala City (1957-1960)

Howard Frank Needham began his career in journalism with the San Francisco Chronicle. In 1942, he enlisted in the U.S. Army. His career with USIS included positions in Vietnam , Guatemala, Paraguay, Lagos, and Nigeria. Mr. Needham was interviewed by G. Lewis Schmidt on March 29, 1990.

NEEDHAM: I was in the special assistant's role for approximately one year, maybe a little less. I left Washington for Guatemala in July, very early in July--perhaps July 1st or 2nd of 1957.

Q: But in the meantime, you had some Spanish-language training, I gather?

NEEDHAM: [Laughter] Oh, yes.

Q: Briefly?

NEEDHAM: Yes. Well, that goes back to why I switched from Southeast Asian area to the Latin American area. As I reported previously, I had this terrible bout with hepatitis and had no desire to expose myself to tropical climates, food, and water for some time. I figured, at that time, that a change in area would be timely and that perhaps my best efforts could be put in Latin America where, being a Californian, I had inherited an interest from childhood. Having had four years of high school Spanish, perhaps I would be able to latch onto enough language at the Foreign Service Institute to be effective doing information work for the agency in Latin America.

Accordingly, I applied for transfer to the Latin American area and was told to get my Spanish in better shape before making formal application. I did this at my own expense, and thinking that I had at least the beginnings of, and the foundation for, an expanding ability, I did apply formally and was invited to take an informal test in the office of the assistant director for Latin America, who at that time was Frank Oram.

He had a personnel officer in his area, Hal Urist by name, who was a charming fellow, but whose idea of testing was rather rigorous. He presented me with a volume of Cervantes' Spanish and suggested that I translate several pages. Well, of course, this was impossible for my meager ability at that time, and I failed that test. I then proceeded to do a little corridor work with friends and they came to me with the same advice, "Get more Spanish, but in the meantime we'll see what we can do about your application."

I proceeded to study more Spanish and finally achieved a non-idiomatic ability, probably at level two, and did make formal application again and was accepted and finally was given orders to report to Guatemala as information officer.

Q: What was the date on this, now?

NEEDHAM: Well, the orders came through in middle-June and I was to report in the first week of July.

Q: Of 1957?

NEEDHAM: That was 1957.

Q: So you went to Guatemala, then, in July of '57 and took up the position of Information Officer?

NEEDHAM: That's right.

Q: Okay.

NEEDHAM: I arrived in Guatemala a month ahead of my family, about July 2nd, and I was greeted by Public Affairs Officer Fred Barcroft. My information assistant at that time was Eugene Friedmann, who later became Minister Consular and deputy chief of mission in Santiago, Chile, and also served as deputy chief of mission in Pretoria, South Africa, in the '80s.

It was a very interesting and beautiful, little country. There was ample media with which to work. There were 11 daily newspapers in the capital city of Guatemala City. There were about 23 radio stations, independently owned except for one, throughout the country. And the Guatemalteco Americano, binational center was a mature and well-developed teaching base. It boasted an auditorium, library, and large enclosed patio for exhibits and gatherings of all sorts, located in the very heart of town and widely used by almost all the students at the university and in the various high schools about the city.

I had the good fortune to be included in a list of people to be presented to President Castillo Armas the Monday following my arrival--and was looking forward to it. Unfortunately, the president was assassinated the Sunday night before our Monday appointment; and I never saw him in life. One of my first duties was to be part of the American retinue that attended the funeral.

There immediately began a series of "new" governments, actually four of them. It took a year for these four governments to appear and disappear. The last one was formed by Presidente Ydigoras Fuentes.

Q: You'd better spell that.

NEEDHAM: That's Ydigoras Fuentes. Ydigoras Fuentes proved to be a very practical, rather pragmatic president, who matched his pragmatism with vigor. He maintained a steady schedule, itinerary of trips to various parts of this small republic. His activity in the commercial area was vigorous. An engineer, his vision as an economist was not exactly tutored, but was entrepreneurial; and he had the instinct for creating new highways, new ports, and for improving the basic infrastructure of the country, which had been somewhat neglected by his predecessors.

Q: What was it that caused the intervening governments, before Fuentes, to disappear? Were they just inadequate? Was there internal opposition from just political sources or what?

NEEDHAM: It was primarily rivalry. The conservative element in Guatemalan politics had only just recovered from the Communist régime of Guzmán Arbenz. They had only just recovered, really, from the liberality of his régime and did not, yet, feel secure. Meanwhile, the liberal elements in Guatemala were very anxious to regain what they considered to be their lost territory. So it was sheer hangover rivalry that caused this bucking back and forth--tug-of-war type of fall and rise, revolutionary movements, during one year of time.

Q: During this time, when you were having all this trouble as to who was going to be the ruler of the country, did this seriously effect USIS efforts and your attempt to make contacts and go ahead with your programs? Or didn't you feel much problem?

NEEDHAM: Well, we were acutely aware of the fact that there was no telling which side was going to emerge on top. Both Soviet Russia and Cuba were taking substantial interest in Guatemalan unrest. At the same time, we knew that our bona fides, while still unquestioned in the country, could become a matter of question, (from "election" to "election"!), if we put a foot wrong. We drew back a bit, in that the materials which we presented for coverage tended not to intervene in Guatemalan affairs, or even in Latin American affairs, if that seemed to be a sensitive area in relation to what was going on in Guatemala.

I guess what I am saying is, that we became cautious and waited. The game seemed to be to pursue non adjuratory objectives in every case. The goal was to weather the crisis, constructively. This gave us a chance to get into Americana materials again, as in the early days that I experienced in India. And we found that, here, too, there was a welcome for information on how the family, the American family, really lived at home and what it really thought. Granted, it

wasn't quite the juicy, even so-called sexy, flavor that a more politically-oriented output might have had for our very politically-minded audience, but it survived and it sufficed. We got through this period; and we had a very capable ambassador in place at the time, who lost no time in establishing a working relationship with President Ydigoras Fuentes.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

NEEDHAM: At the beginning of the turmoil, Ambassador Edward Sparks was on scene. An anecdote about Eddie is rather interesting at this time. As you can imagine, a lot of American media were interested in what was going on in Guatemala, not least of all, Time magazine. We had some difficulty with the roving Time magazine correspondent who came down to cover things during this period, and we finally wound up asking the young man to get a briefing from the ambassador, having cleared this idea with the ambassador first; the ambassador then being Edward Sparks.

The young man, defending his employer's position in a previous article, which had warmly eulogized a young rebel who had been accused of assassinating a government official--this young man said that, like the State Department, Time magazine had its own foreign policy. Ambassador Sparks replied to him, at the time, "That may well be, but Time magazine is not a republic, is not in Latin America, is not in this country, and has no Foreign Service representative in this country that I know of." And that finished that interview.

Q: How did the young man react? Did it improve his reportage or did he keep right on blasting away at the Time policy?

NEEDHAM: He concluded that he had done his job. He'd been there for about a week at the time that this came to a head, and left the following day.

Q: I see.

NEEDHAM: Eddie Sparks was our ambassador well into 1958, and then was replaced by Ambassador Mallory. Ambassador Mallory was in place when Ydigoras Fuentes succeeded to the presidency of the republic. He lost no time in making a friend of Ydigoras Fuentes and gaining his confidence. And indeed, our AID program picked up considerably under Ydigoras Fuentes. In all, the Mallory-Ydigoras Fuentes period was a building period. Much was accomplished in terms of the infrastructure of the country.

And as far as USIA's effort was concerned, we forged ahead, both with the media and with our cultural affairs program, particularly the latter. Leader grants and scholar exchanges were multiplied during that period. I can't give the exact figures, but I know that they were at least doubled from the previous year. This was done rather easily because the post still retained the appropriations, which had not been used during the turmoil.

Q: Was there an AID program in Guatemala, at that time, that helped in the re-building of the infrastructure?

NEEDHAM: Yes, there was.

Q: Was USIS concerned with promoting it? Or did they have their own Public Affairs representative?

NEEDHAM: The AID program in Guatemala, at that time, was not staffed to operate its own information program. That function was performed by USIS.

USIS was not particularly concerned in promoting the country-wide infrastructure, such as ports and highways. But we were very interested in a particular project which AID was putting on. At the time it was original; it was founded by a man called Temple Dick, who had been, before coming into the government service, a San Francisco-based architect. And Dick, with a few of his associates, worked out a program which went about as follows:

They would go into the slums, in the barancas, and ask to meet the "leaders." The "leaders" didn't have to be official. Generally, the people would point to one--and would agree on one or two individuals, and these individuals would be invited to the AID offices. There they would be acquainted with plans for a small complex of homes that might be built, provided that they and their neighbors could supply the labor, and the AID program would supply the materials; and that they would work in groups, building groups of homes.

These would be small, modest homes--concrete poured, slab floors--but they would have plumbing and electricity, which the people were not having in the barancas. They would be in a healthy part of town and there would be a change of lifestyle, and a new opportunity for these families and their children.

The men would work in groups of 12, each group building 12 homes. No homes would be distributed until all had been completed, and then they would be distributed by draw. The challenge was put before the "leaders," that they go back to the baranca and interest people who they thought had the stamina and the purpose and the general acumen to see this opportunity and to take hold of it. They were warned against failure or against change of heart; if there was much of that, the whole project could collapse, they were told.

They did this. They went back to their barancas, and while I was there, there were 36 such homes built and they were built to completion. And the drawings were conducted with President Ydigoras Fuentes making the draw from the sombrero himself. The families moved into debt-free homes. I cannot quite describe the joy that was exhibited at these ceremonies. And it wasn't just those who received the homes who were celebrating, but their friends and compatriots, as well.

This was something that appealed to everybody in the country. Temple Dick went on to do something like this in Chile, by constructing high schools in the same manner; arousing community effort and supplying materials while the community supplied the labor.

Q: Well, did you do any of the publicity work on this project?

NEEDHAM: Yes, we backed this, not only with press coverage and photos and stills and exhibits and seminars on housing and public health, but we also actually made several short motion picture documentaries right there on the scene.

Q: Which were then, subsequently, shown in other Spanish-speaking countries and, also, all over Guatemala, I suppose?

NEEDHAM: Yes. Right.

Q: Did you have a field motion picture program there?

NEEDHAM: Yes, we did. It was rather extensive. There was a land reclamation project on the western plain, bordering the Pacific, in which Guatemalan farmers--or tenant farmers, I should say, really--were urged to participate in a lottery drawing. Participants would receive a quarter-section of land. And at the beginning, where the four quarters joined, there would be the communal things that they had to have to live: the general store, the well, the clinic, and the school.

After that, the government would clear about half of each quarter-section, leaving the other half to be cleared by the new tenant. I shouldn't say "tenant," because, in fact, they had become title-holding farmers. And this worked out very well. It started up at about the same time we were working out of the barancas, with urban people. By the time I left in '60, they were shipping their first crop of export--corn. USIS made several motion picture "shorts" on different aspects of land reclamation and farm operations, on location. These were shown throughout several Latin American countries.

Q: Now, was this agricultural development program something that was entirely financed by the Guatemalan Government, or was it partially an AID project?

NEEDHAM: This was partially AID. The Guatemalan Government felt, that by giving the land, they were doing their share; and we didn't argue about that.

Q: And I suppose this got, then, very extensive publicity, also?

NEEDHAM: Yes. This had more motion pictures on scene, at various stages of the building and of the harvesting and of the sowing, the clearing; even a few of them had weddings involved in the half-hour documentaries.

Q: In one sense you were publicizing what the government was doing for the people, and in the other, you were also supporting the AID program.

NEEDHAM: Yes. All in all, it was a productive period for American policy--American public policy in Guatemala.

One of the, what I call affectionate, memories connected with Guatemala concerns a young lad about 16 or 17 years of age, who had been working as a second assistant gardener to the public

affairs officer when the public affairs officer had to leave the country for an extended period of time and was taking his wife and sister-in-law with him; so that, he had no use for a full gardening staff while he was away, and he wondered if I would take this little lad as my gardener, and I said I would. He warned me that the lad could not speak, but was very faithful and very clean living and a good person to have around the premises.

So, on that basis, we accepted him. And he came in and it was quite true. Whatever you told him to do, he would do and do well; the first time or the twentieth time. But there was one handicap. He did not speak. He was mute, as he had been described to me by the public affairs officer, and he would not look directly at you because his two front teeth were missing and he was very shy about it.

This was the way we received him and this is the way we accepted him at first, until one day he did not come back from his Sunday day off; one Monday he was not there. And the following day, Tuesday, he still was not there. I became worried and went back to the small room that he had at the rear of our compound. And looking among his effects, I found a carton full of correspondence lessons in radio construction.

Q: In English?

NEEDHAM: In English and Spanish. I realized then that somehow or other this lad was literate. I wondered about him being mute and being able to learn English. I explored through the boxes, looking to see if there were Spanish courses, and it is my recollection that there were; there were both English and Spanish courses in the box. About this time, I began to worry about what had happened to him and I took steps to trace him back to his mother's house. We understood that his mother had remarried and his stepfather did not care very much to have him on the premises.

Well, as it turned out, that is exactly what had happened. He had gone home to see his mother, had an unpleasant session with his stepfather, and after the whipping had hesitated to return to our house until his face healed up. When he did return, I had a talk with him. He admitted that he primarily didn't want to show his teeth, which was why he didn't speak. And I said, "Well, we can do something about that."

So we took him to a doctor, who referred him to a dentist, who put in peg false teeth in front, and he turned out to be quite a good-looking lad. We thought we'd go one step further, and we called the AID director and asked if he had any openings in his trade school, and he did. He had several in sheet metal work; several slots that were not being occupied.

So they entered Juanito in sheet metal class and he caught hold. He continued to work for us during the rest of our time in Guatemala and went to trade school four nights a week. He also wrote to us after we left Guatemala, for about three years. With the last letter I was very pleased; he recounted what his home was like. He had his own apartment--only a one-room apartment--but he was happy. He was solvent. And he ended his letter by saying, "I think I am going to marry." That was the last I ever heard from him.

Q: That's the last you heard from him?

NEEDHAM: Yes.

Q: And when, then, did you leave Guatemala? And where did you go from there?

NEEDHAM: Well, I left Guatemala for Paraguay. I was promoted to public affairs officer and direct-transferred to Paraguay in June of '60. And that began another story.

LESTER MALLORY
Ambassador
Guatemala (1958-1959)

Ambassador Lester Mallory entered the Foreign Agricultural Service in 1931 and became a Foreign Service officer in 1939. His career included assignments in France, Mexico, Cuba, and Argentina, and ambassadorships to Jordan and Guatemala. Ambassador Mallory was interviewed by Hank Zivetz in 1988.

MALLORY: Yes. I'd had a lot of Latin American experience, and I was ready for a change. They proposed Guatemala, and I accepted it. I had to hurry to get there, because a new President was to be inaugurated, and I was supposed to be in place before that. So we flew to Washington, had a brief time, and took off for Guatemala.

I had no policy briefing whatever, from anybody in the ARA. The Assistant Secretary didn't give me any guidelines; I just went.

Q: *This was what year?*

MALLORY: This was the beginning of 1959. Well, we had a fair-sized embassy there. We reported in the usual style. We tried to keep in contact with the opposition to the government, to know what was going on; more particularly in contact with the government. They had a new president, General Miguel Vdigoras Fuentes. He had been ambassador to London before that. He was able to win the election, and he started out to be a pretty good president. As time went on, things didn't get so good.

He had a son, and a son-in-law, and a very good Columbian friend; and they were not above dipping their hands in the till. It got to the point, after the better part of two years, that I wrote a private letter to Washington, and said, "I propose to go and tell the president that he'd better pull up his socks, or he's going to be in trouble."

I got a letter back saying to go ahead. I didn't send any telegrams, which gets spread all over; but kept it private. And I did go to see the president, and I told him, and he said, "Well, tell me who they are." So I did. He said, "Well, I'll do something about it." But he didn't. And some time after I left--I guess it was a couple of years--things got bad enough that the same old Latin American stuff happened; when things get too bad, the army just takes over. And he was out.

This has happened time after time in Latin America. I didn't expect it to happen there, because he wasn't that kind of a guy himself; but he just didn't stop it. It was too bad.

Q: *I don't remember the chronology here; when was Arbenz in? Was that much later?*

MALLORY: No, much before.

Q: *Was there any kind of leftist opposition to the government when you were there?*

MALLORY: Not much. Opposition yes; it was quiescent opposition, and we didn't have anything which occurred later, where they were hunting the people down. More particularly, when the leftists began to go up in the hill country with the indians, and work with them, the army got tough. They didn't have that in the beginning. Let's go back a little.

Q: *That was really only my ignorance; the people who hear this will have known. But in your tenure, things were rather quiescent, in terms of this?*

MALLORY: By and large they were very good. We didn't have any army uprisings; we didn't have any persecutions, as it were. We had a few little upsets. Had a bomb late one afternoon at the embassy office. The leftist press tried their best to amplify it. There was also a bomb--at the same time--at the palace of the Archbishop. They tried to pin that on the Americans. Well, this was so laughable that nobody believed it, and it didn't work. They just lost that round.

There were a few interesting events. One was the Mexicans came down, and were fishing in what were thought was Guatemalan territorial waters. Some planes went out and told them to move out. What they didn't know was--the Mexicans didn't know--was: they were talking to each other and using some pretty foul language, about the Guatemalans. They didn't know that the Guatemalans were tuned in on their frequency. So they came down with machine guns, and drove them out. Well, all hell broke lose. The Mexicans immediately broke relations. The Mexican embassy was taking about two days to get out. I went over--interestingly enough--and helped the Mexican ambassador burn his files. He was a good friend.

Q: *They gave him time to leave?*

MALLORY: Yes. One problem we had was about visas. For example the head of the university was a medical doctor, pretty far to the left. And because of some statements he had made, when he applied for a visa our consul turned him down. Well, we got a lot of pressure, particularly from all the leftist groups and the press. A lot of people came to me and tried to make me have the consul cave in. I wouldn't do it. I said, "He's doing his job, and the only man who can tell a consul what to do about visas is the United States Congress."

There was a Eucharistic congress, held in Guatemala, for which the papal representative was Cardinal Spellman. Spellman let it be know to us, through the Department I guess, that he wanted to visit Chichicastenango, which is the great Indian center. I set up a visit. We had one DC-3 of our own, in the air attaché's office. I got another DC-3 out of the Guatemalan Air Force.

We were all set up, until the last morning when I learned that the Papal Nuncio had gone to the Minister of Defense, to get the thing canceled. It was none of his business; except, he was anti-American. And the priest in Chichi was a Spaniard, who didn't like us very much.

Well, you don't turn down a papal legate that way. So I immediately got to the president, and had the whole thing put back on--the President of Guatemala. So we put the two planes together. You couldn't land in Chichi; there was no field. We had to land about 20 miles away, and it was a tremendously emotional thing--the whole business. As he got out of the plane, there was a fence nearby, with a great row of indians kneeling down, and singing in a deep chant. Well, Cardinal Spellman had tears in his eyes. It was tremendous. And we drove up towards Chichi, got out of the cars, walked up--proceeded by a Cofradia, with a guy on a simulated horse, like Santiago - St. James.

Anyway, we got up to the church, and inside--I was scared to death. That church has about 30 or 40 feet of candles burning on the floor, about three feet wide. He swept right up there, with his robes practically touching these; I was afraid he was going to burn. No, he got up and they have what they call a papal mass. The Cardinal, assisted by bishops, and the cofradias, with all their costumes, and it was tremendously impressive. But there was a light motive in it, that you just couldn't believe. Here was the papal legate conducting a mass in Latin, and with a Boston accent you could cut with a knife.

Q: *I had a question in regard to your position as Assistant Secretary for Latin America.*

MALLORY: Can we talk about aid now?

Q: *Yes, please.*

MALLORY: I don't claim to have much authority or knowledge about policy in general, but I do feel I've had some experience with aid. I have pretty strong feelings about when you should and shouldn't give aid. Too often this is a bureaucratic process.

When I was in Argentina, I was approached, "Can't you get us in?" Not did they need it, not was there a place for it, but "Can't you get us in?" I felt that was pretty awful. But fortunately, Peron said he didn't want any aid, it was not an underdeveloped country. So we didn't have any aid, and I'm sure if we had had, we would have had endless trouble. You don't tell Argentines what to do. You can influence them indirectly; you can set up situations. But you're not going to tell them; that's just the nature of the beast. Too often our aid is a mechanistic thing; sort of an engineering kind of operation, rather than, "Do we need it?" I feel very strongly that need must be perceived, and we tend to go in and say, "They need aid for this," whether the people realize they need it or not.

And if they don't feel they need it, it isn't going to work.

Q: *How would you characterize the aid program in Jordan?*

MALLORY: The aid program in Jordan was good; they wanted aid. And we had people who had been trained under the British; they understood things. They knew that when you wanted an irrigation project--what it was. Or if you were building a road, what the purpose of the road was, and where you were going, and so on. It doesn't always work that easily.

For example, we built roads in Jordan. This was good, but on one occasion I had to practically stop the road program because the minister was trying to put too many people on the payroll, and I threatened to cut him off. Anyway, it worked out.

We had, down in the Jordan Valley, preparations to dig a deep well, and put in a deep well pump. As far as I know, we hadn't prepared the population for it. Once when we had one of the uprisings, caused by Nasser, they went in and severely damaged the pump. Now the pump was for them--for their purpose, but they hadn't been imbued with the idea that they wanted the pump, not the Americans who were pushing it on them. This happens and happens.

We had a pretty fair agricultural program, and a clever man in charge. We found that they needed fresh tomatoes--for example--down in Kuwait. They could be taken down by air, if we could grow them in the Jordan Valley. But you didn't go out and tell a guy, who couldn't read or write, what kind of tomatoes to plant. They didn't have any of these damn American tomatoes. So, our agricultural guy sets up a demonstration plot, and plants various kinds of thing; sees how they grow, what varieties are best, and so on. He took his best tomatoes and planted them right on the outside edge, so they could be stolen. And it worked they were no longer our tomatoes, they were their tomatoes; and it worked. We were developing understanding. So you perceive the need.

In Guatemala we had a housing program. Well, the Guatemalans had built houses out of adobes. Up in the highlands they built them out of lumber. They knew about houses. They also knew about earthquakes. We put up a self-help program, where we provided the materials, and they did the work. We put in teams of eight men, for example, and build eight houses in groups. This program went on, and on, and was wonderfully successful. We had a young fellow designing houses, with just a few pieces of steel in the right places. They were put together with concrete. They were good houses. This program was great. The president didn't miss a chance to go out and present the titles to the houses, because this was good public relations. I went along on all these things for fun.

I liked that program. But we went down in the valley, towards the coast, and found out that we could have an export of melons to New Orleans, if we could get water. We'd drill a well. We did, and got the water, but we didn't take the people to New Orleans and show them what a melon looked like, or what the market was. I went down later to see about this well, and I found a field of corn. The whole thing was a complete fiasco. If they had gone out and first, and developed the perceived need, then it might have gone.

Q: *I thought they had been growing melons there; but they had not?*

MALLORY: They had not; we had to develop a desire to grow melons.

I think--not only in the aid program, but in the Department in general--there's a need for some social anthropologists, to go out and access how people think, and what they think. How do you develop a proper result? We've never done this. In our training, as officers, you're supposed to go out and suddenly know all about how these people do . . . why they act as they do, and so on, by some kind of osmosis. That works kind of slowly. Then you get moved around and so on. I do think that some of our policy planning people ought to take a hard look at the idea of how, and where we can use some good help by cultural anthropologists. Not that you can find any good ones easily, this is a hard job. But I think we need them.

VICTOR NIEMEYER
Director, USIS
Guatemala City (1958-1960)

Mr. Niemeyer was born and raised in Texas and educated at the Scheiner Institute Junior College, Texas A & M, and the University of Texas. He served in the US Navy in World War II. Joining the USIS in 1958, Mr. Niemeyer served in Guatemala, Philippines and Chile as Director of specific programs, and as Public Affairs Officer in Mexico and Trinidad. Mr. Niemeyer was interviewed by Lewis Hoffacker in 1999.

NIEMEYER: we were on our way to Guatemala.

This has to be one of the most beautiful countries in the world. On a moonlit night you could almost think that you saw a whole string of volcanoes out there. During the day, you could see the tips of some of these volcanoes from the city of Guatemala. And here I was the director of a binational center again, larger than the one in Tegucigalpa, smaller than the one in Lima, but with an active cultural program and with - I can't recall exactly how many students now, but we had over 500, 600 - a good group of teachers, more Americans in Guatemala than in Honduras, and a number of them had volunteered as teachers, which is desirable because they have the American English accent which native speakers of Spanish do not develop right away. The same way with us, if we were teaching Spanish. Unless we were very well trained and very attentive to errors in pronunciation and determined to improve, then we would speak with a gringo accent. I'm one of those, I admit, who will always have it. But there I had a very good staff of capable teachers, and I was very pleased with that. The cultural program consisted of showing USIS films, dances, lectures, a library, etc. It was a very pleasant operation. Of course, the one in Tegucigalpa was too, but this was on a larger scale, and -

Q: *Was it called USIA at that time? At that time it was.*

NIEMEYER: Oh, yes. This was USIA. The USIA by that time, Lew, was... Let's see, that was '58 when I went there. It was five years old.

Q: *Was there a cultural center and a binational center, or are we talking about -*

NIEMEYER: They're they same in this case. I just use the term cultural center as a sort of a generic term, but binational center would be more correct. And then each one had its own individual local name. This was the Instituto Guatemalteco Americano - the *IGA*, as everybody called it. That's the Spanish acronym for those three words, which in English would translate as Guatemalan American Institute.

Q: *Was there a PAO or a CAO in addition to you?*

NIEMEYER: USIS Guatemala at that time had a PAO, CAO, an information officer, and two assistant CAOs. There was also an assistant information officer, all under the PAO. Now they were all Foreign Service officers. I was still on what they call a "grantee" basis. All I had was a contract with the US Government, as I had in Tegucigalpa and in Lima, just a contract. I was not in the Foreign Service, really.

So that went along very well for two years. We saw a good bit of the country, up to Quezaltenango, Lake Amatitlán, over to the coast, Puerto Barrios. Then the appeal of the country, with volcanoes, was very strong, so we climbed three volcanoes when we were there: a small one, Pacaya, which is close to town... The *guatemaltecos* like to climb at night because they say it's cooler. That's true. You get up there for the sunrise. And the problem is they like to do it on a full moon. Well, going up the volcano slope on a full moon from the path that we had to take, holding on much of the time to the little bushes in the sand to keep from sliding back. A problem is that you're looking right into that moon, and it's just like somebody shining a flashlight in your face, shining it right in your eyes, blinding you almost. But you grab a little sapling here, a little sapling there, and finally you get up to the top. But it's worth it. It is worth it, because you feel very close to nature and close to God when you get up and see how bright these stars are. From that altitude, not necessarily very much in Pacaya, this little volcano, but the larger one at the old city of Antigua, called Agua, which is right behind the city - that's 11,000 feet.

Q: *11,000 - the air is a little thin, too, isn't it? You felt that.*

NIEMEYER: Yes, but it didn't seem to bother us any.

Q: *You were young.*

NIEMEYER: I was young then.

Q: *It makes a difference.*

NIEMEYER: Anyway, it was one of the events that we will never forget, the climbing of those volcanoes and spending the night in the crater in one case. That was an interesting little event. My son and I, Vic III, he and I climbed a volcano, got up there at dusk and built a little fire - this was Agua - and a few hours later we noticed some Indians coming in. Well, we didn't know what they wanted, what they were up to, but they pitched their little camp just a few yards from us and started building a fire, and then we could see what they were doing. They were carrying huge jugs. And we thought, Well, what is this? We couldn't understand it, but we soon found out. Little by little, as daybreak approached, other climbers were coming in, and these enterprising

Indians had brought up hot chocolate and coffee, built their own fires to keep them warm up there, keep the coffee and the hot chocolate warm, and by sunup we counted over 100 people in that crater.

Q: *Having a picnic.*

NIEMEYER: Yes. Most of them were university students or that age level. So that was it. And then, of course, we went back down. But a third time when we climbed, we took the ambassador's secretary with us, and I cannot recall her name. But we rested. It was during the day, and we rested under that sun up there in the crater, and I'll never forget, my son's little shirt separated a little from the top of his trousers leaving a line of skin there, and by golly, when we got back down that evening, that was just as red as a beet, that burn. The poor ambassador's secretary, she could put one foot forward and then another foot forward, and there was no space between either foot. She could just barely take a step. She was completely exhausted, I know, after we got back down, because it was about a - it seemed like it was about a four-hour climb up, and then going down you can hardly do it any quicker because you've got to keep putting the brakes an all the time to keep from moving too fast.

Q: *And if you're not in shape, yes. Were your relations with the embassy good?*

NIEMEYER: Yes.

Q: *You had no problem working with the embassy.*

NIEMEYER: No, I did not. I had not much contact with the embassy, really, but I did with USIS, which had its separate office. The embassy was at one place, and the USIS was at another location, both in downtown Guatemala City.

Q: *I see. What were relations between the two governments, Washington and Guatemala? Were they pretty good relations?*

NIEMEYER: In my view they were good at that time. This was following the overthrow in 1954 of the Arbenz government, a coup in which our government was very directly involved. And then there had been a president, Castillo Armas, who later was assassinated in the Guatemalan White House, really, but it's not white; it's a big green building, the seat of government, the Palacio del Gobierno is what they would call it in Spanish. He was assassinated, and then another president, Ydigoras Fuentes, was the president when we were there. And at that time - we left in '60, December of '60 - there were bombs beginning to go off around the city. This was, I guess, the beginning of the unrest that later so engulfed that country that just came to a conclusion here last year.

Q: *Were there Communists involved in this? Or who -*

NIEMEYER: There was supposed to be some Communist involvement, yes.

Q: *So it was the Communists, yes.*

NIEMEYER: If not, they were certainly leftists and were certainly -

Q: *We didn't like it.*

NIEMEYER: We didn't like it, and we were suspicious of that. In the Binational Center Program, you don't get really close to what's going on in the embassy unless the PAO briefs you on it, and I got some briefing, but I was never intimately aware of just what was going on. But our relations with the government were good.

Q: *And you had no problem.*

NIEMEYER: At the Binational Center, I had no problem at all.

Q: *That's great.*

NIEMEYER: The Guatemalan event ended when I was offered the opportunity to start a binational center in the Philippines, and in January of '61, we all went out to Manila.

WILLIAM P. STEDMAN, JR
Assistant Program Officer, USAID
Guatemala (1959-1961)

Ambassador William P. Stedman, Jr. was born in Maryland on January 1, 1923. He went to the School of Advanced International Studies and to George Washington University. He joined the Foreign Service in 1947. He served in Buenos Aires, San Jose, Guatemala, Mexico City, Lima, and Bolivia. He served in the ARA in Economic Policy, as a Country Director and as a Deputy Assistant Secretary. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 23, 1989.

Q: *You went to Guatemala in 1959 and were there until 1961, and you were an aid program officer.*

STEDMAN: Right.

Q: *How did that come about, and what were you doing?*

STEDMAN: I was in the Department. After Costa Rica, I'd been at Stuttgart, Germany. I was assigned to the Department. Time was coming up for going out, and I really wanted to get some graduate training in economics and return to Latin America. I put in for a program the Department then had of sending officers out for a year at some major university to take graduate training in economics. I was selected.

One day I was invited over to personnel and was told that I would not be going to the year's training in economics; I was one of two FSOs who were going to be assigned to a newly created AIED development programming course at the School of Advanced International Studies, where I'd been some years before.

So in the fall of 1958, for a semester, this course was put on at the school, and there I was. I went out then on full-time loan to AID-Guatemala, starting early in 1959, as an assistant program officer in the AID mission there.

Q: *How did you feel about this? There's always a tendency to say that if you're not right in the regular line or regular economic job or regular political job, but you're assigned to USIA or somebody else, you're out of sight, out of mind. Did you feel that way at the time?*

STEDMAN: You have a little concern, but I was convinced that this was something that I really wanted to do, and I did enjoy it. I was convinced that somehow or other it would help, and it did. Maybe I was lucky in that regard. You are always a little bit concerned about what your next assignment may be, and that bothers you to some extent. But it really didn't bother me too much.

One of the curious things that it does for you, obviously, is to give you a much better understanding and appreciation of other agencies operating in the field. Whether we like it or not, the Foreign Service used to dominate in the field, and we don't anymore. We have to share it. The better understanding we have of the other agencies, the better off we are as an organization. It also gave me an opportunity to look at our own people, our own staff, and our own functioning as an embassy. You learn some things about yourself, too, about ways that are good, ways to conduct yourself, and ways that aren't so good.

So there's some concern about being out of mainstream. However, inasmuch as it was a major policy precept in the hemisphere for the United States to be involved in economic assistance, it looked to me as though this were a significant activity to be in, and I couldn't be hurt by it. It was not off to the side so much, while it was in another agency, it was within the mainstream of foreign policy concerns.

Q: *Could you give an idea of what the economic situation was in Guatemala when you there? What were you doing?*

STEDMAN: Guatemala is a country which has perhaps the heaviest percentage of native Indian population maybe in the whole hemisphere, clearly in Central America. This part of the population has chronic problems of health, nutrition, infant mortality, education, lack of skills. They are not, by and large, in the mainstream of the economy. They are not sharing the economy as heavily geared toward the production export of coffee. The wealthy interests in the country, therefore, at that time were basically the landed interests with large coffee estates. The Indians were providing seasonal labors, Indian primarily living in the highland areas under very, very harsh conditions.

General Ydigoras was president. There were the beginnings of a middle class, the beginnings of a commercial and business class. Tourism was not well developed at the time, and subsequently

it was, of course, but at the time the main source of income was coffee. Chronic problems of underdevelopment existed, but the economy was not doing badly at this period.

They had just come through some political turmoil, and the United States was heavily involved in trying to shore up the economy through a series of projects in the agricultural field. There was a large agrarian reform effort that we were involved in.

So the general panorama was one of chronic underdevelopment, some political turmoil, a skewed distribution of land and income, attitudes on the part of the wealthy people generally not very favorably disposed toward helping the poor, a government willing to associate with us. Our focus was helping, but also trying to alleviate some of these burdens of underdevelopment. So there we were with that mixed panorama. But the country was not doing badly at all. This was not a bad period for Guatemala.

What was I doing as assistant program officer? AID was a relatively large activity in Guatemala at the time. It clearly was a major U.S. foreign-policy activity. The tool that the embassy had to employ in the country was our economic assistance program. Therefore, I was involved, as a very junior officer in the program office, trying to set a annual strategy for the development program, trying to monitor specific activities during the year. I was sharing and supporting, rather than leading and directing anything at the level of assistant program officer, but I was pretty heavily involved.

During the course of a year, if a specific loan were to be considered, I would be involved in the writing of the loan, helping negotiate the loan, helping to monitor the implementation of the loan. Annually we would do this whole strategy and concept. We would write budgetary requests. A lot of this we tried to do collaboratively with the Guatemalans. This was not easy, but we tried. We tried, to some extent, to work them into our approach as to what our program should be all about.

So I would say it was a good learning experience for me to learn how AID did its business, to be involved in a junior role, but involved across the board. The AID people treated me extremely well. They took me right in, they made me one of the family, one of the team, and I was involved in everything from the most substantive activities, field trips, and all social activities. Some of our fastest friends are the AID people that we met and worked with in Guatemala.

Q: *How effective was the program at that time?*

STEDMAN: I like to look at the effectiveness of programs on two levels. If one of the goals is to help the country in a macro-economic sense, to stay afloat, provide foreign exchange, and to show our political support on a macro level, then I would say we did a good job.

On the other hand, at another level, is how significant and how effective were the programs in alleviating the conditions of underdevelopment? There I would say not too effective. These are terribly difficult problems which take an awful long time, a lot of patience, a lot of skill, a lot of flexibility, and in the short period of time, in the short run, our programs could not demonstrate a tremendous amount of success.

Q: *Was there a change between how you were operating when the Alliance for Progress came along in Guatemala, a substantive change, or was it more rhetoric?*

STEDMAN: The Alliance for Progress, to me, was the golden age of U.S. foreign assistance, at least as I knew it. I was in Mexico after Guatemala, back in the embassy as the financial reporting officer in the economic section--a wonderful job, by the way--when the Alliance for Progress was announced. The field prospective in Mexico was interesting because Mexico's attitude before the Alliance for Progress was that they could not accept U.S. bilateral assistance, because that was for the smaller, less developed countries. They weren't able to associate themselves with such assistance, because that was not for them.

The Alliance for Progress provided an umbrella, a banner, by which we were able to work collaboratively with the Mexicans, and we did so in the housing field and also in some small industry support activities.

I then went to Washington, where I saw the Alliance for Progress became one of the most imaginative and creative efforts that we had put forth in the foreign assistance field. On the bureaucratic and mechanical side, State and aid were combined on Latin American affairs. This is very significant. In our bureau, we had State officers who were handling economic assistance matters. We had aid officers who were handling political affairs. They were together, they associated, they collaborated, they had a common viewpoint. We weren't divided; we had single goals. Also our assistant secretary, Tom Mann, was the coordinator for the Alliance, and he was also the advisor in the White House on Latin American affairs. So it was all unified and all well coordinated.

Also we had very, very intimate and close working associations with Treasury. I should back up and say that within the Department itself, between E Bureau and ARA, we had good understanding and good working relationships. We were in daily contact and frequent joint sessions and meetings with Treasury.

In the international agency arena, we had intimate associations with IMF people, World Bank, and IDB. Indeed, under the auspices of the OAS, they created an organization called CIAP, a coordinating mechanism for the hemisphere, in which the governments, as well as the government of the United States, and the international agencies came together on a regular basis. Each country would submit its economic plan, its economic proposals, and these would be all discussed in an open, friendly manner, with give and take. This was the peak of collaborative association for all agencies and governments to work together to solve problems. This is seen largely as bureaucratic mechanisms, but I think it was really much more than rhetoric. There was a very solid effort being made.

I think if you look at assistance on two levels, one, a show of political support, and as trying to keep some countries afloat, we had a lot of successes. However, dealing with the central intractable problems of economic assistance, we had some successes in certain areas, but, again, a long-term persistent cooperative effort was required. Both sides became tired after seven or

eight years of joint work, and when the Alliance gradually dissipated, it was with relief on both sides because there was a kind of fatigue about this intense involvement.

So I would say that the Alliance was a monumental, heroic effort on the part of everybody in the hemisphere to try to work together. It lasted sufficiently long to prove that it could work. However, it showed the difficulties of long-term association toward tackling these problems. I'm not sure that we have it, and I'm not sure that the Latins have it, either, -that is to be able to persist in this kind of sense. The intervention in economic affairs is pretty heavy, and not just by the United States. So many countries, after a while, began to resist what they felt was an excess of intrusion into domestic tax policies, policies on agriculture, prices, exchange rate, and so on. So in the end, people wanted to get back their independence and their sovereignty even at the cost of a lowering of this kind of U.S. cooperation.

Q: *I've often heard it said that we became so absorbed in Vietnam, that this finished it. But actually there was friction all the time, that little by little was slowing down the enthusiasm of the interest of both parties.*

STEDMAN: Yes. A lot of people ascribe the rise and fall of the Alliance for Progress to the change of presidents. There's something to this, but certainly this isn't the total reason. I think what I described before as the kind of fatigue factor came to bear. But nonetheless, President Kennedy put a heck of a lot of enthusiasm into the Alliance. Some people have cynically said that we created the Alliance for Progress because we were worried about Castro being a model for economic programs in the hemisphere and the way to organize the economy. Be that as it may, Kennedy did put a lot of zeal into the Alliance, a lot of enthusiasm, which was shared by the Latins, as well as by Americans.

President Johnson wanted a much more hardheaded approach and much more practical, solid policies. He looked askance at some of the Latin leaders who tended to be perhaps politically a little too soft toward left-wing activities, in his views. So the political atmosphere modified to some extent. He was much more prepared to go along with and not chastise those leaders who were somewhat toward the right.

Then when President Nixon came along, I guess, the Alliance had run down to the point where even the Latins welcomed what was called a policy of "benign neglect." People tend to criticize Nixon for inventing this policy, but in effect, it was a policy which the Latins actually welcomed at the time, because they could get themselves unbuckled. But these kinds of policies seemed to fit the personalities of the presidents at the time.

ROBERT CORRIGAN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Guatemala City (1960-1964)

Ambassador Robert Corrigan was born in Cleveland, Ohio in 1934. He spent part of his youth in Latin America. He received a bachelor's degree from Stanford

University and entered the Foreign Service in 1941 as part of the Auxiliary Foreign Service. His career included positions in Guatemala, Panama, Brazil, and an ambassadorship to Rwanda. Ambassador Corrigan was interviewed in January 1988 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: Well, moving to your period as a senior officer. I think probably we should start at Guatemala. John Muccio, a distinguished ambassador, had been named there. Had he asked for you to go there as DCM or not? Or were you there already?

CORRIGAN: No, I wasn't there already. I was Deputy Chief of Protocol of the State Department at the time. And, indeed, that was practically my only stint in the Department of State, from mid-1958 to the beginning of 1960.

It was while I was in Protocol someone in your old business, Personnel, came to me one day and said, "Bob, how would you like to be DCM in Guatemala? We're looking for a candidate."

I thought about that, and I didn't have to think too long, because it seemed to be like a stepping stone, an interesting job. Muccio was named at about that time. When they were looking, as I understand the way Personnel does in those circumstances for a DCM, they themselves hit upon two or three or four names, and submit those names to the new ambassador. So obviously he approved. I doubt that he initiated.

Q: You didn't know him prior to that?

CORRIGAN: I did know him before, because he was a Secretary of Legation in Panama when my father was minister there.

Q: Well now, every ambassador runs his embassy in a somewhat different way. What did you find your major functions were as DCM in Guatemala?

CORRIGAN: Well, as you know, a DCM's main job is to backstop the ambassador, but that doesn't mean that different ambassadors don't use their DCMs in entirely different ways.

In the case of Ambassador Muccio, he gave me a great deal of latitude to manage the embassy, to resolve any disputes among personnel in the embassy, to edit and approve despatches and airgrams and reports that were prepared by the various people. He was very good in that way.

Besides that, I think, it depends with a particular DCM on his own particular interests. For example, if you have a DCM who is more politically inclined, or more economically inclined, I think he himself is going to manage to get more interested in that kind of activity. In my particular case, I had been a political officer more than an economic officer, and followed politics very closely, and really in that sense worked as kind of the head of the Political Section, in conjunction with the political officers.

Q: Well, in looking back at it, how would you say the post was staffed? I mean, was it a well-staffed--I'm not talking in numbers as much as the caliber of the people there or not.

CORRIGAN: First rate. Absolutely first rate. We had economics officers who were first rate officers all the way down the line. They were good.

Q: Well, what was the political situation at the time you were there? What was happening, and what were American interests?

CORRIGAN: Well, the president of . . .

Q: We're talking about this is about 19 . . .

CORRIGAN: This is Guatemala, we're talking about 1960 to '64. Right. And in the early part of that time the president, who had been duly elected was a retired general, and he was very proud of calling himself not General, but General and Engineer. Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, a most remarkable man.

He was a free-wheeler and a wheeler-dealer, however, such as to almost boggle the mind. Indeed, the papal nuncio to Guatemala at that time told the second ambassador under whom I served there, John O. Bell, as I accompanied him on his visits to his diplomatic colleagues and on the principal officials of the government, when we called on the papal nuncio, who was an Italian, he said to the new American ambassador, "Mr. Ambassador, I must tell you one thing about this president you're going to have to deal with." He said, "This is a small country in Central America. I'm Italian. Machiavelli was around. We were responsible for him and people like that." And he said, "I've been around the world and know a little something about politics and the way political animals operate." He said, "This fellow here is world class when it comes to politics and wheeling and dealing. So don't underrate him."

In any event, his own downfall, indeed, resulted, I think, from . . .

Q: This is Fuentes?

CORRIGAN: Ydigoras Fuentes. His own downfall a couple of years after I got there at the hands of the military institution, who overthrew him, was due really to the perception that he was just too much of a wheeler-dealer.

I'm reminded of what my father used to say about his mother. His mother used to admonish him and her other children, "Don't be too cute." I'm afraid that Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes just became too cute, and one of the things that I think was responsible for his downfall, and this hasn't been established so far as I know in any writings, and it might be of interest to anybody following Central American events, scholars or what not who want to look into that. You may recall that this was the time of the training in Guatemala, and I guess other places, of the Bay of Pigs fighters. Indeed, it was all very clandestine. Cubans were being trained at a finca in Guatemala. A finca owned by a very close friend of the president's. One of the things that may have led to his downfall was that this was done, I think, without reference to the military establishment as an institution. In other words, this was kind of a free-wheeling operation of Ydigoras Fuentes with his personal friend who owned the big finca, and they were training thousands of men. I guess

thousands of men. It was hundreds of men certainly. And actually they were doing it at another site in Guatemala too.

But in any event, after the ill-fated Bay of Pigs, I think those chickens came home to roost, and was one of the contributing factors for the Army's being induced and persuaded to depose the president.

Q: I'd like in a minute to return to the training of the Bay of Pigs people, but before that, and maybe included in that, is what was our interest or policy toward Guatemala? What did we want from Guatemala?

CORRIGAN: Well, when I was at the National War College, an Air Force officer friend of mine used to make fun of the State Department. There was a great deal of jocularity among those people at the National War College, and frequently whenever my friend would meet one of his State Department colleagues in the halls he would stop for a moment and salute, and he would raise his hand and say, "Peace and economic justice." Poking fun at the State Department. So in answer to your question of what we wanted in Guatemala, I guess that's what we wanted. We wanted peace and economic justice. We wanted a consolidation of democracy, and we hoped that the then government of Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes would be replaced in a democratic procedure. There were, of course, substantial American business interests in mining, somewhat in petroleum, the other usual things. A smattering of American business activity of various kinds, including the United Fruit Company, of course, which was very big there at that time. We wanted them to have a fair shake and not be discriminated against in legislation or in implementation of rules and regulations.

Q: Were you noticing any aftermath to the complicity of our embassy, and particularly our ambassador in the overthrow of Arbenz? Bitterness or desire to get us more involved?

CORRIGAN: No, no, not really. Of course, that was a subject that was, you know, always a subject of lively debate. I think more than anything else, that kind of gave an impression both to Americans outside of government, and to many, many Guatemalans, and most Guatemalans outside of government that the United States exercised far more influence than it really did. You know, it's a common notion that these banana republics and the powerful American ambassador, that they just do what you want. But certainly that wasn't the case either under Ydigoras Fuentes or the successor government. They operated in their own interests. They did what they wanted to do. You know, it's largely a fallacy. I think that may be true all over the world. The false impression that we have a lot more influence in a lot of places than we really do in practical terms.

Q: Well, you were serving during the time of the Kennedy administration and of the Alliance for Progress. Was this a major effort on our part in there, and how did it work?

CORRIGAN: Oh, yes. We had a very substantial aid program. And, you know, more and more funds were available at that time. There was a lot more hope, and there was a lot more activity in that field than there is certainly today And that there had been earlier. But I don't know what to

say other than that these various aid programs were carried out with varying degrees of success, just as in most countries.

Q: Well, what about, returning to the period of Cuba, you came to Guatemala just about the time Castro was consolidating his hold in Cuba. And I noted in looking through the journals of the day that Guatemala was claiming a Cuban threat, and the Cubans were claiming, apparently fairly justified, that the Guatemalans were helping to train Cubans to attack them. Was there a particular threat to Guatemala from Cuba at the time?

CORRIGAN: Cuba, (when I say Cuba, of course, we mean Fidel Castro's pro-Communist government) I think had more of an animus against Guatemala, both on account of its president, Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, who was an outspoken anti-Communist, and, of course, had a record of trying to overthrow Castro. Witness permitting the training in his territory of troops to go over there and throw him out.

Another aspect, and I'm reminded of this in answer to your earlier question about the heritage or the residue, if you will, from the Arbenz era. It's true that there was a good deal of Communist influence in the Arbenz government. You recall that Che Guevara was there, and somewhat like, I guess, the situation in Nicaragua today, there were a whole bunch of Communist types who were brought in and were scattered around the infrastructure of government, although certainly not to the degree we see in Nicaragua today.

But Ydigoras Fuentes used to comment that one of the residual problems Guatemala had was that during the Arbenz days there had been this considerable penetration by Communists of the government, and they remained throughout the bureaucracy, so that you had always the possibility of their coming to the surface and influencing events.

There was a famous time, a meeting of presidents in San Jose, Costa Rica, when President Kennedy went down there and met with the presidents of the Central American countries. And this Ydigoras Fuentes, again to show you how mischievous and Machiavellian he could be: I think it was the foreign minister of Cuba, who had been over in San Jose, was going back home and to a hero's welcome. He was over there as an observer. And Ydigoras Fuentes contrived, by sending a couple of messages that he faked, to make the Cubans believe that Guatemalan fighter aircraft were going to intercept the Cuban airplane and shoot it down. The Cubans changed their whole flight plans. And Ydigoras was doing things like this all the time.

Q: Well, as DCM how did you get along with the CIA and its operations? I'm speaking, you know, in what one can talk about these things today, and particularly the training. Was the embassy an active participant in this operation, or was it pretty much done elsewhere?

CORRIGAN: The embassy itself, so far as I know, so far as I can recall, had nothing to do with this training operation of Cuban troops prior to the Bay of Pigs. This was an entirely CIA operation.

We knew about it--now I'm talking about that from the vantage point of a DCM. I do not know to what degree the ambassador himself was briefed on that subject. I personally thought, and

think today, that its a bum way to run a railroad. If you have an ambassador and embassy, and if you can't trust them with details of a covert operation of that kind.

Q: Especially one of that size. Apparently the Cubans knew about it. At least there were protests that seemed rather well founded later on. John Muccio left rather quickly, didn't he? I mean he was there about a year and a half.

CORRIGAN: No, he was there about two years.

Q: About two years?

CORRIGAN: Yes.

Q: And there was a inter-regnum for a period of time?

CORRIGAN: Well, a few months. And then he was succeeded by John O. Bell.

Back on that Cuban thing. There was an aborted uprising against the government of Ydigoras Fuentes, apparently on the part of certain Air Force elements.

Q: This was in November on 1960, is this the one?

CORRIGAN: It was while Ambassador Muccio was there. And that would be about right.

Q: Yes. That's where Guatemala asked for U. S. aid. There were patrols and things like that?

CORRIGAN: I don't remember that aspect. But the thing was aborted, and again it was never clear. There was a suspicion, certain little signs, as I recall, that coup attempt had Cuban backing or Cuban motivation. And that, I think again, is responsive a little bit to your earlier query about Castro's attitude toward Guatemala. Maybe as against other Central American countries for whom he did not have this same animus, except, of course, yes, we have to be quick to add, of course, he had as great or as much an animus against Somoza, in whose country also, you know, troops were being trained. And I guess from which aircraft and ships took off.

Q: Well now, you know, some countries have the reputation of being AID countries. Other countries have the reputation, speaking from the United States' point of view, other countries have the reputation of being CIA countries. What was the role of the CIA from your point as DCM? Did you find them a problem or a help?

CORRIGAN: One thing I think about the CIA presence in Guatemala in that era was the fact that in the overthrow in 1954, which was only six years earlier, of the Arbenz government, and the triumph of Castillo Armas with CIA assistance, there was built up in Guatemala a larger CIA presence than you would normally have in a country where you weren't mounting an operation to help other people of that nationality depose the government, which was the case.

And I think what happened was it was difficult to cut down that bureaucracy to size once that whole situation was over. So that six years later in 1960 we still had a rather, in my view, inordinate CIA presence. Far more than you had in a neighboring country.

Q: Well, did you find that presence began to intrude into regular functions, political, economic and the like, of what you were doing?

CORRIGAN: What I found, and not only there, but in Chile, earlier where I had served, what concerned me was the taking over by the CIA of what had been, and what should be I think, traditional Foreign Service functions. I mean by that, labor reporting, activity with labor unions, which of course is all part of the whole political reporting spectrum. Such things as biographic reporting, which in earlier days in the Foreign Service was a Foreign Service function par excellence.

Q: You might explain here for the uninitiated reader what biographic reporting is in substance.

CORRIGAN: Washington wishes to have on file biographic, personal-type, professional accomplishments, etc. information on emerging leaders in that country. People who down the road one year, two years, five, ten years, are likely to rise to positions of influence and power in those governments. And then when that comes along, we know something about them and can have a better chance then of operating, perhaps, more effectively with them.

And, indeed, this is something that in my earlier days in the Foreign Service we were encouraged always to do. You know, if you have an idle moment, you can always, you know, there are scores of people there whom you can identify as important people, and okay, write down who they are, where they were born, where they went to school, what their hobbies are, to whom they are married, how many children they have, what their political inclinations and proclivities are, whether they're, for example, inclined to be pro American or inclined to be constitutionally anti-American, and so forth.

Well, by the time I was DCM in Guatemala this kind of function was being done mostly by the CIA. They were also doing more political analysis and reporting of an orthodox, ordinary type that was one of the mainstays of the old Foreign Service.

Q: Did you ever collide? Any examples of collision between you might say the Foreign Service approach and the CIA approach?

CORRIGAN: Yes. There were examples of that. On one occasion for example, I found that the Labor Attaché, who was part of our political section, was working in a complete vacuum and writing reports and making analyses about certain developments in the labor field that were entirely inspired, and I supposed financed, by the CIA. But without reference to and without knowledge on the part of the labor attaché the CIA was engaging in activities that were causing certain events and movements in the labor union field. That's one example.

Another example is reporting. On one occasion I saw a CIA message that had reported that the man who had been named head of government following the overthrow of Ydigoras Fuentes was

about to name himself president. We had been tasked by Washington to keep an eye on this to discourage it, because we were hoping that the country would return to democratic elections, and have a democratically elected president, as soon as possible. And, indeed, the military establishment which took over after Ydigoras Fuentes consistently and constantly assured us that their wish was really the same as ours, to return to democracy.

I saw a message that the CIA had sent, without reference to anybody in the embassy, that these people who were in control had made the decision that this head of government would declare himself president. As I say, the development would not be good news to Washington. I scratched my head in perplexity, because this did not jibe with what we were hearing in the embassy. So, I ascertained from an extremely reliable source very close to this head of government that this was simply not the case, and so informed Washington to the anger and consternation of the station chief.

Q: But then in a way we're in a situation which one really dislikes seeing two sides reporting two quite different things without at least having a joint communique saying we see it one way and they see it another. Which is a perfectly fair way of doing it. But they were by-passing you.

CORRIGAN: Precisely. And it was simply symptomatic, it was just one instance that brought this into relief, but it was symptomatic of a failure to have a complete in-house dialogue on these matters that are of common interest to our entire government in Washington, not just to the CIA. In other words, that particular CIA person could have saved himself that embarrassment by coming to us, because we had very good political contacts. We had a couple of fellows in the Political Section, one of whom, Frank McNeil, for example, himself became an ambassador. A very distinguished officer. We had top-flight people, and they were out talking to people and listening to people and reading all the papers, and were absolutely nonplused by this report that came out of the blue. How much better it would have been for these CIA officers to get a little meeting of three or four of us together and say "Hey, look, this is what we hear. What do you hear?"

Q: After this was there a little bit of knocking heads so you all got together more?

CORRIGAN: No, no. There was no noticeable effect.

Q: How about Washington? Obviously Guatemala was not on the top of our concerns in those days. But do you get much direction from Washington, or not? Support from Guatemala desk, pressures from Congress?

CORRIGAN: No, my recollection is that we were adequately backstopped by the State Department. We had good Guatemala desk officers. And what was that other part of your question?

Q: I was wondering, were there any pressures from Congress, or even media accounts and all that caused you to be concerned, looking over your shoulder at events in the United States that affected your operations?

CORRIGAN: No. No, I don't recall any kind of Congressional pressure really. In the back of my mind there may have been a couple of visa cases. This type of thing.

Q: This is par for the course. What about the role of our military in Guatemala? Either military assistance officers or military attachés, did they have a strong influence there? .

CORRIGAN: The military attaché's office was staffed by capable people who had good rapport with the Guatemalan military. They were able to know what the Guatemalans were up to; were perfectly cooperative with us in the embassy with respect to what was going on and provided input for our general reporting on conditions there.

We had a military group (MILGROUP) as well, an Air Force section and an Army section, and they were managing what was then a fairly substantial military assistance program, which has, of course, disappeared since those days. There was a lot of technical work in connection with that, you know. Equipment would come in, and there would be training in connection with the use of that equipment, and rapport with the top people in the Air Force and the Army and so forth. I think, really nothing particularly noteworthy to report with respect to their presence. They were helpful. The Guatemalan military certainly welcomed them.

Q: But there was not a heavy hand as far as our military was concerned of trying to over-strengthen the military, or you felt that they were somewhat of a loose cannon within the country? I mean, I'm speaking of our military.

CORRIGAN: Well, there was one rather amusing incident that showed an extremely heavy hand on the part of one mil group commander. It was after the overthrow of Ydigoras and Colonel Peralta, who was also minister of defense and had been minister of defense at the time of the overthrow, was head of government, not the president. And there was a good deal, you must keep in mind, in those days in Guatemala, guerrilla activity. And so there were safety concerns. And occasionally there would be these curfews.

Well, it just happened that there was a curfew. By curfew I mean you have to be off the streets by say 9 o'clock until 6 o'clock the next morning. And it just happened that one of these periods of curfews coincided with the visit of a very high-ranking Congressional delegation from the Armed Services Committee of the Senate. And one of the Senators was none other than Prescott Bush, the father of the possible next president of the United States.

Q: Vice President George Bush.

CORRIGAN: The father of George Bush. And so as a consequence the ambassador named the mil group commander the control officer. And we talked it over in the embassy, and decided that since there was a curfew we would abide by it. It would have been the easiest thing in the world, of course, to go to the authorities and say "Look, these are very important Senators. It's a shame to send them back to their hotel at 9 o'clock." But we thought that might not be a bad idea. Let them see how things were. But we arranged for them to have all the meetings they should have. And so the ambassador decided on a buffet dinner, which would start at 6 o'clock, and would end say about five minutes to nine, giving the Senators time to get back to their nearby hotel. And the

ambassador's wife had gone to great pains to provide a very sumptuous buffet. And the head of government was there, and all of the principal people with whom these particular Senators should talk. And things were going beautifully until about 8 o'clock the wife of the ambassador said "Well, the buffet is ready." Open the doors to the dining room and everybody could go in there. And the mil group commander called me aside and said, "Well, we won't be eating here, because I have invited the Senators to dinner at my house." (laughter) Frustrating the whole idea, plus certainly downgrading the ambassador's wife's fine dinner.

But in any event, as an aside I might say that this really got the ambassador's dander up, and that fellow was out of there within a few days.

DAVID JICKLING
Public Administration, USAID
Guatemala (1961-1968)

David David Jickling was born and raised in rural Michigan. He attended the University of Chicago and served in the U.S. Military in the Philippines. He then served in the U.S. Navy. His career has included assignments in countries such as Guatemala, Bolivia, Nicaragua, and Ecuador. Mr. Jickling was interviewed by W. Haven North on September 14, 1998.

JICKLING: Then I went overseas in 1961 to do the same kind of work. I worked with my counterpart in the government in Guatemala. The man had worked with me here in Washington in workshops on administrative management. He'd gone to study under Don Stone at Pittsburgh, a rather short three to six month course. Then he went back to head an office of what we would call organizational management, how to make things work in the government, how to streamline administrative systems, how to simplify work, how to make the files be responsive to the needs of the organization. He was my counterpart, and for five years we worked side by side trying to confront these problems in the immigration office, in the post office, in the customs house. In all the most difficult areas in the Guatemalan government we tried our best to simplify. We did films; we did training programs; we did all kinds of things to try to make things better, but in many cases we had very little impact.

Q: What was the situation in Guatemala when you were there?

JICKLING: We had just previous to that, in 1954, supported the overthrow of a popular government which to our view was too left leaning. The Arbenz government with CIA help was replaced by Castillo Armas which was a setback in terms of the objectives of the Alliance for Progress. It is a sad story which Stephen Schlesinger has written about as Bitter Fruit or Piero Gleijeses at Johns Hopkins has written a book about the same process, Shattered Hope. In other words, we were living in the period, the early ‘60s that was the beginning of a 30 year period of military dominance, of a government which was more interested (and the United States was supportive of this) in anti-communism, of strong government to control the kinds of cold war

concerns that we had. But it was not a government interested in the kinds of reforms the previous government, the Arbenz government, had set about to implement.

Q: Was the previous government a Communist government?

JICKLING: The previous government was communist in the sense that it was committed to social reform, to helping poor people, to all of the things which in theory the Alliance for Progress was committed to. This was a government which really was trying to do that. Whether or not it was communist with a big "C," it clearly had these kinds of social goals. The United States and John Dulles and the others just wouldn't tolerate it. We set about at a cost of $20,000,000 and one American life to overthrow that government in 1954.

Q: Was it a threat to the United States or was it just that it was communist?

JICKLING: It was not a threat to the United States, but it was viewed as a potential Communist country and this was after Cuba. We were not going to have another Cuba. This dominated our foreign policy in Latin America for 30 years. Reagan was the extreme of this, but in the 1960s we were equally committed to helping anti-communists. If they were against communists, they were our friends and we were going to support them. People like Somoza. All the way through, Somoza and his father had been anti-communists and therefore we were supporting them.

Q: So we played a major role in the overthrow of the Arbenz government?

JICKLING: That was 1954. In the 1960s there was still very much the spirit of anti-communism. It wasn't so much the spirit of development or of helping people or improving the quality of life as it was creating a system that would somehow be able to resist the temptations of communism rather than the idea of a better life for a broad group.

Q: How did that affect the kind of program we had there?

JICKLING: The program was essentially the same. The emphasis during the earlier period had been on agriculture, education, and health. Public administration was added to it. We had an elaborate system in the ‘50s under Rockefeller who headed the program of the IIAA, Institute of Inter-American Affairs. It created what was known as “servicios.” This is a very interesting experience that is little documented I think. In Latin America we created little ministries, parallel ministries in three fields: agriculture, education and health. People today look back on that, the old timers as the golden years in programs related to agriculture.

Q: Why did we create servicios?

JICKLING: We created servicios because we felt that it was difficult for us to work directly with the government because of their problems of lack of resources and personnel. They didn't have the quality personnel we wanted and the programs we wanted. The idea was sort of like American county agents, to create a demonstration project, to run a program properly with the proper resources and the right kind of people particularly in these priority areas. It had remarkable success. They did all kinds of things. For example, in education emphasizing rural

education, not just city children and teacher training and adult literacy. It created little ministries that sooner or later ran into conflict with the basic ministry.

Q: How was the servicio structured and managed?

JICKLING: The servicio was a little cooperative organization with a Guatemalan or local director and a U.S. director. It had a staff which complemented the ministry but in fact duplicated and often conflicted with the ministry. Above all, the friction was that the servicio was relatively well financed, with good supplies, good materials, and good people. The ministry continued with its mediocre ways so there was often conflict between the two. It wasn't always a model in the sense that the ministry people didn't follow the servicio. That system was abandoned in the 1960s. The notion of the Alliance for Progress was that you would have more of a cooperative approach, you would work together and you wouldn't set up separate and in a sense competing organizations.

Q: As a public administration expert, what was your view of servicios as an appropriate instrument?

JICKLING: We turned right around and under the project idea which came into vogue in the '60s, the projects did almost exactly the same thing. Still to this day we go in with a project, and the World Bank is even worse than we are, they set up a separate administrative group with separate standards in terms of the quality of people and resources that are available to administer the project. The project ends and the supporting infrastructure just disappears. So, the servicio experience had its problems, but today project management has the same thing. I think in technical assistance we should abandon the project focus in development.

Q: Did you have a servicio in public administration in Guatemala?

JICKLING: No, what we had were comparable organizations. For example, in data processing, we would go into an organization or government and we would create a central data processing office. That office would have as its clients, the census people, the tax people, perhaps the customs people, and statistical people in other fields, and it would provide central services for these other fields. It was kind of a servicio, but it wasn't ever called that, and it caught on. In many countries such as in Bolivia where I worked later, Cenaco, was a central computer center, and became a center of excellence. It served as a pilot project introducing a new technology, computers for business operations and gradually expanded serving all of the government. Public administration never had servicios as such, but it created little offices like the office of organization methods which I worked in. We set up in almost every country that AID worked with around the world, an institute of public administration. This was a government organization; it was kind of like a servicio but it never had a U.S. head. It always had a local head who set about to identify bottlenecks in administrative reform and develop training programs and publications and other consulting activities that would focus on making those systems work better.

Q: Well let's come back to those in a minute. You had an institute of public administration in Guatemala?

JICKLING: Yes! CDAP, the Public Administration Development Center. It still exists today under another name. It is now called the Institute of Public Administration, but it has the same basic focus.

Q: In your seven years in Guatemala, what were some of the major issues you had to address?

JICKLING: Rural poverty. We set up a task group because we didn't have an organization concerned with rural development. Agriculture was as much concerned with large farmers as with small farmers, for example the coffee growers or rubber production for export, but we were not concerned from a policy point of view or a program point of view with reaching rural people. We had programs like rural adult literacy or rural education that focused on them. Many of the programs like malaria control or potable water programs reached the rural people, but there was no integration of the activities. At that time one of the greatest emphases in Guatemala and a lot of other countries and the U.S. supported this and later the Peace Corps supported this was community development work. Community development became what we called later in the middle 1970s integrated rural development. At the community level, how do you get leadership and focus your resources on the local problems, whatever the felt needs are of the community. We had in Guatemala a task force. I served as the secretary which is the only real staff function there was because there were people from different fields. We met on a regular basis, and we talked about how to focus programs more effectively on what today we call rural poverty, how to help communities help themselves.

Q: Currently the concepts of rural development and community development have somewhat of a bad name. How did you find it then? What did you work on? What issues did you have to deal with?

JICKLING: What we had to do was to find local leaders and how to encourage them to tackle local problems whether it was potable water or access roads or whatever. Resources were always limited. The problem was how could you focus the resources on community problems and get the community itself to provide the input to make it work. Local leaders were the key to that. Peace Corps volunteers came in, in the ‘60s in great numbers. They typically played that intermediate role between local communities' interests and external resources which could be from foreign aid, from private corporations, from international groups. It focused aid on particular community problems.

Q: What were some of the techniques you used to get this local interest and leadership?

JICKLING: One of the great stories is with the Loyola program. Loyola University, a Catholic organization in New Orleans, decided at the same time as the Pope was saying thou shalt, meaning community priests, should do good works and be concerned with this life, not just the life hereafter to their parishioners. Loyola said fine, let's train local leaders. They developed a program with our support. This was a time when Kennedy was President when it was really questionable whether we could support a Catholic institution. It was a major political decision, and they said yes we would. For five years or so, we worked with Loyola sending people from practically every Latin American country. I can talk about Guatemala particularly because I was

there then. These trainees were picked to go to Loyola. They went for six or eight months and had a range of training focusing on community organization. The same kind of thing the poverty program was working on in the United States, the same methodology of identifying local leaders and training them. Typically in Guatemala, the trainees that went to Loyola, and let's say that 50-75 people went during those five years during the '60s were picked by the local priest. They often were schoolteachers, young bright people who often had been studying in secondary school in another town and had come back to the village. These were the potential leaders, not necessarily the older people, but the movers and shakers. They came to Loyola; they came back all fired up, but they came into an environment in Guatemala which was basically repressive and against change. This was a period when the government was in the hands of the military and they didn't really want education and development at the local level which would run contrary to the status quo. In the following 15 years, when we study the impact and the outcome of the Loyola program (we have never made a statistical study), we find that most of the trainees are dead today. They were killed because they were agitators in the terms of the powers that be. In terms of development, they were the ideal change agent, they were well selected, but that was the kiss of death for them.

Q: They were supported by AID?

JICKLING: Supported by it, financed by AID. When they came back, the AID infrastructure was very sensitive to how they could be supportive. Most of the governments like Guatemala had, at the Presidential level, an office of community development. It was concerned with organizing and focusing resources on these local problems in a very fluid way.

Q: By that time they were trying to get rid of the revolutionary groups?

JICKLING: The government was talking with two voices. One voice was saying help them. Let's do the kinds of things that will help local communities while the traditional and military powers, the powers that really counted were saying these are agitators and let's get rid of them. The governments of Latin America, and Guatemala we can use as an example, are deeply committed to this today. It is now called the Fundo de Inversion Social, FIS. Almost every country in Latin America has a FIS. It is supported fundamentally by the World Bank. It is directed at structural adjustment which means that poor people suffer with a lot of these market economy introductions and things which are being pushed by the World Bank and the international community generally. But also the World Bank's proper concern with poverty. The Fundo de Inversion Social, with World Bank funds coming into these same communities and saying what would you like to do. They help organize on a very decentralized way to support change. I happened to have been working with them this past year with one of their senior people on another project. I had a chance to go into the office. It is an amazing experience because they are just overwhelmed with people. Not bureaucrats, but private contractors. The wisdom of foreign aid today is you can't depend on a government bureaucracy to do these kinds of programs. What you do is say we are going to build schools in this area. Would you like to build schools? If so come in and give us your bid. We'll give you suggestions of plans and you give us your bid. We will build 50 schools if the communities will provide the labor, provide the site, not necessarily the supervision but at least the energy to get the school going and the request to the ministry to

get a teacher there or even in some cases to have the community actually support the school by paying a teacher, a great revolution.

The fact is that there is a FIS program in almost every Latin American country today. I'm not sure how it is translated in English, but it is a community development social betterment program. It is carrying on that same tradition with the World Bank that the community development field did. As I was mentioning, in Guatemala in the ‘60s, AID had a rural development task force that was concerned on how to focus our programs on the same objectives.

Q: Do you have a feeling that the community development work you were involved in in those days created a conceptual base for what happened later or was everything that came later brand new, discarding what went before?

JICKLING: I have been working in foreign aid like you have, Haven, for 40 years. The reinvention of the same thing over and over with new labels is such a sad thing. The fact that the AID organization does not look back and see what has happened before and learn from that experience is a great tragedy. We reinvent the wheel over and over and part of it is the focus on projects. That is a mistake. We set out, and the other agencies I worked for, the IDB [Inter-American Development Bank] and the World Bank have, too, they set up a program. Then they set up a project. They say in five years we are going to turn this aspect of the world around. Then they go in and they often have no interest in what has happened before. They just set up their goals and they try to measure the change and all the rest without looking back and comparing the experience. They face the same problems and they come out with very little long-term impact. What they do is something concrete that they can point with pride that they have achieved something in three years or five years.

Q: Going back to your stay in Guatemala in that kind of a program, what were some of the lessons you learned about what worked and what didn't work?

JICKLING: About three years ago they had a team that went back to Guatemala to look at that under a former mission director, Dave Lazar. I worked with them although they weren't anxious to have me either. They were interested in not being prejudiced by experience let's say. Nobody bothered with the facts. They were concerned with outcomes in Guatemala in rural development after 20-30 years what changes could be measured and what could be seen. I worked with them and I have noted down here some of the things I think were different in Guatemala. I tried to influence them. I don't think with too much success. It seems to me the outcomes of technical assistance which were positive successes in Guatemala were roads. The United States in WWII decided they would build a road down to the Panama Canal in case the Japanese threats along the Pacific coast increased. They wanted a land supply route to the Panama Canal. They set about with no restrictions on the funds. It was a blank check to build the Inter-American highway as a defense highway. That went right through the middle of Guatemala. It was still being built in the 1960s. Twenty years after it started it was still being paved and some parts were still being worked on because of difficult terrain. It was much easier in the long run to build it along the coast on a level route, but because of security interests, they decided to build it in the mountains which was ten times more difficult. That road led to a whole new approach to the highlands of Guatemala. It made them accessible, and the roads which led into it which are called farm to

market roads, neighborhood roads made a tremendous difference in Guatemala. Communities were opened up and given access to markets which they had never had before because of the Inter-American highway and the feeder roads that came into it. Looking back on Guatemala, I don't think there is any question, roads were the number one achievement. They had all kinds of secondary consequences, unintended but beneficial which opened the communities to, for example, teachers. That road, the Inter-American highway today is an interesting case study. The number of teachers, we are talking about hundreds of teachers who want to live in the capital because of educational opportunities and other benefits for their families but who teach in the highlands in the communities. It is a commuter road. That Inter American highway is a commuter road with buses that bring people in to work in the city and take them back. We are talking about people commuting one or two hours, 50 miles and more. It also takes people out to teach in the local schools or to be health workers or village community development people.

The roads have had secondary consequences of tremendous benefit, broad scale development and income generation because it brings into the city cut flowers, strawberries and other products that go out every day by airplanes. For Guatemala, these are what we now call non-traditional exports, which is another emphasis of foreign aid. The roads provide the basis for those products to be broadly produced and to come out of the country. Roses for example, there is a whole story of roses and what it has meant to Guatemala. Cut roses are produced within a two hour radius of the airport, which is a third of the country. Every morning they come in boxes. They are cut at night and are on that airplane at 7:00 A.M. They are in Miami at noon and in Philadelphia in the afternoon. The next day, the second day, they are being sold throughout the whole Atlantic seaboard of the United States. These roses sell for a dollar apiece. They are produced for ten cents. There is a lot of profit along the way, but it is a good example of a non-traditional export. Back to the outcome or the beneficial thing, roads I think are number one.

Number two is water, infrastructure again. Water is the universal need of rural communities, and so often the input is not at great expense. It could be other simple technologies, wells occasionally, but more often it is a surface source that comes to a village. The village identifies a source, and the problem is how to get it to the village. Water is number two.

Construction is equally important although lots of times health posts are never used or they are not used adequately or schools are not properly staffed or what goes on inside the school is essentially what went on before and not much improved. School construction, health post construction, water systems, roads, electric plants, hydroelectric dams, and other basic infrastructure are major projects which AID doesn’t invest in as much anymore, but the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank came along and picked up these projects, which it seems to me have made the most impact on modernizing Guatemala.

The other aspects of technical assistance and interchange were much less effective, for example what goes on in the schools. We have constantly, since the days of the servicio in Guatemala, been concerned about the quality of rural education. I was on a task force earlier this year in Guatemala in bilingual education. The Indian population which is half the population of Guatemala think it is very important and are all for it in any way they can. But again, the governing people, the Ministry of Education, do not give it the same importance. What is needed is, in their view, the integration of the nation, not separation. It is kind of like the vote recently in

California against bilingual education. So, a lot of the things we pushed have never really been accepted. It is partly a cultural thing. It is partly a thing that Indians who, don't speak Spanish, and that is really a definition of an Indian, not how they dress or what they do, but that they don't speak Spanish, don't count. It is a tragic thing in terms of the waste of human resources, in terms of the inability of the country to integrate and become a more unified and effective social group.

We had a major effort in Guatemala in preventive medicine to eradicate malaria. We are talking a major investment over many years. Malaria is as bad in some areas as it was 50 years ago. The mosquitoes have become resistant, and have been difficult to control. Family planning is the same thing. We have put in, in the last 20 years in Guatemala, considerable resources in support of family planning. I had a chance to work about five years ago in a programming exercise trying to measure results of our foreign aid today. What are the results of our investment in foreign assistance in family planning? We spent days literally trying to pinpoint the figures to send to Washington to say what our results would be. We are talking about in five years, that we would go from 32 to 34 percent acceptors. A trivial amount with major expenditures. In other words, the impact of family planning, in spite of our most ambitious efforts, were not going to reach more than a small fraction of rural women.

Q: Why was it not more effective? Was it a cultural block?

JICKLING: The problem of the lack of progress in family planning relates to a whole series of things like the education of women. These are much longer term investments than just providing birth control methods. The program has never in countries like Guatemala, reached the great majority of women. More than half of the child producing women are in rural areas, and they are subject to a whole series of cultural values and lack of access to family planning services, which really prevents the programs from having much impact. For the last 20 years, effective family planning has been the number one priority in countries like Guatemala.

Q: Supported by government?

JICKLING: Supported by the government nominally, but not necessarily by the church and community organizations and people with traditional values. It has had very limited impact.

Q: So what you are saying is that infrastructure was effective but that social services were less so. What were the public administration issues? Public administration must have been at the heart of this dilemma.

JICKLING: No question. Effectiveness of public sector management is a constant problem. Its successes have been in, as I mentioned, computers and data processing and advanced technologies. To a lesser extent personnel systems, civil service, merit systems. There has been remarkable progress in creating systems to get better people into government and to reward them better. It is not adequate, but we have tried very hard in that area. I think that much of what we did in public administration had very little impact. I was asked to go back to Guatemala because I had worked for seven years there and try to measure the long-term impact of public administration programs. I pointed to the two areas, the application of computers and personnel

work as the most successful. Personnel work related especially to training, the institute of public administration which we'd helped start.

Q: Were there specific public administration issues related to the rural development, community development interests that you dealt with?

JICKLING: Yes. I hesitate to think of ways in which we made an impact. I think the real problem of community development , and it continues today, is the fact that the people in most of the rural communities in Guatemala are Indians. These are people whom the powers that be, the government, has not really given a priority. There is only a token interest in their programs.

Q: Were there specific techniques in public administration you were trying in the community development effort that worked or didn't work?

JICKLING: We have had with the Guatemalans success in isolated cases. For example, local government, and that is related to community development. I worked in the '60s on creating a municipal association that might help to bring pressure on the central government to provide more resources, and also increase the sense of professionalism among city managers. They are called municipal secretaries there, but are the staff under the elected mayor. We have had a support role in creating a system in which more of the national resources are going to local government to provide infrastructure, streets, water, markets, slaughterhouses and the typical municipal functions. Before it depended on happenstance of a beneficial central government making gestures, giving here and giving there, and very limited local resources. In the last 20 years Guatemala has moved toward what we call revenue sharing by which an earmarked portion of the central government's budget is transferred to the municipalities for public works, not to pay the employees, but for water systems and other public works, and those funds are administered by the local government. This is a major shift in power that is taking place. We've supported it. For example, in 1968, we helped fund a conference in a village called Panajachel and it is still called the "Declaration of Panajachel." The old timers cite it as a landmark step. The Declaration stated that municipalities should be considered as partners in development. They were not there just for law and order which was their traditional role. They are there in order to help people help themselves, to be partners in the development. It is an interesting concept, which has been the model for people who are pushing for decentralization in government, the shifting of public functions to local government.

Q: Were there any specific programs you dealt with to help municipal development?

JICKLING: First, we helped form the municipal association in which the municipal leaders came together to form a more effective political group to put pressure on the central government. We sent municipal secretaries who were the administrative staff to the United States and elsewhere to organized training in what the possibilities were in local government development, in decentralization, broader local responsibility, and collecting local taxes to pay for this. These efforts have motivated municipal staff to think more broadly, to have a broader vision of the potential role of local government. We also worked specifically on local tax administration systems, particularly the property tax which is now being decentralized to the municipalities. We did it in terms of helping rural municipalities to better map their properties as a basis for better

property tax collection. We worked on what are called cadasters which are property tax bases which help local governments. We worked in other areas which would help the municipalities become more effective in local development activity. This basically supports the same thing that community development tried to do but with emphasis on doing it through the local government structure.

Q: Were there other initiatives you undertook while you were in Guatemala?

JICKLING: Tourism, and there is no question that tourism is the number one potential for that country. It is a small country about the size of West Virginia with a topography kind of like West Virginia with a tremendous potential for tourism. Poverty like West Virginia and violence deters tourism which is an intractable problem. In the '60s, I began as a hobby during my free time, touring the country myself, writing it up for the American community in tour guides and things like that, and then working with the tourist office. All of this was outside my regular responsibility, but it was a very serious hobby for me, working on how to promote tourism for Guatemala. Except for the law and order issue, which is worse today than it was last year or the year before. I don't think there is any area that can potentially provide as many resources for Guatemala as tourism. We spend half the year today in a little village called Antigua. We bought a home there while we were in Guatemala. It is a major tourist attraction. It was the colonial capital, a little Williamsburg, preserved as it was in the 18th century. I have worked with the public and private people in developing tourism, developing handouts, materials, maps, and all kinds of things that help to promote Antigua as an attractive tourist destination.

Q: Were there some other things you did to promote tourism? Did you have a government program that you helped set up?

JICKLING: There is a government program, a Guatemalan tourist institute that is very important. I published a little booklet identifying who the saints were on the facades of the colonial churches. Every saint on a church was picked for a very specific didactic purpose. He or she is there because of the message that church wants to communicate to the village. I am very interested in publications or anything that will help promote Antigua as a more interesting and attractive tourist destination.

Q: Did you have government capacity to do this with you?

JICKLING: Yes. There is a national tourist promotion office which was doing reasonably good work.

Q: From your initiatives?

JICKLING: No. AID supported tourism from time to time, for example, by building roads and providing access to some of the more interesting tourist facilities. In fact, it has never been a priority, and AID, official AID, has said this should not be a priority. Somehow there is a feeling that this is not an appropriate use of public funds. I think that is very short sighted. The National Geographic has been much more supportive of what they call the Ruta Maya, the circuit of places to visit to study the ancient Mayan culture which is one important part of tourist

promotion in Guatemala. National Geographic is doing it with Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico to promote the idea that tourists should be able to easily visit these different expressions of this magnificent pre-Colombian civilization, the Maya.

Q: Interesting. Are there other dimensions of your work there that you haven't touched on?

JICKLING: We love Guatemala and we go back now every year. We've been going for 30 years. This gives us a perspective on Guatemala including the different aspects of Guatemalan development. I have just finished a paper that I will present later this month in Chicago. It analyzes the mayors of Guatemala City, what they have done for the quality of life in the city and how they relate to national politics. It is a fascinating subject because the capital city, even though it is a major city 2,000,000 people today with a huge metropolitan area, yet it plays a secondary role in national politics. It doesn't have any real independence from the central government. It is struggling constantly to provide better services. Only now after 50 years of "municipal autonomy" is it getting the kind of support from the central government that it should have, resources and support for the kind of infrastructure that a city of two million people need.

Q: What were some of the main evolutions in development terms that you have seen in Guatemala over 40 years?

JICKLING: First, the negative aspect, which is a constant problem, is acceptance of the Indian as a human being worthy of support. It is like the whole area of women in development, the notion that women provide a resource, a potential for development, of contributing to development which can only be achieved if they have their own capacities developed. The Indian population is exactly the same. Until Guatemala accepts the fact that half of their people have been essentially excluded from the kind of developmental services that would enable them to achieve their potential and contribute to development, the country will always be held back. That, I think, is the number one problem.

The second problem is resources. The fact that to get change, to get development, you need central resources. The tax collection record of Guatemala is abysmal. It is I guess after Haiti, the least productive in terms of providing resources for public sector programs. People just won't pay their taxes, so that is an equally difficult problem.

In terms of positive change, there are just all kinds of change that have come about as a result of urbanization. Guatemala City was a half a million when we went there in 1961. It is two million today. With urbanization comes all kinds of modernization. There is exposure with things that come with television and radio and all of the things that a dynamic major urban center create. It is dangerous environment in many respects, but at the same time is also a highly productive area. It is an area in which there are all kinds of initiatives, innovations and experimentation, things which never existed before. In other words, urbanization and modernization are two sides of the same coin. As much as we talk about rural development, most of the major changes in development in Guatemala like growing roses for export or other innovations have come from urban people who see the countryside as a place to invest, to make money, not to improve the quality of life in the rural area; although, that is a secondary consequence. It comes about

because the people in the city have a little extra money and are willing to take a chance to invest in certain new initiatives.

Q: Have there been any revolutionary changes in the rural areas since you were there?

JICKLING: The rural areas have changed because of investment in infrastructure. The roads have given them access to markets. The rural areas have also changed as a result of health and educational programs. For example, in 1976 there was a devastating earthquake in the whole central region of the country. AID with other donors went in and helped to rebuild the infrastructure of those communities. They have clearly improved their schools, their health posts, their municipal buildings and other public buildings, so because of the devastation of a major earthquake, there has been a major investment in infrastructure that would not have happened without the earthquake. The earthquake was a terrible thing, but it was a therapeutic thing. It causes weak buildings and poor buildings to fall down. The good buildings stay, but it causes you to rebuild and to create a better physical infrastructure. It is one of the tragedies of development.

Q: What about the changes in the public administration capacity of the government which is the area which you were working on?

JICKLING: I think there have been some improvements, but not much. While I was there in the '60s we worked with the post office, with immigration, with the customs house, with tax offices. Many of these offices are still hopeless bureaucracies, truly hopeless. Why haven't they changed, why haven't they improved and become more user friendly is an intricate question related to leadership and corruption. The fact that if you have a complex system, lots of people benefit because people will pay to get things handled promptly. So, corruption is part of the problem. Also the fact that leaders haven't pushed for user friendly systems. There are some innovations in tax collection. In this small town where we lived, the mayor has reformed the office. In the city hall, he has made it so the lines are much shorter. They have tried very hard to make it easier for people to pay taxes. You don't have to wait in line forever; you can get attention. You may get a tax bill that is computer printed. A complete new initiative so that in a sense you don't have to go and wait in line or beg to pay your taxes. These are the kinds of changes that are heartening to see, and they take place. They don't always take place because of foreign aid. They take place because an organization like IBM or others were ready to sell the organization a machine that will produce that kind of a billing. They convinced the organization that you will make more money if you provide your clients with a bill so they know what they have to pay. You do it promptly, and you create an image of being a responsive government.

Q: What about the political level, what we now call governance? That seems to be still at the heart of the situation and problem in Guatemala. How has that changed over the 40 years?

JICKLING: Since 1986, there have been democratically elected governments in Guatemala. There has been a pulling back of military domination. The governments have been increasingly responsive to local needs and development. The current government, the Arzu government, is an amazingly effective government in many respects with what is called the "peace process." This process brought an end to a 30 year civil war and laid out a whole series of very ambitious

objectives, for example, the integration of the Indian, respect for the Indian. It is certainly a step in the right direction, but it is a step with a huge set of problems. The Arzu government and the previous three governments have been moving in the right direction. There is a real prospect that the military will stay in the barracks, not for sure, but a good prospect they will stay in the barracks and the government will be succeeded by a civilian elected government. There will be an election next year, and the mayor of Guatemala City, probably the best mayor they have had in 50 years, is the insider to be elected as the next president. The current president is the former mayor of Guatemala City who did an outstanding job in administrative reform for the government of Guatemala City. For example, reducing the lines for waiting to pay taxes and other aspects of the administrative management of the city. They current mayor is even better, and he his more human and more effective in many ways. He is the insider to succeed the president, so I think there is real hope.

Q: What occurred to cause the military to go back to the barracks? Why did they suddenly decide to give up the role?

JICKLING: They found that a long civil war was not getting them anywhere. It took years to get the negotiations between the rebel groups and the military to agree to what is called a peace process. They agreed to begin to attack all of these problems that the rebels have been trying to get on the agenda for 30 years. It was signed in December of '96, and now we are two years into that process. The military has accepted a secondary role. Even more important is the notion that policing of the country should become a civilian and professional operation. We haven't talked about public safety, but all through this process AID at the beginning in the ‘60s was very concerned with the policing function and public safety.

Q: We had a program?

JICKLING: Everywhere we had a public safety program. It made a limited impact, but it didn't affect the fact that the military in Guatemala was still doing the principal policing function. They did it right up until recently, and they still do it on occasion. Now the problem is how to create a professional, independent, civilian police force. The Spanish government is helping them do that.

Q: What were we doing in public safety all these years?

JICKLING: Well, we supplied them with equipment for one. We supplied them with training. We brought their leaders here to the old Car Barn in Georgetown which was the Office of Public Safety's training facility. I don't know how many, but let's say from 20 to 50 police officials over the years came to that facility from Guatemala and learned about modern policing techniques. The AID police advisor in Guatemala in the ‘60s was a good friend of mine. He was from Guam and had a Spanish name, although he didn't speak Spanish. He was an interesting guy, Christostomo. We didn't drink Scotch and it was always limited because President Johnson at the time wanted us to buy American and not foreign merchandise. Our commissary had a quota of Scotch. We gave our quota to this police advisor. He didn't drink much either, but when he did, and this is an interesting technical assistance technique, he provided the police officers who came by his house any time to have a drink. That's where our Scotch went. It was interesting because through that, he had access to the police in an informal way that he never would have

had as a regular advisor. That was his approach to making friends with the police. What changes he achieved or what happened as a result, I don't know. I think that our interest in police at that time was very much a cold war thing, that we wanted access to the police for intelligence purposes.

The Vietnam experience with the Michigan State University police program is an example of this. It was infiltrated with CIA. We felt this was a way we could keep track of what was happening in the country through the intelligence part of the police function. I think Christostomo was never directly involved in the sense that he didn't work for the CIA, but I think there is no question that the CIA office in Guatemala, of which I knew nothing other than they were in the top floor of the Embassy, probably interviewed Christostomo every week to debrief him on what he was finding out, but he was not a direct employee of the CIA. I'm sure that whiskey helped to have him find out about things they were doing. Do you remember [the movie] "Z" [about Greece, or] the story about the public safety people training the local people in torture methods and police brutality in Uruguay. I don't think we were involved in that in Guatemala. I think they were more than capable of doing that on their own. I just know that we had a public safety program until it became a political liability. The Spanish government is now doing a major job in Guatemala in working with the police. A professional civilian police force, everyone agrees, is a very useful goal. I think, Haven, the number one problem in Guatemala today, in spite of all these other efforts and programs, is public safety, basic law and order, you have public safety, or you are not going to have a bright future for Guatemala.

Q: Did you have much contact with the Embassy during your time there?

JICKLING: I didn't in Guatemala because I was a junior officer. I did more later on in Bolivia and Nicaragua.

Q: Let's just talk about Guatemala now.

JICKLING: I did in subsequent appointments because I was a senior both in Bolivia and Nicaragua. That is another story. In Guatemala, my experience was mostly social. I got to know the Ambassador socially, and we talked informally. Only occasionally would they talk about things in which I was interested, but their staff members became close personal friends, and through them, I had an idea of what the Embassy was doing. The political officer, John Dreyfus, was a close personal friend, we were neighbors and our boys played baseball together, and our wives knew each other. Through John Dreyfus, the only American in my experience of 40 years in Guatemala, who learned all the verses of the National Anthem, which are always sung at every public occasion. We'd always attend these ceremonies and wiggle our lips, but we don't know more than the chorus of their National Anthem. Here is a political officer who not only knew every verse, but he knew every political leader, actual and future in Guatemala. It's a wonderful story. I admired him so much, and he was a delightful person. He was like this public safety advisor. He didn't have an open bar, but he was hobnobbing with all the young political leaders all the time and knew what was going on. During one of the recent political difficulties about 10 years ago, he was called back to Guatemala to talk to his informants and give the Embassy a report. I had a chance to talk to him later. His report was absolutely ignored; no one had any

interest in it; although, they did pay for him to go back and check up on what was happening. He since has died.

Q: Did you ever have a sense that the Embassy was giving you or your mission political directives as to what you should or shouldn't do?

JICKLING: Yes. The Embassy was supportive of certain things. For example I was interested in decentralization, local government development. The Mission Director, at the time was a real problem. I won't even mention his name. He just was difficult to work with. The Ambassador came into the discussions of the program and said let's do it. In other words, he went around the Mission Director to talk to me to say this is something that is worth doing, and let's do it.

Q: You mean the decentralization business.

JICKLING: Yes.

Q: Why didn't the mission support it?

JICKLING: The mission was giving nominal approval, but in fact was raising all kinds of problems, and by the manner in which the Mission Director was operating was creating really big problems in negotiating agreements on particular activities with the government. The Ambassador came to me personally and said let's move the program forward.

Q: Was this a substantive issue or just a personality...

JICKLING: A personality issue. This was a Mission Director who knew the answers and he was going to tell the people how to do it. He told them in a very loud voice in the presence of subordinates in a way that was so counterproductive. It was a tragic story.

Q: Let's move on. You left there after seven years.

JOHN O. BELL
Ambassador
Guatemala (1962-1965)

Ambassador John O. Bell was born in 1912 and attended George Washington University as undergraduate where he later received a law degree. He started his career at the State Department at age 19. Upon joining the Foreign Service, he served in Copenhagen, Karachi, and Guatemala among others. Arthur L. Lowrie interviewed him on June 17, 1988.

Q: How did you get your appointment as Ambassador to Guatemala?

BELL: After a while the legislation was produced and presented and, I do want to mention one thing in that connection. It was the fundamental rewriting of the AID legislation. Fulbright was Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee at this time. At the conclusion of the formal hearings you get to the point what they call a mark-up session, I'm sure you're familiar with, where the committee actually looks at the written down proposals for legislation and votes on them. They have a big book which the Printing Office has made up for them which shows in parallel columns the old legislation, the new legislation, the Executive Branch position, comments, suggestions and whatnot. This is the session in which normally the Executive Branch is not permitted to have any representation. But Dillon was working hard on Fulbright to let us have somebody in there to answer any questions they might have. Fulbright was, of course, I shouldn't say Dillon was working on him but Dillon certainly had some effect on him. Dillon was, by that time, in the Treasury Department but he and Fulbright lived across the street from each other, and were close friends. Fulbright finally said that he would go so far as to say they could have one person from the Executive Branch sit with the committee in the Executive Session for markup. As far as he was concerned, that person had to be me. Because he said he wanted some one person who could deal with both the military and economic side and he knew I had worked on both because I had been up there enough for him to know that very well. They (Dept.) said, hurray, hurray.

I got sent up to this task and I felt reasonably well prepared for it because we had at least tried for a year to anticipate every goddamn thing you could think of they would be interested in and have a position on it. But you never succeed entirely. Anyhow, the Senator from Vermont, Aiken, Republican, he decided to give me the first blow and he started asking some questions which had something to do with agriculture. I can't even remember what the question was, but it had something to do with agriculture. I opined as how I thought the Executive Branch would react. I was opining without this being something we had reached a position on. We had never discussed it. It was one we hadn't anticipated. I was reasonably confident I was right. He said, well, do you think the Secretary of Agriculture would agree with that? I said, I think so. He said, can you find out? I said, yes sir. It was pure happenstance that about three days before I had met Orville Freeman who was the Secretary of Agriculture at a cocktail party and we had had quite a long conversation because I had worked for Eugenie Anderson who was from Minnesota and whom he knew well. So I got him on the phone. I called down there and said, I'm calling from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing and I'd like to talk to the Secretary, and got him. He said, what's the problem? I told him, they've asked this question and this is the answer I've given. He said, that's fine. I said, they need a letter from you saying so. Fine, be up there in an hour. By God it wasn't an hour and here's a knock on the door and here's a guy from the Secretary of Agriculture with a letter to Senator Aiken. I never got asked another time to support what I said. It was worth a million dollars. Pure chance. I could imagine, you know, if I hadn't met him and had the conversation, calling up saying I need you to write a letter to the Senate saying so and so. But he did.

Senator Symington told Mr. Rusk that I saved the bill for them which I knew was just flattery and being nice. But I did have a lot of conversations, including a long exchange with Senator Fulbright over the absence, he thought, of any rational program for Africa. I used the illustration of saying, well we have now in Dakar a Consul General trying to cope with what are five new states, none of which have any records we are privy to and most of which don't know what they

want to do anyway. I said, God knows we are groping for an African policy. Soapy Williams is working hard as hell trying to figure out what to do. Everybody's trying to figure out what to do. It's an upheaval situation. I said, I'm sure if you have some ideas as to what we should do, they'd be delighted to have them. I'll be glad to report them back. We didn't get too much more once you get them asked to say something. I had Fulbright as a professor in law school and also went with him and Dillon to a bank meeting in New Delhi which was very interesting. Shortly after I went to work for Dillon, we went to ten different countries on that trip. Mrs. Fulbright, the Senator, Mr. Dillon and his wife and then various passengers en route, including Pat Robertson's father, the old Senator from Virginia at one time. It was very impressive because the two men were very congenial. As I say, they were close friends, they lived across the street from each other and their wives were congenial, very nice people. Everywhere we went here is this Democratic Under Secretary. I mean a Republican Under Secretary and the Democratic Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and every place they were giving the old one-two. Tunis, Spain, Greece, Turkey. It was beautiful. The last words he said when he got off the plane were, take care of Doug, he's one of the few good Republicans. Mrs. Dillon said, before we met the Fulbrights we didn't know Democrats were people. That kind of an atmosphere.

Q: The good old days of bipartisanship.

BELL: Fulbright was an interesting man. I remember he thought he was going to be Secretary of State or I think he hoped to be. But he wouldn't have been a good one I don't think. He hates administrative detail. He wants to play golf. A good philosopher, but not an administrative man at all. At any rate, by this time they were ready to let me go. And the question again was, where was I going? It had become clear that I had a chance at an Embassy some place. Galbraith by that time had been named Ambassador to India and he wanted me to go to India as his Deputy. I said I've been in Pakistan and I don't want to go to India. It's very important, he said. Much more important to be Deputy in India than to be an Ambassador in one of those little African countries. I said, that may be so but number one I don't want to be Ambassador in a little African country anyhow. I said, I know it's important in India but you don't pay any more for it than a DCM anywhere else. I think they might just well pay more, you know, in a big place like that. I do. DCM has a hell of a big responsibility in a large place. At any rate, he finally was persuaded I wasn't going to say yes. Then he said, well tell me, who's the next best guy in the Foreign Service? I said, that's a silly question. Number one, I'm not the best guy in the Foreign Service and number two, I wouldn't answer a question like that. It doesn't make any sense. But Bowles asked me if I was interested in going to Iran. I told him no. I said, I want to go some place close if I can. I got kids to go to college. I don't want to be somewhere it is going to cost me. I don't have anything but my pay. I don't want to be somewhere it's going to cost me a fortune for me to come home or for them to come out. I just can't afford it. I want to be somewhere close.

Also I was a little excited when I thought about Latin America because I thought for the first time we were going to have a policy in Latin America one could respect. So I indicated that I would like to go to Latin America and I looked around at what was available and Guatemala looked to me like a good choice. That looked like it was all set up. Bob Woodward saw me one day just before I was getting on a plane to go to some meeting and he said, well, that may be changed. I think you're going to go to Venezuela. So I met with him afterwards and said I really

prefer to go to Guatemala. Money was the reason. Venezuela was a very high-cost post. Maybe it was stupid, but at any rate I said I prefer to go to Guatemala. So they finally said okay. You can go to Guatemala but just one condition. We want you to drive.

Q: What?

BELL: They wanted to get some emphasis put on trying to complete the Interamerican Highway. The emergency project of World War II of which the link in Guatemala had never been completed. It had not been finished and so I was to drive over it to emphasis how important it was. I was perfectly willing to drive. I like to drive. It ought to be interesting and it was. So I went to Guatemala. I wouldn't say ideally equipped for it in retrospect, but interested and eager. I found myself welcomed at the frontier, much to my surprise, by the Mayor and some dignitaries from the town of Huehuetenango which was on the road thirty or forty miles ahead. They informed me they had been waiting for quite a while and no one had told me I was even going to be met much less by any foreign dignitaries. I was wearing an old red shirt and pants and I had a station wagon which had just come through about forty miles of very dusty country without any air conditioning. I had the back open and we were all very dirty. They said we've got people waiting there's a big reception. So we went and I had to make some remarks on the radio in the hall and on the radio in Spanish. My first Spanish speech.

Q: I recall you had some Spanish back in the 1930s. What had happened to your Spanish?

BELL: Well I never had great Spanish. I could read Spanish without any problem but my speaking was pretty limited. It was student Spanish what I had. I hadn't lived anywhere and spoken Spanish. My mother and father spoke Spanish. They used to do it when we were kids so we wouldn't know what they were talking about. Any rate, I did say something to the effect that I was at least the dirtiest Ambassador they had ever seen. Oozing dust, I felt like "Pigpen" in the comic where every time you touched yourself a big cloud of dirt would fall down.

Then we drove on into Guatemala and I met the DCM for the first time. It was interesting. Bob Corrigan was his name. He came over to talk after a few days and I had to talk to him about the AID Mission Director because the AID Mission Director wanted to leave and had to be replaced. He wanted to leave. Nobody was pushing him. He retired I believe. I was talking to Corrigan about it in the course of which he somehow got, I guess, I don't know whether he got the idea or it had been in his head all the time, as to whether I had plans to replacing him. Bob, I said, you don't know me, I don't know you. I start out with the assumption you know your business and your job. I haven't any reason to doubt that. I said, I have no plans to replace you. I hope I never will. It's up to you, lets work together. He said, fine. Very helpful.

Q: What was the main focus of US policy towards Guatemala at that time? What were we trying to do there?

BELL: Well, I guess you could say the whole focus of US policy in Guatemala was the Alliance for Progress. Emphasis on the Alliance for Progress. If you leave out the Alliance for Progress and the issues that grew from that, there weren't really any issues between the United States and Guatemala. Guatemala's relationship with the United States has always been a pretty friendly

one. The Guatemalans, who are as you know just south of Mexico, look at Mexico as the colossus of the north and the United States as a protector of people who lie south of the colossus of the north, or as potential protector. Their major imports are from the United States. The major exports are to the United States. I mean to more than anywhere else. Contrary to a large part of Latin America, most of their professionals went to the United States for training rather than to Europe. You don't find French restaurants in Guatemala like you do in Peru. Friendly to the United States by and large, despite all the stuff you read about United Fruit Company and whatnot. And despite the 1954 CIA invented coup d'etat. Basically friendly. The US had a policy of we want the Alliance to succeed. You know we had this declaration of Punta del Este when all the nations except Cuba subscribed to this notion of economic and social progress, justice and whatnot and better tax systems and all sorts of reforms that are going to bring new health into the system.

One might think from reading that that there was a unity of a lot of really revolutionary people in Latin America. When I think the fact is that most of the people signing that had no intention of engaging in all of those reforms at all. They are happy for others to engage in those reforms but not me so to speak. Some at least face-saving gestures of adherence were necessary if they were going to get this dream wealth from the United States, aid, money. We had put up, we got it in the Eisenhower Administration an aid bill, a special bill, we got $400 million for earthquake relief in Chile and $100 million for a token of United States willingness to join with Latin America if they would bring out a coordinated development program.

Q: Was that influenced by the Marshall Plan Approach?

BELL: Yes, to some extent. The idea was at least there was an assumption there of some sophistication which would be justified to some extent in some of the countries but not in all of them by any means. Everybody talks about Latin America like it's one country which it isn't. Any more than Africa is the same. The Guatemalan's wanted to get aid. The President of Guatemala who had been elected in a "honest election" a man named Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, he and the Minister of Defense at the time I presented by credentials wanted to know when they were going to get some jets, aircraft. The President made claim sometime afterward that he felt that they weren't getting as much aid as they had a right to expect as partners in the Alliance for Progress. It was sort of pointed out to him that Guatemala had yet to show in a practical way what they were doing to achieve the goals of the Alliance for Progress within Guatemala's own borders. Like reforming the income tax. He said, well we're going to get one through. They eventually got a tax bill through which was a joke as much as anything.

Then the President got the idea well maybe we were down on them because we hadn't sent them a Peace Corps. They wondered why they didn't have a Peace Corps. I said, Mr. President we sent something to the Foreign Office three or four months ago saying the opportunity existed but we've never had anything back. Well, you'll get something back. He didn't care what the Peace Corps did. He wanted to be sure that he was doing everything he could to get some more money. No suggestion in his mind, no remote idea in his mind of effecting any basic reforms in the society and I don't think anybody else's much either.

Q: Hadn't Guatemala helped us in the Bay of Pigs and prior to the Bay of Pigs? Was there some reward he expected for that?

BELL: Yes. Well, there may have been. As far as I say, the fellow who, well it was a man named Roberto Alejos who was a businessman in Guatemala and one would say he was a successful crooked used-car dealer who parlayed himself into the position of some wealth including owning a fairly large finca, a plantation, farm, hacienda, whatever you want to call it. A finca in Guatemala is like a 1850 Mississippi plantation with the social structure pretty similar. He made his finca available to the CIA representative in Guatemala in order that it could be used as a place to train Cubans for the Bay of Pigs invasion. The story which broke in The New York Times and Ambassador Muccio read it in The New York Times to his consternation finding that the CIA man sitting just above him in the Embassy building had been engaged in all this activity without his knowledge all that time. Alejos was a good friends of Ydigoras and there was a certain hanky panky going on between them. I shouldn't say I can prove it but everyone thinks there was and I believe it. Ydigoras wanted Alejos to be his successor as President. Whether they expected a reward, they certainly thought of themselves as having done favors for the United States and Ydigoras was very plain spoken about that. He also was prepared to continue such cooperation.

They were glad to give us bases if we wanted some bases and go in and finish the job. They thought the only thing wrong with it was that we hadn't continued. That was their view about the Bay of Pigs. It wasn't that they condemned it. They condemned failing to go in and fight, abandoning the people. I always said that the Bay of Pigs was like the nursery rhyme "Mother may I go in to swim? Yes, as my darling daughter hang your clothes on a hickory limb! But don't go in the water." It was the policy we had that was stupid, dumb and stupid. Anyhow, they expected something but they were playing the game as far as we were concerned. They were going to go through the motions of showing what they thought we wanted them to do.

Guatemala is a very odd country, very odd country. It's not going to be brought fully into the 20th Century for many, many decades in my opinion. The basic thing about Guatemala that makes it different from I think any other Central American country (the one that's most like it is Peru except Peru's on a larger scale). The basic thing is that it has two cultures. It has what they call the indigenous culture, the Indian group, which is about 55% of the population and the Ladino or westernized group which is about 45% of the population. The Ladino culture has within it various levels of economic and social power ranging from almost none to quite a bit. Whereas the indigenous culture has no levels except bottom. They are all poor and they were only removed from legal slavery by about 60 years. The indigenous culture had existed since before the Spanish came. They accepted the Spanish culture and they accept the present day rule much in the way that there is a cellophane overlay over a map. It says this unit here and that one there but underneath the Indian structure is unmoved. He continues with his ancient traditions and his ancient ideas and he worships his ancient Gods. If necessary, right in the same church.

One of the great tourist places to go is in Chichicastenango at the Church of Santa Tomas where you have the witch doctors on the steps outside the church and the priest inside. You have on the hill the sacrificial alters which are both pagan and Crosses where they kill chickens and burn sugar and pray. They believe in multiple gods, a few more like Mary and Joseph and Jesus don't

matter and more. They have lain largely dormant in terms of activity, political activity of any kind and powerless to engage in anything much. Some thoughtful Guatemalans who puzzle about this are worried about what will happen if they ever get aroused. They are afraid to excite expectations because they are unable under their existing system to satisfy the expectations of the Ladino class. The Ladino class is essentially about twice as productive. You've got this big mass of people hanging like a millstone but you're afraid to do anything about it for fear. It's a mess. Largely managed for a very long time by if you have any trouble, knock 'em down, beat 'em up, shoot 'em, put 'em in jail. Don't give them any, civil rights is a joke. You don't have any civil rights if you're in the Ladino class. If you're an Indian, you don't have anything. You can tell one from another very easily because the Indian class, the indigenous, they wear the native clothes. They have plaids and costumes that if you are really skilled at it, you can tell what province they come from, much like you would a tartan in Scotland. The Ladino class wears western clothes. The government helps the poor people a great deal by having a monopoly on the production of azuardiente which they sell in convenient octavos, 1/8 of a fifth size. It's convenient because it's cheap enough that they can buy it and potent enough that it can get them drunk. It's a sort of government-induced drunkenness, I think. I suggested to it several times that they should stop that but they didn't pay any attention to it.

Q: What was the role of the American corporations during your Ambassadorship in Guatemala?

BELL: Well, the role of the American corporation in Guatemala is defined differently depending on the perspective of the person talking about it. If one tries to look at it as if you were from Mars, you can see that there is some validity to both points of view. From one point of view of the American entrepreneur's point of view, American corporations in Guatemala are epitomized by the American fruit company. The United Fruit Company being the biggest and for a long time perhaps the only large-scale American investment. From the point of view of the United Fruit Company, they came in and purchased land. Large quantities of land at fair prices which they proceeded to build plantations for growing bananas which necessitated not only clearing the land and preparing it for cultivation, but also preparing the roads to it, railroads to it and from it. Housing for employees, American and native, school systems, providing whatever there was in the way or urban facilities. We're talking about raw land being converted into plantations with housing and equipment for operating it. They bought large quantities of land on the Pacific coast as well as on the Atlantic coast because they were having a great deal of trouble with particular diseases that seemed to be prevalent on one and not the other.

They built the railroad in order to market their product from the mountains and from the hills and from where it was grown down to the sea where ships that they brought in, using facilities that they built, to America for sale of bananas. They provided, from their point of view, a large amount of employment, continuing employment as well as initial construction employment and the operation that paid reasonable share of taxes and paid wages to its employees which were at least as big and most of the time larger than they were earning from other enterprises in the society, okay.

From the Guatemalan point of view they would say, yes much of what you say is true, not all the Guatemalans but those who would object. What it amounts to is that the position of the railroad and these plantations has given you an undue political influence which enables you to get what

you need from our government. Bribery or whatever other means you may use and you aren't paying wages like what you would pay in the United States which, of course, they weren't, same thing. It makes a good target. It makes a good target to hit for anybody that wants to agitate about foreign investment. The people who profited the most, I mean profited in the big sense, from the investment, of course, are not among this group who are complaining. The people who are complaining are people who are claiming that even though United Fruit may have done better by them than Joe Zilch in Guatemala, they aren't being done very well by at all. They aren't making a hell of a lot of money. They are working for little wages and basically their labor is subsidizing cheap bananas for big profits or both for the fruit company. Most of this friction had taken place long ago. I mean it wasn't a matter of any great current problem when I was there. We weren't constantly having to go in or worry about the fruit company being attacked or the railroad being attacked. The railroad was perfectly willing at this point in time to be nationalized if they wanted to nationalize it. They didn't care. The people had come to the conclusion that the Peploma Power Company was owned by Americans too, Impresso Electrica. But Impresso Electrica had made an offer at any time they wanted to sell the company to the government and on time, no down payment. They only had three foreigners working in it anyhow. The electric company had a better record than the fruit company in terms of, you know, local operation.

Q: Did you work closely with the American corporation executives? The leftist historians today see that period as one in which the American Government and the American corporations went hand-in-glove.

BELL: I tell you the only time I had one occasion in the nearly four years I was there, one occasion to speak to the government on behalf of United Fruit. Just one time. That was regarding this: the fruit company had decided that where it found that they had a variety of banana plant that resisted disease and still grow on the Atlantic coast, so that they would not need all the land that they had on the Pacific coast, Pacific highlands. Which was better for them because it's closer on the Atlantic coast to the ships. You know, harbors you can use on the Pacific side. So they wanted to sell the holdings on the Pacific side. They offered them for sale to the Guatemalan government or to any Guatemalan who wanted to buy them. That was what they wanted to do. They were being attacked on this. The government was very troubled by this because the government read it as this means the fruit company is going to go out of Guatemala. They wanted a guarantee that they would not reduce the volume of exports, which they had no intention of doing anyway. They came to me and they said we absolutely want to guarantee this. We don't care. We want to get rid of the land. They're always complaining about we're holding all this land, give it to them. We're not saying sell it to Americans, we'll sell it to you.

So I went and talked to the government about that and they eventually said, okay. It was fascinating that their concern was that they might go. Not that they were there but that they might go. Ridiculous. It's just like the Guatemalans use Belize. You know, British Honduras own Belize now. Every time they have a problem domestically they can't deal with they start talking about the British and Belize and Belize Es Nuestro, Belize is ours. A fellow in the British Embassy there used to say the only answer is to say, Si Belize Es Nuestro, Yes, Belize is ours. And he did that very effectively. They haven't got a damn, not a person, not a penny's worth of claim to British Honduras, except under some archaic notion of where the Writ of a Captain

General in Guatemala ran as compared with the Captain General in Mexico City during the time of the Spanish Empire when neither one of them had anybody down there.

Q: What did you spend your main amount of time on in Guatemala?

BELL: The main amount of time in Guatemala was spent trying to get them to do something about the Alliance for Progress objectives. That was number one and then I spent a lot of time the first six months I was there trying to persuade various Guatemalans that I didn't want to be partners in some coup d'etat. Amazing to me that I think I'm the only man in Guatemala that wants it to be an independent country. Ask them what would they do if they were in power and none of them had any real idea. You know, its shove them out of the chair, let us get in so we can get the gravy for a while. This is in accordance with the standard tradition. You run for office, you get elected or you get in somehow, and then you start stealing. Everybody expects you to do that. As long as you don't steal too much. The opposition starts from day one saying they're stealing too much. Not that they're stealing, but that they're stealing too much. When the public becomes convinced that they're stealing too much, then you have a coup and you get your turn. The only thing approaching a revolution they had was in 1954. A real revolution, they still haven't had it. All the words are in the various historic constitution documents just like they are in many Latin states but as far as a real revolution, it hasn't occurred. Talking about coup d'etat is a sort of national pastime. It was fascinating to me. After coming from a place like Denmark where everybody's so sophisticated to Pakistan where they are so primitive, the notion of coup d'etat was sort of surprising.

Q: Well you had one didn't you in March of 1963?

BELL: Yes we did. It was very interesting too. The preface to that, there was supposed to be an election and the question was who was going to run, who was going to run for office. And there was a man named Jose Arevalo who had been President of Guatemala back in 1944 and whose protégée was Arbenz. Arbenz was a communist and he's the man that was overthrown in the coup of 1954 with US assistance. Arevalo had gone to either Chile or Argentina where he had been in exile from Guatemala for a long time which doesn't hurt your reputation in one of those little countries if you're a figure in Argentina or a big country, that's nice. It's such a small puddle. Arevalo was reputed to be going to run for President and that scared the military greatly. That scared the military greatly and it infuriated those who didn't want Arevalo. He was also a military man but not because of that he didn't like him he was a conservative, very conservative fellow. Whether Arevalo was ever going to run or not no one really knows.

I was put in a very awkward position there because a story was printed in the local paper Prensa Libre, a daily newspaper in the capital, to the effect that Arevalo and Theodore Moscoso had had a meeting in Mexico. Theodore Moscoso was then the head of the AID agency, a Puerto Rican who had achieved a certain fame as a liberal, great friend of Betancourt in Venezuela and whatnot. Not a bad fellow but very Latin. I went back to Washington on this and said, is this true because I understood our policy to be one which we were not in favor of Mr. Arevalo and could not imagine why we would be in favor of Mr. Arevalo. Another of his claims to fame was having written a book called "The Shark and the Sardines" which the United States was the shark and the Latinos were the sardines. He had every President from I think way back near to Grover

Cleveland to Kennedy personally involved in the march of Wall Street into Latin America. A real incredible work. I went back to Washington and said, did this meeting take place, what's the story here, what's happening, why is Ted Moscoso an AID official, involved in this anyhow? I got back a flat denial there had been any such meeting. I made a statement to that effect in Guatemala that this wasn't true. There had not been any such meeting. Without going any further than that. A long time later when I was getting ready to leave Guatemala as a matter of fact--at least two years later--the fellow who wrote that story came to my farewell party. He said he wanted to talk to me about something and I said, okay. We went to a side room as you do and he said I just want you to know that that story I wrote was true. He said I know it was true because I was there. But he said, I thought you were a friend of the country so I never wrote any more about it. It was fascinating to me. I still don't know what the facts were. I don't know whether Moscoso met with him or not but I believed Zarco and I don't believe Moscoso's denial. I think it was outrageous for him to be messing with the thing to start with. But he was apt to do things like that. Maybe not intentionally but at any rate.

So Arevalo was regarded by many people as a threat. Ydigoras thought boy I've really got this worked out. I can name my successor because the military won't stand for Arevalo. They'll have to go with my man. My man Roberto Alejos. Well the military looked at Alejos with disgust. They regarded him as a low form of life. As one Guatemalan said to me, he's asking us to choose between a communist and a crook. I said, why don't you run a candidate of your own? It's a free country isn't it? You can run a candidate. Back some other person if you don't like the ones that are running. Well there was a group there of Guatemalan businessmen who had begun to get interested in what was happening and who were trying to bring some pressure to bear on the government to change some of the ways it did things. I talked with some of them. They talked with me, I guess, down in Antigua one day.

One of the great curses of the country or of many Latin American countries is that the best educated, most powerful people in the country (not necessarily the most moral) but they are like any other group, there are good ones and bad ones), regard politics as "too dirty" to engage in. So the history has been that you don't get into that stuff. You simply pay whoever's milking you enough to keep him quiet and to let business go on. A form of taxation if you like. And if it gets to be too much then you find somebody else and get A thrown out and let B run it. But you don't get involved in government. I said to all these people, you take more interest in your goddamn horses and cows than you take in your country. I said, you wouldn't dream of doing that with your cows. One of these guys had 12,000 cows (Santa Gertudius) and he flew his own plane everywhere. If you want to clean the government up, you've got to participate. You can't do it any other way. Now I'm working on getting them to become responsible citizens, not very fruitfully, strike a few blows here or there.

Well the military (this is retrospective at this point) I think simply felt too inexperienced in running an election campaign to feel any confidence that they could win. Whereas they were very confident they could take power. Some of them really didn't want to have a military government. They just wanted to have a government that wasn't crooked or communist. Among that latter group was a fellow named Peralta, Minister of Defense Colonel Peralta, who eventually led the coup. They decided on taking power before the election which was <u>not</u> done in consultation with us, although I would say it was clear enough that the United States

Government was not supporting Arevalo. And it was fascinating. The W-ash-in-gton -Post on the morning after the coup had headlines saying "Armored Tanks Provided by American Military Assistance Thundered Down the Aveneda de la Reforma Last Night, crashed into the Presidential Palace, a coup d'etat clearly the result of American military aid." The storyline. Written by a guy who subsequently won a Pulitzer Prize, not for that article but for Latin American reporting! He'd never been in Guatemala. He wasn't in Guatemala.

Part of the problem for America, I think, not confined to Guatemala but an illustrative example, is nobody no American press or news agency asked anybody in Guatemala. The New York Times was suppose to cover more than anybody else, had a fellow named Paul Kennedy stationed in Mexico City who was assigned to cover Mexico to Panama. Obviously, Mexico was the important country so he spent most of his time there. Two weeks a year he would make the tour. Call on the Embassy and call on his local contacts, all of whom were locals, natives. At one point in time (this was before but still illustrates the same point) they were having some trouble in Guatemala with student riots and overreaction on the part of the government. And it was sufficiently exciting, Time and Newsweek and US News and World Report each had an article on Guatemala in the same week. I read them all three and I sent a message to Washington saying I had read all three and none of them seemed to describe the country I was in. Not a one. They were all written from the bias of whatever perspective they had to start with about a country they knew nothing about. Ignorance, ignorance.

Anyhow, what happened that night the night of the coup The Washington Post story suggested a violent military conflict. What happened was that two officers, Colonel grade, got in a Chevrolet car about 10 O'clock in the evening, they drove to the Casa Crema, the President's residence, and asked to see the President and he received them. They said, Mr. President you're through. What do you mean? You're finished. Your term is over. So he said well, we'll see about that. So he picks up the phone and calls for the Commandante of the Guardia del Norte which was right smack across the street as close as that house. The Commandante of the Guardia del Norte says, that's right Mr. President, you're through. Then he telephones the garrison at Mariscal de Zawala a little out of town about four miles. Same thing. Then he calls the Air Force. The Air Force says the same thing. Well he knew he was finished. They were all agreed. He says, okay. No shots fired. Then these two guys leave him there. They're not worried. Where's he going to go? They come to my house and they say the President is finished, will you let him come into Miami? Will you receive him in Miami? I said as far as we are concerned he's the President. We're not party to your activities. Hell, of course we're getting on the horn to Washington, the telephones' happening, sending urgent messages. The next morning about 8 o'clock Ed Martin was on the phone, I was on the phone, we're on the phone talking about this and they come and tell me, there he goes. He's on a Guatemalan plane being flown to General Somoza in Nicaragua. Where he remained for a while and then he moved to Costa Rica or some place. He eventually came back to Guatemala many years later. But nobody was shot. No shots fired at any time. What are the facts?

Subsequently, it was disclosed in an article written by a woman named Georgie Geyer, who writes for the Chicago papers, that this coup was the result of a plan that was gotten up in the White House (I'm not kidding) by Kennedy and Dick Helms and Ed Martin and I. And that I was the agent for having it executed. My picture was put in a magazine in Guatemala. An agent of the

CIA, whatnot, after I had gone. What was very interesting about it was that those people, those four people, were in a meeting in the White House. Kennedy, Martin, Dick Helms and I did meet in the White House. We did not meet to discuss the overthrow of the Guatemalan government. What we met to discuss was the forthcoming trip of President Kennedy to Central America. The idea for the trip had originated with President Ydigoras, actually, who when Ed Martin came (Ed Martin was then Assistant Secretary for Latin America). He had come down to Guatemala and I had taken him to see the President and the President sprung this idea on him why doesn't President Kennedy come down. We know that he can't go every place so all the Central American Presidents will meet in one place with him. Here if you like or anywhere else. Ed was taken with the suggestion. It seemed like an interesting idea. The President had agreed. It had been agreed there would be such a meeting. They finally decided Costa Rica was a better place to meet than anywhere else, you know, no controversies in Costa Rica. Like now, more civilized than the rest. I had gone to Washington and the reason I was meeting with the President was he was supposed to be briefed on what to expect from the Presidents when he met with them. Because when he met with them in Costa Rica he was going to meet with them as a group then he was going to meet with each one individually afterward all in the same place. He wanted to know what they were going to bring up? In that briefing there was certain discussion of the election, you know, and the problems of the election. There was no decision to overthrow anyone at all. I tried to think how in God's name they ever got hold of the fact for the meeting because I'm certain Ed Martin (and I can't believe Dick Helms would and I'm sure Kennedy wouldn't have and I knew I had never discussed it with anybody. I kept wondering whether or not it was Moscoso. Now that's a totally unfounded suspicion but I kept wondering just the same whether he had somehow knew there was a meeting. He could have known there was a meeting, it's possible.

Q: Did the Kennedy trip ever take place?

BELL: Oh yes. Very successful.

Q: When?

BELL: In mid-1963. It was terrific actually. He came to Costa Rica. Costa Rica, San Jose's a nice town and there was a big open park area near where the Embassy residence was and it was packed with students, packed with students. Just jam-packed. There must have been 10,000-15,000 out there. You know, students in Latin America, you never know what the hell they are going to do but Kennedy with that talent he had for disarming people, he near drove his secret service guys totally nuts. He just walked right out into the middle of the crowd and started shaking hands, talking to them. They just ate it up. We said, he could be elected President of Costa Rica today. No question about it. He got a terrific bang out of it. He really felt good. That's the last time I ever saw him. He really enjoyed that day I tell you. It was a big success, the meeting, you know politically wise. Public relations is what it amounted to. There wasn't any great pact signed. No summit meeting accomplishments.

Continuation of interview: July 19, 1988

Q: Ambassador Bell, to finish up with your tour as Ambassador in Guatemala, during those years were there any interagency rivalries to speak of?

BELL: Well there was a ongoing competition for intelligence reporting which was sometimes irritating and sometimes amusing. The military had originally the Army Attaché, the Navy Attaché and the Air Attaché and then later they had the Defense Attaché which was supposed to foster integrating the military components, but actually simply added one more customer in Washington. And then they had the Military Assistance Advisory Group which reported to the Commanding General of Southern Command in Panama. The Commanding General in Panama was no more interested in being scooped by G2 in Washington or the Air or Navy or CIA than they were interested in being scooped by each other. Of course you had the CIA to report intelligence and you had the State Department reporting various degrees of intelligence. It took a lot of effort to try to force them into what I would call all addressees forms of communication. So that they would all receive this material simultaneously and, hopefully, with some degree of coherence and some similarity of emphasis. But never entirely successful. What the CIA people reported of course you never really knew for sure.

Before I went to Guatemala there had been some discussion of this because Mr. Muccio who was my predecessor in Guatemala had been the lucky Ambassador who discovered through The New York Times that we were training in Guatemala through the CIA people to invade Cuba and the operation was being run by his supposed subordinate on the floor above him in the Embassy building, a CIA man. He got a call from Mr. Herter wanting to know what was happening. That's how he found out about it. Well they had a hurrah in Washington. I was told, before I left that that had all been straightened out and the CIA had promised to be good and not do that anymore without the Ambassador knowing. Actually, the CIA had been blamed improperly in my opinion. The person who should have been blamed was the Assistant Secretary of State Tom Mann who was on a committee that decided whether or not you would conduct these kinds of operations and who had participated in the decision to conduct such an operation in Guatemala and had participated in the decision that the Ambassador did not need to know that which I think was unforgivable.

Whether that happened to me or not, I still don't know. I don't know of any instance of it happening. The Station Chief there was a very agreeable person who seemed to cooperate, professed to cooperate. As far as I know, did cooperate with me.

We had the normal problems of some friction between the Economic Section and the AID Mission but we were able to get that hauled away pretty well because of I'd had enough experience with that on both sides to be able to instinctively know what was what. I had more trouble, I guess, with the AID regional office in Guatemala than any other Government agency. The so-called ROCAP, Regional Office Central America Panama. An office which in many ways I thought I had suggested in earlier conversations with Ted Moscoso who was then running the Latin American part of AID. But the fellow who was in charge of it, a man named Henry Duflon had been Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower or something, political appointee. Duflon was very aggressive and he was determined to spend as much money as he could in Central America, theoretically promoting Central American economic integration, but in my

opinion frequently just wasting money. So we had some friction. They were headquartered in Guatemala and it wasn't too easy.

Q: How would you evaluate your staff over those three years?

BELL: I think I had a good staff. I was very pleased with most of them. Thinking back on it, the fellow who was my Deputy Chief of Mission when I arrived, Bob Corrigan, went on to be an Ambassador in Africa. His successor, Peter Vaky went on to be Ambassador I think to three countries, Columbia, Venezuela, and he worked for Kissinger and he and Kissinger fell out. He became a Diplomat in Residence for a while. Then Frank McNeil who also turned out to be a maverick, was a junior officer in the Political Section when I was there. He was the Ambassador to Costa Rica before he and Elliott Abrams fell out which I think is to his credit. Jack Binns who was a junior officer trainee there later became Ambassador to Honduras. Marvin Weisman who was an AID Mission Chief during the latter part of my stay there went on to be Ambassador to Columbia. So we had about five or six guys who went on to at least be given positions of trust. I thought most of them were pretty good.

This isn't the place where they send everybody who's the best officer they can find, but we didn't have anybody I thought was terrible. They certainly all were willing to do their best near as I could tell. I thought the military were spotty. Some of them I thought were very good. Some were terrible. The original Army Attaché was a dead loss but he left and we got a good one. The Air Attachés were both good. We had a funny assignment. They were Air Attachés for Central America but they always lived in Guatemala for some reason.

Q: Do you feel you had influence in Washington on debates, not just on policy questions but in terms of your reporting having an impact in Washington?

BELL: Some. It's hard to tell, in the first place you have to think about it in perspective. Guatemala was a small, not a particularly important country. We had no real issues with them at the time. The major problem in Guatemalan international affairs was a self-created problem of Belize to which they from time-to-time laid claim. Usually like the Indians and Pakistanis over Kashmir as a means of diverting attention from internal problems they weren't dealing with. They went to some length, I became convinced after a time that there was a possibility of maybe exercising good offices or arbitrating this problem away between the British and the Guatemalans. And that idea was not received with any kindness in Washington. I was told several times by various people sending me articles they had written or new messages that this had been thought of before and "we" didn't want to be involved in it. And yet my efforts pushed them hard enough that they eventually did after I left appoint somebody to try to serve as a mediator who didn't succeed. I always thought I could have succeeded if they would have let me, but they didn't. Maybe I wouldn't have anyhow.

I did have some luck in policy decision making, but it was more fortuitous than anything else. During the time I was there, the President had sent Maxwell Taylor on his mission out to Vietnam to, you know, look at what was going on. And one of the things they came back with was the idea that you had to have some kind of civic action programs or some kind of plans for anticipating difficulties and working to prevent them. I was very, very surprised one day to

receive a long telegram saying that Guatemala had been placed, I think the words were, within the cognizance of the "special group" we were to come up with an "internal defense plan" and well, it sounded a bit silly because we had so small a threat at this particular point in time. The guerrilla threat in Guatemala seemed to me not very significant. Most people thought maybe there were 100-150 fellows running around. Not that there weren't problems if they could agitate them, but they really weren't a significant force. My initial inclination was to go back to Washington and say, what nonsense.

I figured that wouldn't do much good and besides if you looked at it right it was an opportunity. So I figured here's an opportunity for us to say what we think our policy toward Guatemala really ought to be since nobody in Washington was really telling us much about it. Other than: sit there. So we went back with an internal defense plan which was mostly about economic aid and trying to get some of the military to work on civic action projects rather than run around. We began to develop a theory which I have sense expanded somewhat: the fact is that the major problem with the military in most under-developed countries is lack of mission. Here was Guatemala threatened by absolutely nobody and there is a military which is the almost only avenue to upward mobility. If you aren't born in the right circles the only chance you have is through the military pretty much. People going through it and becoming officers and then finding themselves sort of nonessential. Well you want to do something. It's like your appointed committee which will get a purpose for itself whether it's rational or not. Anyhow I got to go to Washington and present this to the special group with Harriman and you know the whole batch and they thought it was a good plan. It sounded good I guess because it was doing something. So we started on that.

So they did listen to that. They listened to me another time which was interesting and I'll tell you this because it's got a little question in my mind about it ever since. Pan American Airways had done something. They had picked up a passenger in Guatemala who was supposed to be going to I can't remember whether it was Costa Rica or El Salvador, at any rate for some reason they landed in Nicaragua where the passenger was picked up by the Somoza police. He was a wanted man in Nicaragua. Political thing. And they wouldn't let him go. And Pan American, let's see, Guatemala sued Pan American and it went thought the courts through all kinds of due process for years and they finally got a judgement against Pan American for a lot of money. They were going to hold their plane until they paid it. And I got a long telegram saying how I should go in and tell them nonsense, let that plane go. In other words, to hell with the law it's Pan American. I wrote back a fairly sharp message to the Secretary saying I'm not going to do that. It's absolutely contrary to our interests. It's absolutely contrary to what's right and I simply will not do it. I never got an answer. Never got a response. It was just like I hadn't sent it. We didn't do anything.

I was in Washington I guess some months later on consultation and I going down the hall I ran into Len Meeker who was then the Legal Adviser. He stopped me and he said, you know your telegram to was absolutely right. I said, what telegram the Legal Adviser's office? He said, the one about Pan American. I said, really how did you get it? He said, the Secretary appointed a committee to look into it and I was the chairman. We decided you were right and so told him. I said, well it's fascinating. Nobody ever told me. I have always thought that was held up somewhere in ARA, which wasn't about to give me the satisfaction of getting away with it and acknowledging that I could say no. But I was quite serious about it. I would have resigned. I

mean I think you are some places where you can say well it's a matter of judgement as to whether you do it this way or that way and you can be overruled and you do it. But to my notion, this was a matter of principle. It sounds stuffy but I got away with it anyway.

Q: What about the Alliance for Progress. In your judgement was that a big success?

BELL: Well, no it wasn't a big success. It had a passing maybe more than passing beneficial effect in having been initiated and pursued for a while. I think I was as perhaps as naive as anybody else about it. I had higher hopes for what would come of it than ever came of it and confess to disappointment in that regard. But I thought the Alliance for Progress was significant in the political sense of for the first time saying in a clear and unequivocal fashion that the United States is abandoning its traditional policy of "evolution not revolution". Because God knows revolution is needed in a lot of those places. And to say evolution not revolution simply means the same old situation as far as the people in the country are concerned. But it wasn't all that revolutionary and I don't think the motivation was quite as clear as mine--a belief in the need to improve the rights of people. The motivation, I think, was much more one of feeling we've got to stop the spread of communist, or that was regarded as the better selling line. Well the Alliance for Progress was not necessarily going to stop this drive for communism. It's not going to stop the drive for change. It is a drive for change.

I remember we went to a ceremony in the Paten region of Guatemala with Colonel Peralta after his government had taken over and they had finished up the water works project that had been abandoned for about 15 years up there. We went up to the dedication ceremony--everything is dedicated through long speeches and songs in Guatemala. The mayor of the town's turn came to thank the government, which he did, and then he went on to give a shopping list of about 15 other projects they'd like to have and the more he went on, the more annoyed Colonel Peralta got. I was telling him the old story about what have you done for me lately and trying to maybe convince him that this was a sign of confidence in his government. That they would even have the nerve to suggest there were some things to be done, because most of the time they wouldn't have. It is a force for change. Not everybody was thinking about getting change. And, of course, the enthusiasm on our side dropped off. Johnson was not really interested in the Alliance. He was interested in improving relations with Mexico which he understood pretty well. Nixon had a plan for Latin America which sort of disappeared in thin air. He sent Rockefeller off on a mission. The first thing Rockefeller did was stop in Haiti and embrace Papa Doc Duvalier which got it off to a splendid start! But the report they filed <u>was</u> an excellent report and it warned that the whole place was going up in flames if something isn't done which, of course, Nixon ignored. In fact, he tried to keep it classified. Then his big change was to say we'll recommend that you'll have an Under Secretary for Latin American for Affairs instead of an Assistant Secretary. And we'll change the name of it some way. I've forgotten the words. But total cosmetics.

Then, of course, many of the Latins (like in Guatemala) hadn't really subscribed to this thing as endorsing revolution but rather subscribed to it as a means of getting some additional resources. So, you know, it was a mixed bag. But the objectives it sought to address are still the problems. They are still the problems that plague them all over the damn continent and unless they are addressed, there's never going to be such a thing as peace, peaceful existence there.

Q: The critics of our Latin American policy over the years say we end up embracing these two-bit, tin-horn dictators in country after country. Do we and why?

BELL: Well I think we are so scared, we are so scared of violent change that we endorse anybody that has the power to maintain apparent calm. And that normally will turn out to be a military dictator. Why we're so frightened of any kind of experiment I don't know. The only country in Latin America which has succeeded, and it's about to collapse, in an experimental approach is Mexico. They adopted a one-party political system which worked pretty well for about 50 years and is now on its last legs I think, but I've been saying that for 10 years. May not be. We're always trying to say the solution to their problems is to adopt an American-style constitution. Well they've had the words and most Latin American constitutions are parodies or paraphrases of the American constitution. Far more than the French. And yet it's meaningless. That isn't what the thing is all about.

There are so many things that have to be done before you can really have a sound democracy. There is a great book written by Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Sigmund called "The Democratic Experience" in which Reinhold Niebuhr in the first half of the book tries to outline what were the component parts leading to the development of what we think of as Western civilization and our values. In the second half of the book, Sigmund tries to see what are those conditions exist or can be created in third world countries and they are missing most of the places. You can't make the jump. They don't need to copy us. They need to develop their own system. Hell our system worked because it was pragmatic. There's not a goddamn thing democratic about the United States Senate. A vote in Nevada is worth 34 votes in California or something, seventeen, whatever the ratio is. But nobody is trying to change it because it works. It's pragmatic it works reasonably well. At least to the satisfaction of the public.

Q: It reminds me of something you said earlier about the AID programs and trying to transpose the Western European experience on the rest of the world.

BELL: You can't do it.

Q: The Alliance for Progress was just that wasn't it in a way?

BELL: To some degree, yes, to some degree. What you essentially had in large parts of Latin America had and still have to a very considerable extent is a kind of what I call a plantation type of economy not too different from Mississippi 1850. Large fincas or haciendas. Essentially self-supporting. Have their little enclaves of dependencies and not at all responsive to central government and where there is a caste system as clear as it can be, enforced. Now it's altering as you know as cities grow and areas around places like Rio and Buenos Aires and of course the whole economy has changed in Columbia for different reasons. But I don't imagine the rights of the workers have changed much. It used to amuse me, Congressmen get very enthused about programs like buying sugar because the money goes to the country instead of through AID. So you subsidize sugar. But what they don't seem to be able to understand is that the price the worker gets for working in the sugarcane isn't changed one goddamn bit by what price they sold the sugar for. Any more than if the coffee prices go up the coffee workers get more money. They don't get any more money they just get their same starvation wages. If you had your American

instincts, your American experience, if that was part of your cultural makeup, and you go down to any one of these countries to live you'd be a revolutionary in my opinion or else a dictator. I don't know.

Q: Was there anything else about Guatemala before we get into the STRIKECOM?

BELL: I guess not, I guess not. I think I've probably said enough about Guatemala.

JACK R. BINNS
Rotational Officer
Guatemala City (1963-1965)

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

BINNS: My first post was Guatemala from 1963 to 1965. In those days, when you entered the Foreign Service, your first two year tour was a "rotational" assignment and you spent, in theory, at least, six months in the main sections of an Embassy--political, economic, consular and administrative. That was my first assignment.

Q: What were our interests in Guatemala in the early 1960s?

BINNS: Our interests were largely economic and security. This was after Castro's coup and there was a perception, indeed a reality, that he was fermenting revolution in the Central America region. The US had major investments in Guatemala, at least relative to other Central American countries. We had a major economic assistance program--The Alliance for Progress. We saw the development of Guatemala as an inoculation against communism and it was therefore a priority.

Socially, Guatemala at that time was a panorama of extremes. There was a substantial wealthy community which controlled the economy, controlled to a large extent the political scene although it by no means had a monopoly on it. Then there was 90% of the population living at or below the poverty level. The majority of this group was ethnic Indians, many of whom did not speak Spanish. It was clearly a polarized society.

Q: How well did you and your Embassy colleagues feel that the Alliance was working?

BINNS: We felt it was a very positive effort and thought we were having quite a bit of success. That was certainly true from the microeconomic perspective and from the social development point of view. We built over two thousands schools over a relatively short period. I remember that we would always try to send someone from the AID Mission or the Embassy to dedicate these schools as they were completed. We had two or three people on weekends cutting ribbons.

Q: Did these buildings remain school buildings?

BINNS: I am sure they are still being used as schools. We build two thousands of them, mostly small ones with four to five classrooms largely in remote rural areas. They were built for primary education. The question was that beyond that level there was not much of an infrastructure, not much government investment nor much economic interest in pursuing more than just rudimentary education. The poor rural families, once a son reached the age of ten, put him to work because the child could contribute more to the family by working in the fields than by staying in school.

Q: While you were in Guatemala, how important did you consider American business interests?

BINNS: Except for the United Fruit Company, American business was not particularly influential. Even the United Fruit Company's star was waning at this time. Because if American anti-trust legislation, the Company had been forced out of the railroad business--at one time it had owned the only railroad in Guatemala. It was forced to sell it because of American law. The same law broke the Company's monopoly on sea-borne transport in Guatemala. Until the early 50s, United Fruit owned the only deep water port in Guatemala. There was no road linking the port to Guatemala City and other major population centers of the country. There was only the railroad. So United Fruit controlled the port, the railroads as well as large banana plantations which was the basis for one of the principal export products of the country. It had a lot of power.

Q: Your Ambassador was Jack Bell, I believe.

BINNS: That's right. I was most impressed by him. I thought he was extremely intelligent man; one who did a superb job as Ambassador from my point of view as a newcomer to the Service. His major interest is economic development. I remember most vividly that during my second year, while I was probably working in the administrative section, I was pulled out of the section to study what progress the Alliance for Progress had made. So an AID junior officer and myself were given the task of designing indices which would allow us to objectively measure the progress that was being made in meeting then specific goals of the Alliance. The Treat of Punta Del Este set up ten specific goals for the Alliance. One for example, which was easy to measure, was a sustained growth rate of two and half percent per annum above the population growth. There were others which for the most part did not lend themselves to quantitative measurement. So we had to device other indices. For example, for the eradication of literacy, it could only be done through a thorough census, which was beyond the capacity of Guatemala to conduct. We used instead the number of schools built, the number of children attending, the number of people attending adult education, the amount of investment the country was making in education from its own resources, the number of teachers being trained and so forth. There were a long series of measurements which while not addressing the issue directly, could provide a feel for where the program had been, where it was currently and how far it might have to go to meet the objectives. We spend several months doing this. It became clear that we were making more progress in some areas than others, but there was a general feeling that progress was being made across the board. In no case, to the best of my recollection, were there any objectives that were achievable in a ten year period.

Q: The Castro appeal was very strong at this time. Did we do anything to counter it?

BINNS: We were providing military assistance to the Guatemalan Armed Forces. We had a "Public Safety Program" through the AID mission which was intended to train the police. We were, as I mentioned, trying to inoculate the country against Castro's siren song by improving the lives of the Guatemalan citizens, especially for those at the lower end of the income scale. These were all activities to counter Castro. Not all were of course being conducted solely for that threat, but they served that purpose as well.

If you know Guatemala, its history is strewn with government over-throw attempts, usually by the military. Shortly after my arrival, the existing democratic-ostensibly democratic-government under President , was over-thrown by the military. It stayed in power throughout my tour, but shortly after my departure, conducted elections which were free and open in which the opposition party won. The new President was allowed to take office and served his full term.

DOROTHY DILLON
Cultural Attaché / Deputy Public Affairs Officer, USIA
Guatemala City (1963-1966)

A New Yorker, Dr. Dillon was educated at Hunter College and Columbia University. After teaching at Sweet Briar College and Rutgers University, she joined the State Department, working in INR dealing with Latin American Affairs. Transferring to newly created USIA in 1958 as Deputy Chief for Propaganda Intelligence, she was subsequently posted to Guatemala and later to the Philippines as Cultural Affairs Officer. Other assignments include Assistant Director for Latin America, Fellow at Brookings Institute and Diplomat in Residence at American University. Ms. Dillon was interviewed by Allan Hanson in 1988.

Q: Would you tell us a little bit about your first assignment, what Guatemala was like in those days, and what was the interest of the US in Guatemala at that time?

DILLON: Guatemala was a fascinating place. Ironically, it had been the country that I was supposed to go to in 1948 when I had been offered the Foreign Service reserve appointment by the Department of State, which didn't materialize because of budget problems.

In the meantime, I had visited the country on official business, and I was delighted to go back. It was, of course, an interesting country, because in 1954 there had been the famous overthrow of the Arbenz Government, which was considered by the United States Government to be Communist infiltrated. That is to say, there were Communists in various important positions in the government.

As a result of that overthrow, there was a rather strange situation in Guatemala, even nine years later in 1963, because there was still a considerable polarization in the society between those

who were considered to be pro-Castillo Armas, who was the colonel who overthrew Arbenz and eventually became president, and those who were not with Castillo Armas. Many people, as a result, had curious things in their security files to the effect that they were pro-Communist, just because they were not pro-Castillo Armas. Indeed, one or two people on the USIS staff, that is, Guatemalans on the staff, even had problems at the time of the overthrow of Arbenz, not because they were pro-Communist--they were anything but, in fact they were very anti-Communist--but because they were not pro-Castillo.

One of the things that I found very strange was that although the US Government had decided after the overthrow of Arbenz it would try to help the Guatemalans build up democratic institutions in the country, including democratic labor unions, in the nine years between 1954 and 1963, not one labor union leader in Guatemala had been sent to the United States on an official grant. So I immediately talked to our labor attaché and said that I would like to set aside each year at least two slots for labor leaders.

Q: On the international visitors program?

DILLON: That's right. I asked him to come up with some suggestions, and then we interviewed these people and eventually chose two leaders to come to the university under the international visitor program. As I recall, I continued to do that during my term there, my three years. I felt that that particular segment of society had been very much neglected so far as our official program was concerned.

DILLON: Yes.

Q: That Institute, 25 years later, is going strong.

DILLON: Very much so, yes.

Q: What was it like in those days?

DILLON: When I arrived in Guatemala, some of my American colleagues who were taking me around to introduce me to people, said, "Now you must come over and see the IGA." I didn't quite know what the IGA was first, and then I realized they were talking about the binational center, the Instituto Guatemalteco-Americano.

At that time, the binational center was in an old rather run-down former hotel in the center of the city, not too far from the USIS offices. I was a bit dismayed by the atmosphere of the place, but it had an active program, though it didn't have much money. Shortly after I arrived, a new American officer came down to be one of my assistant cultural affairs officers and to be the director of the binational center. I might say that at that time Guatemala had the largest cultural program in Central America. I had three assistant cultural affairs officers in addition to myself, so there were four Americans on the cultural side plus a fairly sizable Guatemalan staff.

Q: Would you say this was because of the political situation?

DILLON: That was because of the political situation, yes. Guatemala was and is also, of course, the largest country in the region in terms of population, so from that point of view it would generally have the largest program. But in this case, I would think it was the political situation. Also remember that in 1963, we were still in the heyday of the Alliance for Progress. President Kennedy had come to Costa Rica at that time; there was a great deal of excitement and interest in John F. Kennedy, and a great deal of sympathy for him. He was very well liked through Latin America.

Just as a diversion here, I might say, I was in Guatemala at the time that he was assassinated. Most of us in or out of the government generally remember what we were doing when that happened. I was home at lunch and I got a call from our information officer saying that the President had been shot in Texas. He didn't know at that point whether the President was dead or not, but at least he had been seriously wounded. I rushed back to the office, and by that time we had gotten the word that the President was dead. Everybody, of course, was in a state of total shock, but we all had to gear up for the work that had to be done in connection with it.

The Guatemalans started to pour into our office in USIA and pour into the embassy expressing their condolences and asking what had happened and could we explain it. It was simply a tremendous outpouring of sorrow and shock in the country. I didn't leave Guatemala till January of 1966, and between November of '63 and January 1966, I cannot tell you how many ceremonies and inaugurations I attended of schools, libraries, clubs, etc., all named in honor of John F. Kennedy.

Q: Is there anything else you'd like to say about Guatemala before we move on to Manila, where you went in 1966?

DILLON: In those days, since it was the height of the Alliance for Progress, we had a large program. We sent large numbers of university students on 30-day grants to the United States and also large numbers of university professors and people in other professions--journalists, other media leaders, artistic and cultural figures and political leaders. We also had a group of about ten American graduate students who came down each year under the Fulbright program and were at San Carlos University, and several American professors who came down under the Fulbright program to teach at the university. In addition to that, we had, of course, American professors and others coming down for short periods of time to participate in seminars, lectures, etc., etc.

I think one of the interesting things about my time in Guatemala was that in addition to not having sent any labor union leaders on grants before 1963, I also discovered that nobody at the embassy had any contact with the faculty of economics of the University of San Carlos, which is the national university. It was supposed to be one of the most anti-US and, some would say, pro-Communist faculties at the university. The faculty of economics, along with the faculty of law and the faculty of humanities, were considered the most anti-US

I decided that I would try to make contact at the faculty, and I was looking for a natural way of doing it. I received a notice from the Department of State in Washington that a professor of economics from the University of Texas was going to be traveling in the area and he would be available to come to Guatemala for a few days. I was delighted with this, and I immediately

wrote a letter to the dean of the faculty of economics saying that this professor was coming and would he be interested in having him talk to the faculty and to the students. Well, a couple of days later, the dean was in my office and said, "Si, con mucho gusto," they would be delighted to have him come.

As a result, we arranged for the professor to come. We set up a program for him in Guatemala City and also in Quazaltenango. The day after he arrived, I had a reception at my home for a group of the faculty members and student leaders to meet him before his lectures.

I didn't know the person who was coming; it was Calvin P. Blair, known as "Pat" Blair. I really was buying a pig in a poke, so to speak, because I didn't know just how simpatico he would be. It turned out he was perfectly marvelous. He came with practically no voice because he had been in Mexico for several days before arriving in Guatemala, and he had been up till 2:00 and 3:00 o'clock in the morning discussing all kinds of economic and other problems with university students. So I gave him a day to rest to try to get his voice back, and then immediately sent him off beginning with this social event in my home, and then going on to a series of lectures. It was just a marvelous beginning.

As a result of that, I developed a very close relationship with the faculty, sent a number of their professors and students on grants to the United States, and also got the economic officers in the embassy and the director of the AID mission involved with the faculty. As a result of that particular opening, we were able to develop good relations with that faculty. As a matter of fact, the dean asked for a Fulbright professor. Unfortunately, during my time, the Department was unable to find a suitable candidate who could speak Spanish.

Q: Who would spend a period of time.

DILLON: And would spend a semester or a year. In any case, the point was we had this opportunity. It was an example of how one cultural program can lead to a number of other developments later on.

Q: That seems to be two excellent examples of the efforts that USIS can make in connections and contacts.

DILLON: Exactly. And in fields, perhaps, which you might not think of, you know, as being close to USIS. But I just happened to have an interest in labor unions and one of my minor fields was economics, so therefore I was interested in the faculty of economics, and one thing led to another.

I think one other interesting thing to tell about Guatemala would be about one of the professors in the faculty of law who had been the dean of that faculty back in the middle '50s--oh, I guess either during or shortly after the time of the Arbenz overthrow. He and some other deans had been invited by the United States Government at that time to go on grants to the United States. It was part of the effort of the US Government to develop good relations with Guatemalans after the overthrow of Arbenz.

Unfortunately, he had a bad experience when he went to the interview for his visa in the consulate, and as a result, he simply refused to go and walked out in indignation. Now, I had known about this in Washington. When I came to Guatemala, my senior assistant cultural affairs director, Bob Rockweiler, had already been in the country for a year and a half, so he was instrumental, naturally, in introducing me to many of the people that I would have contact with in the future.

He came to me one day and said, "You know, there's someone I would like, if we could, give a grant--if we could work it out."

I said, "Who?"

And he said, "Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro, who is a member of the faculty of law."

I said, "Oh, I know about him." And I said, "Yes, I'd be very eager to give him a grant if we can persuade him to take it."

So given the fact that he had had this bad experience in the past, we had to approach him in a very delicate fashion. We asked a friend of his to approach him first and ask him if he would be interested in a 30-day grant to the United States, a leader grant, as it was known in those days. The friend came back to us and said yes, that Mendez Montenegro would be interested in discussing it.

Lic.Mendez came over to my office. In order to make sure that nothing would go wrong this time, I talked to our consul general and I said, "Look, send the papers over to my office and let me handle all the things over here." He was extremely cooperative and said yes.

So we managed to do that. We sent Lic Mendez on the grant. He was absolutely delighted with his experience, and he came back just raving about the United States and how wonderful the people were to him. I was invited to his home for dinner to meet other members of the family. His older brother was then the leader of one of the political parties, another brother was an attorney, another brother was an officer in the Guatemalan Army. One of the reasons that we were interested in Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro was because we were expecting him to become the next rector of the university, and that is what he had in mind.

As fate would have it, the brother, Mario, who was the leader of the Partido Revolucionario, the PR party, committed suicide, and Julio Cesar had to assume the leadership of the party. Not that he wanted to, because he had been out of politics since his student days in the 1940s, in the revolution of 1944 in Guatemala. But as you know, these parties are very personal, and so with his brother dead he had to step into the breach. He ran for the presidency in 1966 and won instead of becoming the rector of the university. [laughter] So we had done much better than we thought!

As a result, there were very good relations between the embassy and the president during his four years in office. I went down on an official visit to Guatemala in 1966 after his election but before he became president, and he and his wife invited me over to the house for tea. They were not

living in their own home because it was not secure enough. They were living in a friend's home surrounded by guards, German shepherd dogs, machine guns and what have you, because there was great fear that he might be assassinated before he took over the presidency. Well, he was not, fortunately, and he managed to survive his four years in office.

I came back in 1969 on another visit. I was then at Brookings Institution as a federal executive fellow. This was after I came back from the Philippines. I was engaged in some research on Latin America, and I was doing a lot of interviewing. When I came to Guatemala, one of the people I wanted to see, of course, was the president. I went over to see him and we had a talk for about an hour or so. He said the one thing he hoped to accomplish was to finish his term in office and turn his office over to a freely-elected president to succeed him. Then he was going to leave the country and go to Spain, which he did.

So that is the story of Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro. He was the last civilian president in Guatemala until the current president, Vinicio Cerezo Arebald took office in 1986. Lic. Mendez was back in Guatemala for President Cerezo's inauguration.

Q: They had a long period of military dictatorship.

DILLON: They had a period of military presidents for over 15 years.

RONALD F. VENEZIA
Peace Corps Volunteer
Guatelama (1965)

Junior Officer Trainee, USAID
Guatelama (1966-1968)

Loan Officer, Regional Office of Central America and Panama, USAID
Guatemala City (1977-1979)

Ronald F. Venezia was born in Tuxedo, New York on January 15, 1940. He received his BS in 1963 from Kent State University and his MPA from Harvard University in 1972. As part of USAID, he held positions in countries including Guatemala, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Honduras. Mr. Venezia was interviewed by W. Haven North on January 31, 1996.

VENEZIA: Well I joined the Peace Corps, I sent the letter probably in 1962, trained in the summer of '63 so this would be 1963. The first year, year and a half of Kennedy's administration. It shocked my parents. I called my mother who was an immigrant, and still does not write English. She's a very wise person, but she was sort of stunned that I would go to Guatemala but said if that's what you want to do fine, and gave me encouragement and so I was launched.

Q: *Why Guatemala, do you know?*

VENEZIA: We were going to work with Indian cooperatives, we were going to try and start an Indian cooperative, in the Indian Highlands and they were looking for a mix of skills, some of us had business skills, some of us had farm skills and so the group that was eventually formed, there was like 40 of us as I recall, had a mixture, business, education and a lot of practical farm application, bee keeping, things like that, sheep raising. It was an extraordinary group of individuals. I was always struck with the quality of the people I was in the Peace Corps with, and I always felt that it had deteriorated as the years went on but we were a very early group and I was impressed with the people that I was associated with, and we were the first group into the Indian Highlands, Guatemala, and we didn't have anything to judge our performance against and I will get into this later on, but 15 years later, I met an AID colleague (Mike Williams) for the first time and he said, "you're Ron Venezia" and I said yes, he said, "we finally meet," he had been like the fourth volunteer into my village, Comalapa, and people still talked about "Don Ron" and he was finally glad to meet the individual that he had heard so much about and it was easy if you're the first volunteer in a town, and I'm actually quite glad I was the first. It was wonderful, quite challenging and everything was new.

Q: *Well Ron, what did you actually do there?*

VENEZIA: We worked in co-ops, we were trained in co-ops, we went to New Mexico State University, in the middle of nowhere, it was the Summer time, it was right outside of Las Cruces, New Mexico. It was 1963, the university was on summer recess, it was hotter than blazes, we were sitting in dorms on the edge of the desert and the only real entertainment was watching the tarantulas come in at night. It was just so totally, totally, different than growing up in Spring Valley, New York, I can tell you that and we learned, I learned farm skills, how to castrate a pig, how to watch my health, basics of co-ops, animal husbandry. stuff like that. We went up to the Jickaria Apache Indian Reservation for two weeks, and the first week we were out shearing sheep and the second week we were out scaling rocks, what they call outward bound, and it was fascinating. It's hard to describe the change that was occurring to someone from the east coast. So we then were packed out to Guatemala.

Q: *You were learning language?*

VENEZIA: We were obviously involved in learning the Spanish language and then we arrived and I was assigned to Comalapa along with two other volunteers and in those days they assigned volunteers in groups and we were dropped off. We were literally piled in the back of the jeep, driven up a dirt road, Comalapa was about 16 kilometers off the Pan American Highway - a large village, maybe 8 to 10 thousand people - and we rode in the back of an open jeep down a dirt road and we were choking with dust and the three of us got out, were introduced to our counterpart and the jeep drove off, (laughter) and we were put into a little pension and I'll never forget my counterpart, Santiago Chex, a little Indian who looked at me and said, "Do you smoke?" and I had given up smoking two years before, and I said "you bet" (laughter) I started smoking again right there.

Q: *They knew you were coming I guess.*

VENEZIA: Oh, yes, it had been arranged and from there we moved into a house. We rented a house together, which caused a little consternation, since one of us was an American girl, a single, but we each had separate rooms and we rented a little pension and we turned it into a center and Bonnie ran her classes, I started a co-op and office there and Jim was doing work with farmers, teaching farmers how to do new techniques. The co-op was started in the house, the co-op exists today as a small credit cooperative. I created it as a credit cooperative with the idea that it should also be a multi-service cooperative and I think it is still that today and then we negotiated over a period of time a grant from AID. AID had a small projects fund and I went in and I talked to them and I heard about it and used that grant to build an office, we built a warehouse and we were negotiating a loan with the Government's agricultural credit agency and the coop bought a tractor together. Now I had never driven a tractor so I spent my time trying to keep one day ahead of the people I was teaching. I knew how to drive a car and so I taught 3 or 4 guys how to drive a tractor along with Jim Noble, my fellow volunteer. He was the farmer and we trained them and we began to plow and to work for farmers in the co-op, earn some money. The co-op will never be the world's most successful co-op, but as far as I know it's still there. Still providing services. The first five bucks in the co-op is mine and it's still there, I wonder what it's worth today and I think we had a period, a year in a half, where we had a good experience, it was a rewarding experience. It was not one of those things where you walk away disgusted, although in an article I wrote for the Peace Corps, which is in the Peace Corps literature, it's in the first book that they published, called the *Peace Corps Experience* and it was my end of tour report. I entitled it "Wasting Time Profitably" because I felt that it had taken us enormous time to accomplish very little, but it was published and the coop worked. That was my AID connection by the way.

Q: *I see.*

VENEZIA: With that small grant.

Q: *Getting the grant*.

VENEZIA: That's right and we were close enough to the city that we had occasional visitors. The AID Director, for example. (laughter) We were looking out of the garage of the pension and we looked up this cobblestone street and I saw this enormous Chrysler Imperial, with, you remember, these Chrysler's with the fins in the back and the red lights on top of the fins.

Q: *Right, right.*

Conducting a country-wide survey of Private Voluntary Organizations in Guatemala - 1965

VENEZIA: This thing was backing down the street towards my house and I said, my God what is this and it turns out it was the AID Director, Marvin Weissman, who had heard about us. We had some rabbits, he had a couple of kids, and he and his wife had been out for the day and they had driven up this dirt road in this enormous Chrysler, and were visiting us. We had a wonderful time and so I got to know the AID Director and several other people in AID since Comalapa was the town that had some local artists and so people would occasionally come by. So at the end of

my Peace Corps experience I said to myself what do I want to do. I applied to Stanford and was turned down. My academic history could only be described as checkered. So I went down to the AID mission. I walked into the mission, and the person I dealt with there was a Dr. Don MacCorquodale who was the Chief of Human Resources Division and he had worked with Indians and the training of Indians and I said "Look, you know I've got some skills, I speak the language, I've obviously spent a couple years in the countryside, do you guys need anything like this? "

It turns out at that particular moment, Guatemala was entering one of its periodic and tragic phases of violence it has faced since 1954 and the AID mission was terribly involved in their own version of -I think the easiest way to describe it now without overburdening it - what I would call counterinsurgency. It was the mid-60's, the threat of the Cubans was out there, the attitude was that Central America was the target. The question was what can we do to "keep" Guatemala, and make Guatemala democratic. So I was hired as a personal service contractor for six months - the first of three six month contracts. The first 6 month contract was to work with Dr. Richard Adams from the University of Texas on a study of "power" in the Country. I did some interpreting and worked on producing some maps of interest groups for a book. AID then asked me to do a complete survey of the PVOs (Private Voluntary Organizations) in the Country. No one knew what was out there. So I got in the car - I bought a car, I used my money from the Peace Corps, I also bought a brand new suit and a $90.00 pair of shoes and I swore I'd never live that kind of poverty again in my life. (laughter) - I said "I've done this now and I think it's time for me to do something else in life."

Q: *What year was this?*

VENEZIA: This would be 1965, and I then drove around the countryside to all the little villages, all over the country and, for what I was told was the first time in the history of AID, which may be a little stretch, I identified all of the American and in some cases non American PVOs operating in country. I put together the report and I identified something in the neighborhood of 6 ½ or 7 million dollars a year that was coming into the country through monetary contributions and salaries and whatever else, and I put together a report and the embassy was astonished. Pete Vaky who was the DCM at the time said this is incredible and I wouldn't want to quote Pete, but he said "I wonder how we can use these people". (laughter). That was not the objective, of course. The objective was to find out just exactly what kind of work and influence was going on out there. These included Maryknoll priests and CARE and a whole bunch of other private groups, a lot of protestant missionaries, but also a lot of private voluntary agencies.

Q: *Not funded by AID?*

VENEZIA: Some of them had PL 480, for example, but a lot of them were just simply representing interest groups in the United States. This was put into an AIRGRAM and circulated world-wide so I became known in that context. My six month contract was renewed and I was told to produce the same thing on cooperatives. I interviewed all agricultural cooperatives in the country and they sent me up to the University of Texas to work with Richard Adams to try and sort the data. That was very inconclusive. The third time around, which was to work with Don MacCorquodale, they said, we need some work, some help on keeping these rural programs

going, and about a month into that, Marvin Weissman said, "There's this program called the JOT (Junior Officer Trainee) Program in AID, are you interested?" I said yes. So he nominated me for the JOT Program. It's called the IDI Program now.

Joined USAID/Guatemala as a Junior Officer Trainee (JOT)

Q: *Junior Officer training.*

VENEZIA: Junior Officer trainee, and I was hired. I never took a test, I just was hired. I don't think that could happen today but back in 1966 AID was expanding. Vietnam was beginning to take off, people were being brought in by the dozens. I went up to Washington for six weeks of training, came back and started working in the mission in various divisions on a rotational basis. I worked for a while with Don, and I ended up in the program office for a rotation. Ed Marasciulo was the Deputy and he was very serious about my getting a broad exposure in the mission.

Q: *In Guatemala?*

VENEZIA: In Guatemala, City, Guatemala, and my business skills came to the fore a little bit. I discovered programming was fun and in those days programming AID funds was programming of AID funds. Nowadays you've got the earmarks and it's for this or that thumbtack. In those days you got a block of money and the program office sat and said well lets see, who shall get so much, basically according to the obligating documents that you had. One of the things I remember doing was taking about $35,000 and setting it aside, because I ended up as acting program officer, I went to help the assistant program officer. The program officer went on home leave, the assistant program officer became the program officer, I became the assistant program officer and then the assistant program officer was transferred to Costa Rica. So there was an interim where I became rather central to the mission from one day to the next almost. Before that, I had worked under division chiefs like Don MacCorquodale and Don Fiester, a good guy, who I eventually ended up working with again in ROCAP (Regional Office of Central America and Panama).

Q: *Don...*

VENEZIA: Fiester, he was the head of the Ag division. He was very suspicious of co-ops. Don was an old line Ag officer who worked with coffee many years and was quite suspicious because the co-ops in the country had been used politically in the past. Well, I felt very strongly given the survey I had done, that a government organized co-op system was doomed to failure, that it had to be helped from the bottom. I proposed AID support a co-op school run by co-ops in the Chimaltenango Department, which is where Comalapa, which was where my PC town was, just outside Guatemala City. There was a group of co-ops that agreed to come together into a small federation. Being program officer, I waited until the last 30 days of the fiscal year when all other needs had been met - and we had this $35,000 extra - and I convinced the AID mission to sign an agreement with them, to create a co-op school for themselves. That co-op school is in existence today in Chimaltenango. It is now financed by the Germans, because AID took a different tack a couple years after I left, and the school survived in spite of withdrawal of AID funding. But it's

there today, and I think it represents the interests of the member co-ops, I hope it does. One never knows in this business.

Q: *Guatemalan staff?*

VENEZIA: All Guatemalan staff - Odilio Blanco, I think is still there, the last time I was there was five, six years ago, he was still the director, white-haired now. But they're doing okay, not going to be the end of the world but they're...

Q: *There hasn't been an attempt by the government to interfere?*

VENEZIA: No, not that I am aware of, they kept it away from the government completely. Sanctioned by the government obviously. Another thing that we did turned out to be, in retrospect, pretty dangerous. There was a program with Loyola University in New Orleans where we selected Indian leaders and sent them up for what was referred to in those days as sensitivity training, leadership training, six weeks, pretty much a mind blowing exercise, where these people were taught to have confidence in themselves and do what they had to do. This was so successful that Don MacCorquodale proposed that we start an in-country training program like that, and I worked with him on it and with Landivar University in Guatemala City. We started a program for Indian leaders. Within a couple of years we probably trained - in 30 courses - some 500 or 600 Indian leaders, who went back to their towns and were trained in the skills of organization, of motivation, of change in political development. Many of these people just took off and organized their community. Many of these people are today dead because they ran into a wave of violence that occasionally occurs in that country. This would be then in, let's see I left in 1968 for the first time, I went back later on. Between 1968 and 1976, when I went back to work at ROCAP, the early 70's were a period of violence in the country. And then after 1976, which was when the earthquake happened, there was a period of brief flourishing and then the early 1980's violence erupted again. So, a lot of these leaders, who now became very exposed, obviously for taking a forward position in their communities, ended being targets of violence when the political structure simply said look we're not going to have any more of this among the Indians. The Indian situation in Guatemala is very, very sensitive.

Q: *Because of a military government?*

VENEZIA: Well, you have to say it's largely the military, but it's hard to separate the government and the military in Guatemala. It's basically a symbiotic relationship.

Q: *Do they perceive these people as some sort of threat?*

VENEZIA: Well yeah, they perceive them as organizing to change the status quo. A lot of these individuals started organizing some of the farm workers that were farm labor for the periodic harvesting on the south coast. The whole question of wages, the whole questions of living conditions in the countryside, especially in the Indian countryside, is quite conservative and change itself is seen as a threat. So it was an exciting time and it was a dangerous time. Indian highlands are not terribly *latifundista*, they are mostly broken up into very small parcels of land.

There was a strong desire for a cheap source of labor for the South Coast for the harvesting of the coffee, sugar or the cotton or whatever, so it was a major issue in Guatemala.

Well, organizing these people stepped on a lot of toes, even in the towns themselves, there were various interests and the government had a system of informants who got paid to report anybody who looked suspicious and, the abuses that could creep into a system like that whether someone owes you money or whether you had a dispute with them later on or of a family feud, who knows, but a lot of these people ended up dead.

Q: *Was this after you left too?*

VENEZIA: This was after I left. I had gone on to Costa Rica. I was supposed to stay in Guatemala. Dean Hinton, who has remained a friend for many, many years, was the AID mission director. He ended up being one of State's Career Ambassadors, who just retired. He was the AID director at the time and he was a rough old guy, but he was good to work with, he had a lot of integrity and he asked me to come back for a second tour in Guatemala, which I agreed to. At that time the population program was beginning to take off so they were going to establish a population office and they arranged to send me off to school. AID was going to train me for four months to be a population officer and then I was going to work at population for another tour. Several things happened. I was going at that time with a woman I married and am still married to after 27 years. Burgess and I had been going together. She was a widow. She had been married to a Guatemalan and he had died and she had 3 kids and she was running a small hosiery factory in the country. She had run that while he'd gone on to other business ventures. They had started it together. They'd met in Clemson, South Carolina, they came down and they started this hosiery factory. She ran the hosiery factory and he went on to do some other things, some of which went bankrupt. Well, not all, but some of which had gone bankrupt. Anyway she was running this factory with the three kids and we were getting along quite well and I decided, I was 28, you never know why you get married but it was a good reason I think. So I decided to get married and I felt very strange about staying in the country where she had a previous family, who I got along with very well. They were Christian Palestinians but I said to myself, something's going to have to give. I'm going to have to either join the family if I continue with AID in Guatemala or maybe go to a sock factory. And out of the blue, as much of what happens in life, the assistant program officer that I had worked for in Guatemala, who had gone on to Costa Rica to become the new program officer, called me and said would you like to become my assistant program officer and I said probably again within a minute and a half, yes.

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VENEZIA: People said that the LA bureau was a closed shop and it was not entirely true, but there was enough of it, enough of it that was close to being true, that the impression was not entirely wrong. I got a call from Larry Harrison, my old boss in Costa Rica, who had been in my car pool, he lived about a block and a half away from here in the district, and he was the head of the DP when I was in DR and he then was sent to Guatemala as the director of ROCAP and he was down there about three or four months and he called me. He said, I need a loan officer, would you like to come down and become a loan officer for ROCAP and that was a dream assignment. My wife was American but had deep roots are in Guatemala. My kids had grown up

in Guatemala and so we decided to go, although this time with one kid. One dog was dead, the maid was gone, but the ...

Q: *The piano?*

VENEZIA: The third piano, the piano was fine. But the prospect of going back to Guatemala was very exciting. So we went back. Left Washington. Went back to Guatemala after we were in Washington for four a half years and went back to Guatemala and I became the capital development officer, just as loans were closing the door and going out the window. Capital development officer for Central America, and we spent the next three years there. The country was in pretty rough shape. We arrived six months after a major earthquake. My village, by the way, had been destroyed. I went back to my village and the house where I lived for two years was just an open block. If I had lived in that house I'd be dead. It was an older wooden building with some adobe walls, but with these heavy tiles, and the roofs came crashing down, and I lost a lot of friends in that town. So we ended up in Guatemala again, closing a little bit of a circle and ...

Q: *February 5th, you were just talking about being assigned to ROCAP in Guatemala, completing the circle in the new role. What was your position?*

VENEZIA: Oh, it was capital loan officer, which was the head of the loan office for ROCAP, the Regional Office of Central America and Panama. Panama was not a member of the Central American common market. I went down and ROCAP had a loan portfolio with the Central American Bank and some private financiers like LAAD..

Q: *But let's back up a minute and say a little bit what was the purpose of ROCAP?*

VENEZIA: Ah, ROCAP. ROCAP was a very innovative and very imaginative initiative on the part of the U.S. Government as part of the Alliance for Progress in the mid 60's. The Central American economy in those days represented small economies in their separate parts. So the US Government made a tactical and I think probably a strategic decision that their only real hope lay in their cooperating among themselves, and in those days before the open borders days, we were prepared to allow them to build a customs union around Central America and increase trade among themselves and raise tariffs with everybody else. Which today is diametrically opposed to where we are, what we're proposing. But in those days it had made some sense and it certainly fit in with a lot of the philosophy that was being put forth around the world. Similar things were happening in Africa and it was very much fit it with the CEPAL philosophy coming out of Chile and it also fit in with the Alliance, which focused on government investment. So I think people said, these economies by themselves lack the ability to attract investment. If a U.S. investor was going to come in and wanted a larger market, well fine. So ROCAP was, I'm not sure what came first, but ROCAP was there basically to foment and put into effect a series of regional initiatives. Many of which are in place today. ROCAP was responsible for the creation of most of the regional institutions of Central American.

Q: *What institutions specifically?*

VENEZIA: Well, take your pick. Any sector, any economic sector. It started pretty much in infrastructure. They opened up the borders, they communicated with themselves and a lot of work had been done earlier on the highway system and the Pan-American Highway in World War II had joined these countries and so there was this strong effort made to integrate them physically and institutionally. A lot of work went in and a lot of money. There were investments in public administration. There was a strong attempt to modernize telecommunications in the regional sense and the regional institute for telecommunications was set up to use satellites. There's an interesting side story on that.

This was the beginning of the space age. So the efforts involved creating a Central American telecommunications network that would look ahead and depend upon satellite communication. Most of land lines ran up through Mexico on a micro wave basis and I think there was some cable. But clearly the wave of the future was space communication. Well since we were putting up most of the money, we sat on a gold mine. We had a large role to play in the design of the structure. Well somebody back in the early '60's made a sine-qua-non condition for our investments. If there were was going to be a satellite up-station, it had to be in a very secure place. So that particular person, unknown, and whoever he worked with, chose the most secure location in Central America in those days which was Nicaragua. So Nicaragua was chosen because of Somoza and the satellite uplink was established in Nicaragua. 20 years later when the Sandinista's came in they had a marvelous source of tapping every international phone call made in the whole Central American area. So it was one of those ironic decisions which was made but which did not stand the test of time.

Anyway, there were a whole series of institutions like that. There were a whole series of regional institutions which were created, kind of like Central American Ministries. There was an institute for standards and industrial development ICAETI. There was the Central American Bank for Economic Integration. There was a secretariat called SIECA. There were a whole series of institutions like this. There were institutions of agricultural cooperation where you joined all the ministries of agriculture in an organization. Ministers met once a year. The ministers of economy, finance and heads of the Central Banks all met. There was a clearing house that was established to have the Central American central banks be able to settle their debts and foreign exchange accounts, and there was Central American Health Organization. It went on and on and on and we financed a large part of the start up costs of these and provided technical assistance and there was a great surge of early growth behind an external tariff. Once they put up the tariff a company for example, a cannery, a food cannery could go into one of the countries set up shop and then find that they could sell in Central America behind a tariff wall, The theory was that they would have protection after so long and then that protection would be diminished and that of course was a pipe dream.

Q: *Did the U.S. Government go along with...*

VENEZIA: Oh, yes, all part of the key. The idea was to attract as much foreign investment as is possible. Any question of Central America exporting outside Central America would have been an extra benefit. It was not the object, the object was to create a strong internal market and service the Central American economies.

One of the interesting aspects of this which I had run into in Costa Rica earlier in my career, was a very innovative legal reform initiative: Bill Skidmore who was ROCAP regional lawyer for AID, made a correct and far sighted - and quite obvious observation - that if you're going to have a central market, a common market that was business oriented and made any sense, you had to have the legal framework. The legal framework was like a quilt, it was different in each country. So a contract signed in Guatemala wasn't quite enforceable in another country. So there were a whole series of problems. I believe I mentioned earlier in Costa Rica, in my earlier time that I had been exposed to a ROCAP project, in legal reform, and I believe it probably represented one of the earliest attempts to work in what is now referred to as governance. That was, with a ROCAP funded contract, with the law school at the University of Costa Rica for the creation of a case book, law textbook of Central American commercial law. Boris Kosalchek, now at the University of Arizona, law school, another visionary, came to Costa Rica, was a Cuban trained lawyer and he worked with a lawyer named Torejejo, maybe that's the name. A very prestigious Costa Rican commercial lawyer and they began to develop with ROCAP funding a series of cases for commercial law in Central America and that grew and it became the basis for a textbook which is currently used throughout Central America at the moment in all the law schools and that led in Costa Rica to a series of efforts which I supported strongly, on legal reform. It led Carlos Jose Gutierrez, the dean of the law school, to institute case study instruction as a way of replacing the then by rote method that was very common in those days and still very common in some places in Central America today where the professors would read from these faded yellow notes, then you simply took down notes if you came at all. But the whole idea was to use this as a wedge and Carlos Jose began to train various law professors in the new techniques. And then we used that as an example to go off into a legislative reference service which was at the Cost Rican assembly, and also at the supreme court where we were indexing supreme court decisions. Before in the country each lawyer had their own files of different cases. So, if you hired a lawyer he had his own particular cases that he would argue in the court of law, "Oh, you say you have this law, well I have this law which derogates your law," and it was a game of gotcha and nobody could go to any one place and find what the real law was. Even judges were confused.

Anyway when I left Costa Rica the first time I had strongly promoted this and I was taken with it. I came back to it later on in 1990 when I got back to Costa Rica. I went back to those roots. All this had its roots in this early ROCAP project, with strengthening the law school, with trained professors and creating case law, we had the supreme court project with a place called Equity Publishing in New Hampshire, we had the cadastre and legal work in municipalities, so it was one of the early attempts by AID to work strongly in the area of governance, and it started with ROCAP.

After I left however, it fell upon very hard times, there was a communist deputy in the Costa Rican assembly called Manual Mora, a famous guy in Costa Rica, a dyed in the wool commie and he was in the congress and he stood up and he accused this whole thing as being a CIA plot. Not only did it blow up in AID's face, but Carlos Jose was thrown out as the dean of law school, it was just a terrible thing and it killed that kind of effort in Costa Rica pretty much until I returned 20 years later, AID never went back to it at all.

But anyway back to ROCAP. ROCAP had started this very innovative thing but clearly by the end of the 1960's easy gains from integration had probably run their course. A lot of the easy targets were accomplished very quickly, there's no price to pay, until you have to decide to try to lower some of these benefits given to these industries. It clearly became almost impossible to do that, so the Central American common market started running out of steam. The regional growths rates, I think, began to taper off, there was an enormous growth in an interregional trade and some job growth, but it was clearly not enough and the region was going through more and more difficult times. Politically it was never stable, Guatemala remained unstable and went through varied various periods of political crises, Nicaragua under increasing pressure because of Somoza. Somoza ran into an earthquake that caused serious damage in Nicaragua. We had moved in with a lot of money and within a couple of years there were allegations that the money hadn't been used the way it was supposed to be. The countries were under a lot of pressure. I don't know enough about Honduras at the time but the region was becoming unstable. If you listened to the Cubanologists; Castro was increasing his influence in the area. A lot of people had been trained: some of the early work we'd done in Guatemala in training those Indian leaders had caused a lot of people to stand up and question the status quo, so the whole region was going into an unstable environment which, in spite of the common market, began to affect negatively foreign investments.

The funds began to drop off a little bit and job growth was difficult to maintain so when I got there in 1976, I'd have to say it was probably 15 years after the central common market had established itself and taken off, and it was generally considered to be moribund. Larry Harrison had arrived a year earlier. Larry had been spending the time in Washington, more or less in exile. He had been PNGed out of Costa Rica for going head to head with the ambassador. The ambassador's name was Walter Plaiser, I'll never forget the guy. I was a very young officer, bright eyed and bushy tailed and I was giving him a briefing and he fell asleep on me. He was an ex-congressman out of the Eisenhower administration. A one term congressman, raised a lot of money for the Republicans and had been rewarded, had been sent to Costa Rica. The moment he arrived was the moment that Pepe Figueres was elected to his third term as President to Costa Rica and Larry knew Pepe from his earlier time in Costa Rica as program officer. Larry was an unabashed Liberacionista. He was pretty much a liberal Democrat, though, his later Nicaragua experience turned him into a disillusioned democrat, but then he believed very strongly in the Alliance, the philosophy and the method of the Alliance and had worked very closely with Costa Rican friends in the Liberacion party which was in power when he was there.

When he came back he was coming back to home ground. Well, Plaiser, Ambassador Walter Plaiser was very much a mid western, older, very conservative Republican. You talk about oil and water, it was just destined not to work. The problem came when Pepe decided he was going to open up to the Soviet Union. He wanted to establish relationships with the Soviet Union. I was not in the hierarchy, and I'm going to guess that there are other people in this exercise that are being interviewed on Costa Rica that can give a far more coherent view on what happened. But from my perspective - which was division chief level but not in the policy making part of the embassy - the embassy just split down the middle, one of those rare occasions where different elements took sides, and we ended up having, the first time I've ever heard of this, two program documents called the CASP in those days, which was the Country Assistance Strategy Paper. There were two of them. One which was supported by AID, the econ section and the mil group,

which was a very small operation, the other one was supported by the ambassador, the CIA and I'm not sure, perhaps the DCM. Both papers went to Washington. It was the strangest thing you ever saw in your life. And one said, you know this is Costa Rica moving into the modern world. It's opening its relationships with whoever and it's part of a modernization process and it's certainly part of a graduation process. Well, Larry was convinced that Costa Rica was ready to graduate and, like I mentioned earlier, all the economic data was just glowing and it was quite clear that the Rostow theory was true and it was taking off, the wheels had just come off the ground and part of that was for them to look for their own place in the sun and if they had relationship with Russia then so be it. The other side thought that this was opening up, Costa Rica, indeed Central America, to Soviet infiltration. Big cold war stuff.

Well, Larry I think will have to stand or fall with his own thoughts on this issue but Larry was not a person to sit around and let events dictate things. He very much was interested in dictating events. Larry became very concerned and attempted to influence the outcome, in effect going around the Ambassador and back-channeling to Washington, and that took about probably a millisecond for anybody to figure out and things got pretty messy. There were allegations, and I suspect they were true, that Larry's phones were bugged by our own government. There was some question whether his house was bugged. He was clearly put under surveillance and I think probably caught with his hand in the cookie jar because he went to Washington for consultations. We were called into a meeting with Peter Krease, who was acting for Larry. Peter was acting for Larry when he was away, and he showed us a cable, drafted Walter Plaiser, approved Walter Plaiser. Mr. Lawrence Harrison is currently in Washington on a consultation. There is no reason for Mr. Harrison to return to post. I'm hereby appointing and my memory is a little shaky on this but I think he tried to appoint DCM as acting mission director or as mission director. Larry never came back to the country, stayed in Washington. So he ended up being the head of the program office and he was the one I later commuted to work with everyday.

Q: *Why would an AID mission director would get involved in this; there must be another dimension to this in a sense that it was a political decision about opening up relationship with the Soviet Union?*

VENEZIA: Well, Larry never saw himself as a purely developmental economist.

Q: *Right.*

VENEZIA: Larry had been in the Dominican Republic during the revolution. Larry knew most of the people in the State Department that were in the seats of power. Larry considered himself their peer. Larry did not see himself as a shrinking violet, so he felt very strongly, especially in terms of his own vision with regard to Central America and mostly Costa Rica, his own vision with Costa Rica. Trying to push Costa Rica back and I'm speculating now into the banana republic context within his vision of their graduating seemed to make no sense, so Larry was and is strong willed and not afraid to express his opinion and not afraid to engage in a fight. So he leaped into this fray and lost. Big time.

So he went to Washington. Later, we had a good relationship there in Washington, we would cross swords occasionally there. I remember coming back from a long trip to the Caribbean

Development Bank. I guess it was the loan for recapitalization. I talked about this earlier. It was pretty much for general infrastructure work throughout the Caribbean. And Larry simply said to me in the car, " Look, I don't think we're going to do that. There's just not enough people there, you divide the number of people on these islands and 10 million dollars you get so much per capita, you know, its outrageous," and he put up a very strong fight. We disagreed professionally not personally. He was not afraid to engage. If he felt strong enough about something, he would engage. He won some, he lost some. This one he lost, the one on Costa Rica anyway. He ended up in Washington and the ROCAP mission director position came open and one of those strange things is that the ROCAP Mission Director in the hierarchy of US positions did not require White House approval, which given his history would have been difficult to obtain with his background under Nixon.

Q: *Yeah, or Ford.*

VENEZIA: Nixon, Ford

Q: Right.

VENEZIA: So when I went down, Larry had been there at least six months, maybe longer and Larry never felt comfortable unless he could do something big. It was always fun to see Larry operate as in Costa Rica where he was going to put together the golden handshake, 20 million dollar agricultural sector law. My loan for municipal development came afterward. Though it was considered part of it, it was actually the last loan, but it was part of that golden handshake package. So Larry's whole approach to Costa Rica was he was going to organize, mobilize these few resources and send Costa Rica off into the future. Well, ROCAP at the time was moribund and Larry took the same tack. He said look, a lot of work's been done on the infrastructure, a lot of work's been going on in industry, a lot of work has been going on in some of the social sectors. The one remaining barrier is helping trade and grain is the big issue and in a funny way it still is, most of them produce grain. So Larry carved out a major policy area of grain stabilization and put together a major proposal. By the way he did the same thing in Haiti late on, but in this case he put together a proposal for the Central Americans to cooperate on trade in grain. And he in effect said, Larry's an all or nothing guy, it's either this or something like this or some major progress in this area or we should close the place down. Well, it was very difficult going, there was very little cooperation anyway, and no one was prepared for a major initiative.

We were talking about 50 million dollars, which was a lot of money in those days, but it was an interesting amount, but not enough bait for the Central Americans. So he spent about a year or two and it was quite obvious that we weren't going anywhere.

Meanwhile, I was working on the Central American portfolio, which was with the Central American Bank, we had an active portfolio with LAAD which was the Latin American Agricultural Development Corporation, which I'd worked with also in the Caribbean, and they had an active program in the region. We had an almost disbursed program for the Harvard Grad School INCAE in Nicaragua. We had an interesting loan portfolio that I was working with and servicing and I was also working with several of the other people in the mission on projects, so I

was happy doing what I felt I always wanted to do. So I felt that we were doing some interesting things besides all this effort to increase trade in grain.

Well, Larry came to the conclusion that this wasn't going to work. So he decided we were going to close ROCAP. Surprisingly enough, some of us disagreed. We didn't exactly write a proposal against that, but it was not something we all actively supported, and in effect Larry eventually accused me of not supporting him, not being loyal. But Larry put that proposal on the table and then went to Haiti. The Haiti mission job opened up, he was asked to go to Haiti, so he left and a different guy came in called Harry Ackerman who was a political guy with some AID experience, and the deputy was Barry Sidman who went off to Nicaragua, he became the AID mission director of Nicaragua just as that place began to go down in flames. So I ended up as capital loan officer cum acting deputy director of ROCAP. It was one of those being there things. Harry Ackerman, who was a delightful guy who kind of ended up in ROCAP because they weren't going to appoint him anywhere else, decided he would try to promote or continue Larry's dream which wasn't going anywhere. We had a couple of grant programs that we also decided to pursue, but Harry had a terrible back problem, and he became more and more sick, staying at home, he'd have to lie on a cement floor, terrible pain. So I ended up going to work every morning where it was me and Bob Hechtman and Don Fiester. We'd get together and say, "What are we going to do this morning?" Somebody had to run the place, so I ended up being put in charge. I was the acting deputy and I'm not a shrinking violet either, so I began to put my own stamp on things and which didn't make Harry very happy when he would come back in eventually and discover what we had done. But we eventually put together a small program which required approval by Washington and if they approved it they would have to continue ROCAP and they did. Probably one of the more evil things I did in my life. But in those days, it was hard to have a long term vision and I always felt that I was committed to Central America and I said to myself if we leave it's dead. Budget requirements in those days were not such that we had to make terrible trade-offs. Today you wouldn't stand a chance but in those days we got away with it.

Q: *What was this program you put together?*

VENEZIA: Oh, I think mostly it was CATIE. I worked the CATIE one and the one on ICAETI and there were several small grant programs, plus the loan portfolio which was disbursing.

Q: *These are all regional projects?*

VENEZIA: Regional projects. Meant to try to work with the other CA missions and I can't tell you whether they did any good or not.

Q: *Did the other missions in the countries go along with it?*

VENEZIA: We had meetings every six months as I recall. There was a formal consultative group that got together. Barry Sidman who knew ROCAP, would attend and said quite clearly that he thought the ROCAP game was up. But the other Directors felt that as long as we weren't going to compete for the same resources, what the hell; it was quite clear that if we lost our resources, they weren't necessarily going to get them. As long as there was a resource transfer of some sort

they were prepared to ahead with it and no one wanted to shake the tree any as I recall so this went on.

All of the sudden, from one day to the next, I got an offer to go to as deputy director to the mission in Santo Domingo and I could never figure out where it came from, I still can't in many ways. Harry Ackerman had been very kind to me in terms of EERs, and he spoke well of me to Lalo Valdez who was at that time AA for LA. Lalo was another political guy and Harry and he understood each other. I always say I could never fault Lalo's choice of executive talent. I thought he had a very perceptive appreciation of executive talent. (laughter) But he plucked me out of ROCAP and sent me to the Dominican Republic as deputy director.

WILLIAM V.P. NEWLIN
Political Officer
Guatemala City (1966-1968)

Mr. Newlin was born and raised in Pennsylvania. He obtained degrees from Harvard University and the Fletcher School and, after serving a tour with the US Army, joined the Foreign Service in1960. A generalist, Mr. Newlin's service took him to France, Guatemala and Belgium, where he dealt primarily with European Organizations and NATO. In Washington his assignments concerned Trade, Law of the Sea and other economic matters. Mr. Newlin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: *In '66, where did you go?*

NEWLIN: Guatemala.

Q: How did this come about?

NEWLIN: The way it was always explained to me was that in your first three assignments, one was going to be in the State and two would be overseas in different parts of the world. So, I had to go somewhere different. I don't remember quite how much say I had in where I was to go. But there were various choices I had. One of them was San Salvador. It seemed like a very nice country. It was Spanish-speaking. I said, "Okay, I'll take the San Salvador job." Then that got changed at the last minute to be a Guatemala job and I was sent to Guatemala.

Q: You were there from '66-'68?

NEWLIN: That's right.

Q: What were you doing in Guatemala?

NEWLIN: I was a political officer. My beat was the insurgency. It was a terrible time to be in Guatemala. It was a terrible time to be in Guatemala in any capacity. It was certainly a terrible

time to be in Guatemala as an American political officer if you had any liberal leanings. What was happening in Guatemala at that time was that the Guatemalan government was systematically wiping out all of the good people in all of the liberal institutions, which included labor, the church, the universities, and anything in-between. But thousands of people were being disappeared. The line was that they were being disappeared by right-wing vigilante groups. That was utter bullshit. The right-wing vigilante groups did not exist. They existed in name. There was an organization that was known as the Mano Blanco [the White Hand]. It put out papers. It threatened people. People would disappear. It was said that they had been taken by the Mano Blanco. The Mano Blanco would say that they had taken these people. But in fact there was no organization at all called the Mano Blanco. It was a just government security forces operating clandestinely. The U.S. government was up to its ears in this. I did not know that officially. I don't know who in the embassy knew it officially.

You would talk to Guatemalans who would tell you that there was no Mano Blanco. You would report that this or that Guatemalan had told you that there was no Mano Blanco. But I don't know at my level, second secretary of the embassy, officially that this is the government that's doing this. But I know it unofficially because I'm not dumb. Everybody knows it unofficially. At that time, Gordon Mein was our ambassador. He was later killed there. There was a top secret report from INR that talked about the right-wing vigilantes operating in the capital who were killing off the liberal elements. It made me furious. This was a piece of paper that was theoretically going to go to the top levels of the government. It was a top secret magazine that they had put out at that time. It was to tell people who weren't normally following Guatemalan affairs what was going on in Guatemala. It was sort of like "Time Magazine" would come out and periodically have articles on different countries. This was the article on Guatemala. I said to Gordon Mein that this made me furious. Our reporting was saying that everyone was saying this was the government doing it, not a right-wing organization. Here they were reporting to our government that these were right-wing organizations doing it. He said, "What do you want to do about it?" I said, "I want to take it on head on. I want to say, 'This report from the INR is contradicting embassy reporting. It is not true. It's misleading our senior officials.'" He said, "Why don't you write it up and let's take a look at it?" I wrote up a two-page paper that was very blunt and direct. I gave it to him. Then he took that and gave it to my boss, Matt Smith, a lovely man who spoke completely fluent Spanish. I never got very good at Spanish. I didn't know any Spanish when I went in. I went to the Foreign Service Institute. I got the 2+ that you're supposed to get after the eight week Spanish course at FSI. I worked on my Spanish there. But I never got very good in Spanish. It was hard for me to do the kind of reporting that I should have been doing but that I didn't have the Spanish to do. I never did get it. Anyway, Matt Smith was bilingual in Spanish and knew a lot of the people and was very good at some things. He rewrote this thing. Together we reworked it. It ended up being much, much longer and putting the whole thing into a much broader historical context, but it did include what I wanted to have included. It included the fact that these were not right-wing vigilante groups but that they were government supported and that we were in bed with the government. We were complicit in this. That went in an airgram. Mein called me in a week or 10 days afterwards and was furious. He said, "I've just gotten a call from the Department. They said, 'Gordon, we've just seen this paper. Can we assume this is just Newlin and Smith getting a little bit off the deep end and we can ignore it?' If there had been a telegram, I could understand that attitude, but it wasn't a telegram. It was an airgram. They can see my signature on it. They should know that I wouldn't have signed

something that I wasn't going to stand behind." He went back to Washington and there was a big furor about this. I don't think anything came of it. We continued to support these bastards and they continued to off anybody they wanted. But it made me feel better.

Q: What was the rationale for our supporting this thing?

NEWLIN: We were still worried about dominos. We thought that we had to keep… Earlier, we had kept Guatemala from having its revolution in the '50s.

Q: Was this with Arbenz?

NEWLIN: Yes. We had kind of quelled their revolution. That's their problem. They never had their revolution. The Mexicans got their revolution, but the Guatemalans never did. We thought that we had all these right-wing people in the army and in the oligarchy who had gone to school in America who were going to hold the status quo when the status quo was fine from a geopolitical sense, but from the social sense it was terrible. It was a very small number of people owning all the land and the means of production and holding down the poor people.

Q: How did you find life in Guatemala, you and your wife?

NEWLIN: We had a nice time. It was the first time we had been exposed to real poverty. It took a while to get used to that, particularly for Louisa. People knock on your door begging for food and looking for work. In the city, all kinds of people begging. The favelas were on the hillsides. You can accept the poverty in the countryside. We Americans can accept the poverty in Northern Maine much more easily than we can accept the poverty in Southeast Washington. But that was hard. Aside from that, we had a nice circle of Guatemalan friends largely educated in the U.S. There was an expat community down there. I got involved in community theater. I was in four plays during the time we were down there and had quite a lot of fun.

J. PHILLIP MCLEAN
Political Officer, Bureau of Latin American Affairs
Washington, DC (1967-1968)

Mr. McLean was born and raised in Seattle, Washington and was educated at Seattle University and the University of Indiana. He entered the Foreign Service in 1962. A Latin American specialist, his service in the State Department in Washington and abroad, primarily concerned Latin American Affairs. His foreign posts were Brasilia, Edinburgh, Panama City, La Paz, Milan and Bogota, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. In Washington Mr. McLean held positions dealing with Latin American Affairs, including that of Deputy Assistant Secretary for South America. Mr. McLean was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in1999.

McLEAN: Let me just mention Guatemala as an example of some of the work we did in, I believe, March of 1968. We were doing papers, and one of our functions was to do the weekly contribution to something that was then called "Current Foreign Relations," which was a document that was put out around the Department, and the desk officer brought us a piece about the assassination of some U.S. military officers who had been riding in a car and an assassin came along and riddled the car with bullets. He wrote about it, and again it was our function, Regina Eltz's and mine, to sit and in talking with them try to parse what he was trying to say in this report, because it had to be short and brief; and in the end what he did, what we did together, was publish something that talked about the growth of violence in the country, not just on the left but also of something that was called the white hand. Today you call it paramilitaries or right-wing guerrillas or government-backed right-wing guerrillas, but at that time these were new concepts, and in the report we just dealt with the two issues. Well, that caused an explosion from our embassy. The embassy wrote in. They somehow thought that these reports were done by the intelligence part of Washington, but in fact that was just done by the desk officer, and we kept our heads and didn't get into much of a debate about it. The embassy clearly wanted not to be discussing this other part of the issue, which was the part that there were left-wing guerrillas and that there was also violence being generated on the right and perhaps by the government as well. The story goes on that in June of that year my friend Ralph Cortada, who had left INR/XR and had gone down to the Latin American part of things, did a rather simple report. It was a simple analysis that simply said, "What causes violence against American institutions in Latin America?" He tried to do an academic correlation, population size, per capita income, etc. He did this all up on a chart, and the only correlation he could find was that violence in the country correlates perfectly with violence against Americans. It seems like a simple idea. Again, Embassy Guatemala blew up. They were very unhappy with our analysis, because they thought--it wasn't our analysis, it was INR's analysis--that INR was trying to criticize our policy in some ways, and that was an enormously surprising reaction. A letter came in from Ambassador Mein to the assistant secretary making this complaint and then asking us that we go to INR. In that capacity I went to Ralph and I got the background on how we did it and the rest of it, and I had to say I didn't think Ralph Cortada was trying to do anything about Guatemala policy and in fact the paper was written about the whole area. It wasn't aimed at them. Knowing Ralph, I knew that he was not terrifically ideological in any way. But I did feel sad about it, because I had known Ambassador Mein. He was my first DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission).

Q: This was Gordon?

McLEAN: John Gordon Mein. But there it was, and I remember seeing him. Just after that there was a major interagency group meeting that I attended probably as a notetaker, and I saw him at that time. He's a wonderful, good person. The sad ending of this phase of the story, though, is that in August, late August of that year, I went in to temporarily fill in as the staff assistant to the assistant secretary, and the assistant secretary left that day in fact to go down to Ecuador, and I got the call from the watch and was plugged into talking to the DCM in Guatemala saying that the ambassador was dead, he had been assassinated that afternoon. It was an enormously sad moment, but as you can tell, my own conclusion is that, once again, we hadn't stepped back and looked closely enough at the full implications of what we were doing in Guatemala. The sadness of it, of course, was I was involved, deeply involved, in doing the arrangements for transporting him back to the States. I think it was one of the first times, if not the first time, that the

Presidential aircraft went down and picked up an ambassador's body and took off with it to bring him back to the States with his family. The day after as I walked into the Department, a friend said, "Shouldn't we have the flag flying at half mast?" I tell you it took me the better part of the day getting lawyers and others to agreement that we could fly the flag at half mast. Now sadly that's a regular thing that is now done, but it had not been done up to that point, that in fact a department has the ability to make that decision on its own, and arranging the meeting and the funeral, and, as I said, sadly I did many of the condolences whether it was from the Secretary, from the American Foreign Service Association, etc., and we worked long hours. It happened to be the week of the Chicago Democratic Convention, so it was a very difficult time. We'd work all day long.

Q: This was a particular convention in Chicago? This is riots...

McLEAN: This is riots and the rest of it. So we were dealing with these very emotional and very deeply troubling events in Guatemala, and you'd come home and turn on the television set to have a late dinner or early breakfast, and there you'd have the Chicago thing going on.

Q: Well, Guatemala actually is a very violent place, isn't it? I mean people settle things with guns. Isn't that...

McLEAN: I suppose. Since I've never served in Guatemala, I don't want to analyze too much of what was going on. What I do know is, looking back at it, U.S. policy wasn't taking this into account enough in terms of what our interests are, as seems to have come out in recent years, that we ourselves have gotten ourselves too tainted by this thing. I think there is a way to be true to what you're trying to accomplish without compromising yourself and becoming part of the problem. My suspicions are that in the Guatemala case we in fact were part of the problem. Again, good people were doing it, but in fact I think that they were making some mistakes.

A. ELLEN SHIPPY
Consular Officer
Guatemala City (1970-1972)

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

Q: Well you were in Guatemala from 1970…

SHIPPY: …to 1972.

Q: What were, you were a consular officer, was that it, or were you rotation?

SHIPPY: I was a Consular Officer, and I did about three months in the Political Section. Larry Pezzullo was head of the Political Section then. John Dreyfus was DCM, and Nathaniel Davis was ambassador.

Q: A very strong embassy at that time. People who went on to bigger and better things.

SHIPPY: The day I arrived in Guatemala was the day the German Ambassador's body was found. He had been kidnapped and killed.

Q: For what? Was it a…

SHIPPY: This was the guerillas, the anti-government guerillas using diplomats as pawns in the fight against the government.

Q: Was there very tight security around your office?

SHIPPY: There was security, nothing like there is these days, but there was security. The capital city was considered the most dangerous spot, so we had to ride in convoys to work. We were followed by Guatemalan police in a car. We always figured the greater danger was from the police. But the countryside was not a danger, so we were able to travel throughout the country on weekends. It was great! One day they cordoned off the city to do a house-to-house search for guerillas. The whole thing was totally bizarre. They blocked the streets going in and out of the city, but of course there were a million other ways to go in and out. The whole exercise was strange.

Q: What as you saw it in the 1970-1972 period, what was the government and economic situation in Guatemala?

SHIPPY: It was a dictatorial regime with the army playing an important role. Guatemala had a parliament or a legislature, but that wasn't too significant. The average Guatemalan was very poor. The Indians were often mistreated. The use of Indian labor in the coffee fields was not according to international labor standards. There was resentment. Americans were liked, but there was resentment of the U.S. for the U.S. involvement in the 1954 overthrow of Arbenz.

Q: Arbenz, yes which sort of resounded through decades. Were you aware, was the CIA messing around there very much?

SHIPPY: I would suspect they were, but I wasn't privy to a lot of what was going on. I got there shortly after Shawn Holly, our Labor Attaché, had been kidnapped. (He was released unharmed.) Guatemalans were being killed left and right. A friend and I were driving in the countryside one day, and the truck in front of us swung something over the side. Our first guess was that it was a body. (It wasn't; it was a bag of cement.) Every morning the tabloid-sized newspaper would have a full page photograph of the latest body discovery.

Q: Was this sort of a violent society? I mean did the men take guns and so forth to work and that sort of thing?

SHIPPY: I don't think so.

Q: So these deaths were pretty much this was opposition to the government.

SHIPPY: Right. Crime was not a huge problem as I recall. I mean there were shoplifters, pickpockets and such, but crime as we know it today was not a big deal.

Q: What about what type of work, you were saying you were doing mainly consular work. What did that consist of?

SHIPPY: Interviewing way too many people per day and telling 70-80% of them no. They wanted visas to go to the United States. They wanted tourist visas, and they were going to work, so we had to tell them no, they couldn't have a visa. They were just trying to improve their circumstances and make some money to help support their family and get their kids some schooling. It was not a pleasant job.

Q: Where were they going? Was there any sort of focal point for Guatemalans?

SHIPPY: No, they were going pretty much all over the U.S. I remember once a guy was telling me – in January, that he was going to Chicago because it was such a great place to visit.

PHILLIP ELY CHURCH
Program Officer, USAID
Guatemala (1970-1973)

Phillip Ely Church grew up in Portland, Oregon. He received his bachelor's degree from the University of Chicago, a master's from Stanford University, and a PhD in economics from the University of Oregon. He joined USAID as a program economist in Guatemala in 1970. He has also served in Bangladesh, Pakistan, the International Rice Research Institute and in the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. Mr. Church was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.

CHURCH: I received my Ph.D. in Economics from the University of Oregon in 1970s. My thesis was on the Indian marketing system in the highlands of Guatemala. I took an approach similar to that of Theodore Schultz; his research examined how economically rational the non-western Guatemalan Indian farmers behaved in managing their farm production resources. I sought to answer a related question about how economically rational these indigenous communities were in their market trading behavior. Until that time, a popular belief was that "non-western" societies were poor because they were not economically rational and therefore did not produce and trade in a fashion that would lead to greater efficiency and prosperity.

Q: Any particular points you got from that study?

CHURCH: There is one point that appeared very relevant to USAID's early efforts at development assistance in Guatemala. When you go into an Indian village in the highlands of Guatemala on market day, you'll see a great deal of commercial activity - a lot of small buyers and sellers of similar products like corn, beans, chickens, hogs, rice, and textiles. They obey all the economic laws of efficient markets: large numbers of buyers and sellers, homogeneous products, easy market entry and plenty of price and product information. They will haggle over price with their relatives and neighbors as vigorously as with a stranger. It's a very competitive process. All the conditions of market competition prevail. Larger merchants took advantage of this fragmented and internally competitive nature of these Indian communities to buy low and capture the bulk of farm produce that they then could resale at much higher prices at very profitable margins.

Now, the USAID's strategy aimed to organize Guatemalan Indian farmers into cooperatives to buy and sell collectively so they could get better prices for their inputs and produce. But this "cooperative strategy" was often at odds with the very competitive nature of the Guatemalan Indian culture. The concept of a cooperative movement didn't fit too well with the very competitive nature of local communities. Getting Indian farmer-traders together so they could bargain collectively with more powerful merchants from outside the community proved very difficult. It took a while for USAID to realize that in such settings a cooperative movement required strong economic incentives to overcome the local competitive forces.

Q: So what happened after you finished your graduate work? How did you connect with USAID?

CHURCH: As often happens with graduate students, I ran out of money and time during my research in Guatemala. There was a wonderful Mission Director at the time in Guatemala by the name of Dean Hinton. Shortly after his arrival in Guatemala, Hinton invited a team of economists from Iowa State University to help design a development program for the country. They needed information on conditions in the regions of the country where I had been doing my research. I was able to sign on with the team for six more months to help write a Guatemalan economic assistance strategy focused on the highland of the country. I got to know the mission and the staff at that time, of course, and learned a bit about the USAID program. Dean Hinton encouraged me to consider joining USAID. When I returned to the United States to defend my thesis I submitted an application to the Agency. Several months later very close to graduation, a letter came from USAID inviting me to go back to Guatemala as a USAID foreign service officer. I was thrilled, and, of course, said "Yes." So, in September of 1970s I finished at Oregon, and my wife and I came to Washington where, in October, I was sworn in as a foreign service officer, given two weeks of orientation and in November packed off to Guatemala as a USAID program economist.

Assignment to the USAID Program in Guatemala (1970-73)

Q: Well let's talk about Guatemala. What was the situation when you arrived there?

CHURCH: I arrived at a very difficult time in Guatemala. A few months earlier, the American Ambassador to Guatemala had been gunned down in the streets of the capital city. There was constant urban guerrilla activity going on. Che Guevara was loose in the mountains of Bolivia. The United States was very concerned about Castro and his impact in the region, and so there had been a concerted effort on the part of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations in the 1960s to provide greater economic assistance to the region.

Of concern to many of us was the entrenched poverty among the highland Indian communities and the fear they might get caught up in a rural revolution. About half of the country's 6.0 million population were of Mayan Indian descent living in the western highlands of the country. The old somewhat "feudal" colonial plantation system was giving way but nothing viable seemed to be emerging in its place. The Indian community in Guatemala traditionally depended on the established landowning class for employment on their large plantations and farms. And the land owners depended on the Indian population for low-cost labor to keep down the prices of their sugar, coffee, cotton and banana exports. In the first half of the century, Guatemala had instated indigent laws that allowed the government to conscript anyone not working into harvesting coffee, sugar cane, cotton, and bananas.

When the indigent laws were abolished, land owners feared the economy would collapse. But lower infant mortality and longer life expectancy led to a growing highland Indian population that needed plantation work to supplement its meager corn cultivation or *milpa* incomes. Moreover, increasing population was putting pressure on the land and the soil was being depleted by over-cropping and grazing. Because corn cultivation only lasted three or four months out of the year, Indian families migrated to the coast to harvest plantation crops, no longer forced by indigent laws but by population pressures on the land. In short, plantation owners needed to worry no longer over the possibility of labor shortages.

This seasonal migratory labor arrangement also created social problems that disrupted progress in Indian communities. Schooling was difficult to provide to children who migrated with their families from one location to another. Health conditions in the labor camps were very poor. So, it was very difficult to deliver public services to improve living standards of the people who needed them most. Any development assistance program had to come to terms with this.

The USAID mission aimed to increase smallholder farm productivity and incomes as a way of breaking the country's cycle of seasonal underemployment, low-wage migratory labor and poor health and education services that kept the highland Indian population mired in poverty. Based on recommendations from the Iowa State University study on which I participated, USAID sought to reach Guatemala's small Indian farmers with improved "green revolution" maize and wheat varieties that were coming out of the international institutes like the Corn and Wheat Institute (CIMMYT) in Mexico at that time. Shorter maturing, more rapidly growing varieties would allow areas to get two harvests where they had gotten one previously. This released land for cultivation of irrigated nontraditional high-value vegetable crops that could be exported. It would allow the farm population to remain in place in the highlands throughout the year. In this manner they could then be reached with the health and education services they lacked.

There was some urgency to raising small farm productivity, incomes and jobs as well. The sugar and banana industries were declining under the pressure of falling international market prices and the land was going into cattle grazing which had much less demand for labor. This strategy of boosting yields of traditional food crops and introducing production and marketing opportunity for diversified nontraditional export crops became the focus of the program on which I was working as an economist in Guatemala and the other Central American countries between 1970s and 1977.

In 1973, when the USAID program in Guatemala was well underway and showing some promising results, there was an opportunity to take the strategy "on the road" to the rest of Central America, where similar needs existed in Honduras, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The U.S. was beginning to appreciate the fact that Central American producers could provide fresh fruits and vegetables to the U.S. in the off-season and wouldn't compete directly with U.S. suppliers. We had a challenge in the early years of the Guatemala program convincing U.S. interests, including Congress, that this wouldn't be disruptive to U.S. food producers. Eventually, USAID was able to help Central American countries build a winter season market niche for their high value agricultural produce in the U.S. By the time I left the region, refrigerated trucks were moving by ocean barge from Guatemala to Florida where they were attached to tractor units and moved up the east coast to urban grocery stores. USAID was building links from Guatemala's highland Indian communities to east coast suburban consumers in the U.S.!

Q: Did you have any other successes in the Guatemalan program?

CHURCH: It all depends on how we choose to define "success." To give you an example, USAID support to the cooperative movement among Guatemala's highland communities included setting up a number of warehouses or silos to store corn at harvest time. The goal was to give more marketing power to Indian farmers by providing the alternative of selling grain to their own cooperative rather than to speculators. In the past, truckers would come up to the highlands to buy up much of the corn crop at harvest - when prices were low and production debts needed to be paid. They would hold the corn in their facilities, and then when there was a shortage of corn in the highlands toward the beginning of the new planting season, return and sell it back to the Indians at much higher prices.

The USAID solution was to assist local farmer cooperatives to build small cooperative warehouses using Butler bins - metal silos like you see all over Iowa - and to provide some capital to the cooperatives to buy the corn at harvest. In this way, they could hold it in the silos for resale back to members of the cooperative and the community at a lower price than the truckers would sell it when supplies became scarce. Well, I can remember going into one community a couple of years after farmer cooperatives had installed the USAID funded corn silos and found them sitting idle. My job was to assess why the program wasn't working, why the grain bins were not being used.

When I started interviewing truckers and local farmer cooperative members, I learned that one very interesting development had taken place. After the silos were built, the first year the truckers came to buy, they couldn't get any corn at the low prices they had offered previously

because the cooperatives were now paying more to buy and hold the corn for their farmer members just like the program was designed. But when the truckers started increasing their offering prices to compete, farmers showed no loyalty to their cooperatives. As I mentioned before this was a competitive culture. So farmers again sold to the truckers but, this time, at a higher price. The cooperative wasn't able to buy at what it could offer so the corn silos sat empty. Still the local community had more money because of the better price they were able to command for their maize from the truckers.

Now the question is, was that a success or not? We accomplished our objective which was raising the price of corn for producers by having the corn bins there, but the cooperatives never really functioned as commercial units because farmers sold where they could get the best price, even when that meant dealing with the truckers who earlier had exploited them. A U.S. Congressman visiting one of these villages and seeing an empty USAID funded grain silo might conclude the USAID cooperative program was a failure. While the farmer cooperatives were not successful in using the bins to buy, store and trade their members' corn, they were able to force the truckers to offer a better price. The coops provided the service of a market floor price. So USAID did accomplish the objective of the program which was to improve the marketing position of local farmers by giving them an alternative selling option.

Q: That is a good illustration. Is that still a lesson that USAID can use elsewhere?

CHURCH: Yes. I would say that kind of experience could be replicated in many African country contexts. I think we've seen it in the Asian setting. In fact, I had an opportunity when I left Guatemala for Bangladesh, which was my next post halfway around the world, to take some of those concepts to totally different areas of the world and apply them with similar effectiveness. As I said, I firmly believe from my experience as a USAID economist that people behave in an economically rational way no matter what their stage of development is. They respond rationally to economic incentives anywhere in the world if given the opportunities and the options from which to choose and the capacity to act.

One of the greatest development contributions USAID has made is providing people with more opportunities to exercise economically rational behavior by helping them acquire the resources - skills, land, technologies, markets - to exercise choice. USAID cannot force everyone to become a loyal cooperative member. What USAID can create is an environment for choice. For example, in the case of Guatemala, Indian farmers now have two choices, a trucker or a cooperative to trade their grain where before they only had one, a trucker. That alone was enough to improve their lot.

Q: Did everything go smoothly during your first overseas assignment with USAID in Guatemala?

CHURCH: Hardly. In development work there are always surprises and unexpected challenges. There were two serious setbacks that we experienced during my tenure with the program. One was a devastating earthquake in 1976 which laid waste to large sections of the Guatemalan highlands. For the next year, we were essentially mobilized to restore a lot of the services that were disrupted. The earthquake not only leveled villages but brought down landslides on roads so communications were cut off. We cut down trees along straight stretches of road so the

highway could be made into a temporary landing strip for single-engine planes that flew in medical supplies and flew out the seriously injured. That was in February of 1976, and it was a serious blow for Guatemala. It set back the country's economic progress a decade.

Q: What was your role in that disaster?

CHURCH: The USAID mission staff had two roles. First, we found ourselves working with the strategic military assistance command out of Panama which was bringing in U.S. Military C-41 cargo jets with emergency tents and food for the most heavily affected communities. Our immediate job was just getting an assessment of the damage done and determining where the assistance was most needed. I can recall getting in the light planes filled with drums of aviation gas in the back and flying into these remote highway landing strips which served as staging areas. A crash would have been fatal. It was a dangerous thing to do, but it was the only way to get into some of these remote areas to get a good look at what was going on and to deliver short term assistance by getting injured people out and getting doctors and medical supplies in. In the longer run, of course, we had to rethink our assistance program to assess what we could keep running while the relief effort was underway. We really wanted to sustain the long run program without ignoring urgent short run needs. It was not an easy balancing act.

Q: Well, you said there was another event.

CHURCH: The other challenge we faced in Guatemala was a change in U.S. policy toward the country, because of the military's influence in Guatemala's government. Without a larger degree of democratic participation in the political process, the United States was no longer prepared to continue economic assistance at the same scale as when I arrived. One of the most difficult challenges for us as development practitioners is how to help people in need in a political setting that is not very conducive to that assistance. Development funds are often fungible. Giving money, say, for building Guatemala's education system, may not actually add anything in the way of more resources to the country if the recipient government simply cuts back its own education funding and instead buys more military weapons with the savings. If, on the other hand, we refuse to give assistance until more democratic systems and political will is in place, a lot of people at least in the short run, will suffer and the pace of progress will be retarded.

Q: Did it have any effect?

CHURCH: In the long run, yes, but conditions did get worse before improving, with civil war and political strife in the 1980s and up until just a few years ago. It was not until 1995 that Guatemala had a peaceful transition from one democratically elected government to the next. A peace accord had just been signed with rural combatants and development assistance is starting to flow again.

Q: What would you sum up as the impact of that strategy you helped develop during that period?

CHURCH: If you go to Guatemala and visit the highland Indian communities today, you'll find a greater awareness of their capacity to improve their lives than when USAID first started its development assistance programs in the country. Before, people had a more fatalistic approach

toward the world and to their livelihood. Now there are widespread aspirations for a better life, and there is a growing confidence in the ability of local communities to make it happen.

Still, the country faces serious problems. Endemic disease, illiteracy, shortage of potable water, and access to sanitation remain serious challenges to development, particularly among the rural Indian population. Child and maternal mortality figures are high. Education services also are still lacking. Guatemala has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, just ahead of Haiti at the bottom of the list for Latin America. There is a long way to go, but the difference today is that among rural communities there is more awareness of what can be done and among political leaders a bit more commitment to providing support. I don't think the Mayan Indian culture would allow the clock to be turned back. There is more popular pressure on the government to provide these services. I don't think Guatemalan leaders can ignore that today and expect to remain in power.

WILLIAM T. PRYCE
Political Counselor
Guatemala City (1971-1974)

Born in California and raised in Pennsylvania, Mr. Pryce was educated at Wesleyan University and the Fletcher School of Tufts University. After service in the US Navy he worked briefly for the Department of Commerce before joining the Foreign Service in 1958. Though primarily a Latin America specialist, Mr. Pryce also served in Moscow. His Latin America assignments include Mexico, Panama, Guatemala, Bolivia and Honduras, where he was Ambassador from 1992-1996. Ambassador Pryce was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1997.

Q: *Bill we are going to Guatemala in 1971. You were there from 1971 until when?*

PRYCE: To 1974.

Q: *What was your job going to Guatemala?*

PRYCE: I went there as political counselor.

Q: *Was this something you asked for or did you know about it?*

PRYCE: It was an opportunity that came and I was delighted to take it. It’s a little interesting story. I was not the proper rank for the job. I had known Ambassador Davis from...

Q: *This is Nat Davis?*

PRYCE: This is Nat Davis, right. As you might remember things were kind of tough in Guatemala at that time. The previous ambassador had been assassinated.

Q: *That was?*

PRYCE: John Gordon Mein. John Gordon Mein had been assassinated, two Mill Grow people had been assassinated and a very close friend of mine, Sean Holly, had been kidnapped and held hostage for about six weeks and finally got out. It was a dicey time and the person who had been selected for the job at the last minute declined so there was an open job. I was offered the opportunity and I grabbed it. I was delighted to go.

Q: *I have to ask though, there is personnel and then there is your wife. How did this...*

PRYCE: I think what happened in all honesty is that the person who didn't go, didn't go because his wife said "This is it, we're not going," so he didn't go. Joan said, "If this is what you want to do we'll do it." But I was apprehensive. I wasn't worried, for one thing at that point there was this macho culture in Guatemala and they didn't bother the family; they didn't attack women and children so I wasn't worried there.

I remember going into the Foreign Service Protective Association and asking about accidental life insurance wanting to sign up for it. There was a very nice and, at least to me, imperious lady who was in charge of the operation. I was asking questions about the small print in the contract as to whether it paid off in terms of riots, insurrections, and I was asking if it was involved in individual attacks. She didn't know where I was going but I was wondering whether it was applicable or not. This lady said, "Young man, we paid off on Ambassador Mein if that's what you're asking." "As a matter of fact that's exactly what I'm asking. Where do I sign?" I remember it was $93 or $97 for $100,000 worth. I signed it and I remember sending a copy to my father-in-law who took a dim view of this saying "If [inaudible] work out, it will help the children."

We went off and I really didn't worry about Joan and the children. It was a very interesting tour but it was dicey. At one point it was the only time in my life where I carried a weapon and was authorized. It was not an easy time in that sense but it was fascinating in terms of the work.

Q: *Let's talk first before you went out, you're going to go out as political counselor and I assume you kind of read your way into the job back in Washington. What were you getting from the desk? What was wanted from Guatemala?*

PRYCE: We wanted to know what the level of political violence truly was; how many people were being assassinated on each side? Was there a possibility of our helping to bring about some kind of accommodation? Also, how could we legitimately help the elected government keep as much public order as possible in a democratic way, which was not easy.

Q: *You got there when, in mid-'71?*

PRYCE: We got there in mid-'71, in July of '71 just in time for the 4th of July reception.

Q: *How would you describe the situation in Guatemala at the time you arrived?*

PRYCE: It was a very, very tense situation. The place was full of armed camps on both sides. Every political faction had their own bodyguards. Every political faction had been involved in deaths on each side. There probably wasn't a family in Guatemala that hadn't been involved in a death in the family.

Q: *Could you describe why there were armed camps?*

PRYCE: Because there was a bitter dispute between the left and the right for control of the political process. The president who was elected on a law and order platform, President Arana, had solved the terrorist problem in Zacapa. Depending on your point of view, from the conservatives he was known as the lion of Zacapa...

Q: *Zacapa is what?*

PRYCE: Zacapa was the province in Guatemala where the greatest political violence had taken place and Arana had been a military commander who basically brought law and order to the area. He was either known as the lion of Zacapa to his supporters, or the jackal of Zacapa to the opposition many of whom were zapped. There had been violence on each side and just a bitter political dispute which went on. There was hatred. As you know it took another 20 years to finally be able to settle this situation and it was just impossible to eliminate the terrible animosity.

Q: *From our perspective, this is still high Nixon, high Kissinger period, was this seen as an east-west thing or was this sort of a red and blue type...*

PRYCE: It was a democratic society but an imperfect democratic society. The government was democratically elected and the previous government had been a more leftist oriented government and we had actually thought that the liberal party would win. They didn't. The conservative party, that's not their name, but the conservative party won and there were ideological differences, I think that is the question. There definitely were ideological differences but each side had a defensive mechanism and in some cases offensive mechanism in terms of just plain killings.

Q: *It can be effective. I'm thinking about, you are coming out and we're talking about Kissinger and Nixon who were seeing so many things in, you are either on the side of the Soviet Union or you are on the side of the United States and here is a left-right thing but it doesn't sound like it's really a communist thing.*

PRYCE: No, no. Some of the guerrillas were definitely Marxist socialist oriented. I never felt that they were directly controlled from the Soviet Union. Although they were getting money from Cuba, they were getting support from the Soviet bloc. They weren't directly run by the Soviet bloc but there was an ideological difference and there was definitely support from the socialist camps.

Q: *Again coming back to the time you were there, any support from Cuba I would have thought would have sent off warning bells in Washington.*

PRYCE: There had been warning bells ever since the Jacobo Arbenz regime. What we were trying to do was to foment and to support a stronger democracy. One of the things that we worked very hard at in the political section and in the embassy as a whole, was to try to have fair and free election in it must have been 1973. We had worked with the electoral tribunal, we had gotten to be friends with all the people who were in the electoral mechanism, and we had cultivated contacts with all the various political parties pushing very hard for free elections. We were told of course that there were going to be free elections, that they wanted to broaden the base and to have elections which would be accepted by the body politic and by the international community.

What happened, I can remember and I'm jumping ahead, was election night we were down, we encircled the town and were covering the elections right up to the very last point. I had a wonderful group of colleagues in the section, people who have gone on to very many interesting and varied things. Chuck Brayshaw was there who is now the chargé in Mexico City. We had Ray Burghardt who later went on to be head of the NSC and DCM in China and who is now consul general in Shanghai. It was a wonderful group of people. The elections were very well covered, each party, and we were trying to figure out how it was going to happen in the end.

On election night we were down with the party in power who thought they were going to win, watching the returns. As returns came in it became more and more evident the party in power was not going to win. All of a sudden the electronic communications started to be turned off and you couldn't get the election results. There was great embarrassment among our friends and we knew early on that the election had been stolen. We did what we could to try to correct that imbalance. Rios Montt was the candidate we had close contact with, as we did with Laugerud Garcia, basically was robbed of the election. He later decided not to make an issue of it and he took golden exile in Spain. It was one of those areas where we did what we could but we were not able to turn around the fraudulent election.

Q: *This of course was before something that has become more standardized in trouble spots where we have international observers and all that.*

PRYCE: That's right.

Q: *We were probably the only honest broker around.*

PRYCE: As I remember it there weren't many others. We had the place covered like a tent but there weren't that many international observers. There were some but there certainly was no OAS mission as you had in Nicaragua or in Haiti. There were very few international observers; the UN wasn't there. There were individual NGO groups but we were probably the single most effective one.

Q: *Were you getting anything from the National Security Council or from Congress or something, particularly I'm thinking about the more rightish wing of the Republican Party?*

PRYCE: It's interesting but we were not. Basically there was general agreement that what we wanted was free elections. We were aware that there was an historical tendency of the

government to bring things in their favor and we were trying to make the elections as open as possible. It was a policy that was supported across the board. At this point, I think I should make clear, any party who had a chance of winning would have been amenable to U.S. interests. There were obviously different points of view. One group was more conservative than the other but we could have had a healthy relationship with whoever won so there was no pressure to try to influence how things came out. Early on, this is back as I say in the early '70s, our policy was we want free and fair elections and we will take our chances with whoever wins.

Q: *I take it you are also pretty much off the radar screen of the National Security Council and others?*

PRYCE: That's right. There were individual senators who visited us but we were not high profile at that point.

Q: *Were there guerrillas sitting up in the hills who we were concerned about?*

PRYCE: Actually at that point the major problems were in the city. We were in a situation, I told you, where it was an armed camp. The embassy provided security protection for all the principal officers; it wasn't just the ambassador and the DCM. Everyone was taken to work with an armed guard with a follow vehicle. We had something like 60 or 70 Guatemalan security people. We had an organized system where you could go to work one of three times and you varied routes. It was a dicey situation. If you were going to go out at night you were supposed to call up and get a security accompaniment. There were times when you couldn't do that, I mean I couldn't do that. I felt if you appear at a meeting with political people, especially people who were not in the government, and they knew you had security people, you would lose trust and confidence. You just had to take your chances and we did that a number of times. It was as I say an armed camp.

I'll give you just a vignette. In our house I had a number of lunches and sometimes dinners. Sometimes we would have what we called mixed salad where we would have people who were political opponents now, but they were close friends from school and they really wanted a chance to talk to each other. We were neutral ground, but they all came armed. Often they would come in and it was almost like the old west, they would say, "Where do I put my gun?" We had guns up on the mantle of the fireplace and it was kind of bad for the kids so we actually bought a piece of furniture that had about 20 little drawers in it so that there would be a place for the weapons when people came in. There were times when it was near full. When you had a party like this you had to see to the care and feeding of your guests, but you also had to see to the care and feeding at a little different level of all the bodyguards. You might have 25 people outside waiting around and you'd have to give them sandwiches and cokes and things. It was a tense time.

Q: *Did you have problems with any of the groups or were they all willing to see you and really sort of eager, or how did it work?*

PRYCE: We were able to see all of the groups and I think actually we helped keep people alive in the opposition who were defeated. I won't say they lost it. We had a fair amount of influence, the ambassador, the DCM, myself and others. I remember that once the election returns came in people came to our embassy saying "Can't you guys fix this?" Of course we couldn't but we did

go to the government and say it would be a terrible mistake if anything happens to these people. One of them was the mayor who was assassinated later on, Fuentes Moore, who was one of the leaders in the opposition - it will hurt our relationship. I think that had an effect in helping to keep those people alive, at least for a while. We were able to go to Mario Sandoval who was the bête noir of the right wing telling him we really hope that nothing happens to these people who have not been elected because it will hurt U.S. Guatemalan relations tremendously. They did stay alive for at least a couple of years.

Q: *What were American interests in Guatemala at that time?*

PRYCE: There is the standard interest which is that we had an interest in trying to promote democracy there. At this point there were still a number of dictatorships all over Latin America. We were trying to strengthen the democratic base. We also had the business interests there that we were trying to promote in terms of U.S. investment. We were very interested in Guatemala's votes in the UN. We were interested in cooperation in the OAS and we were also interested in improving, if we could, the labor and human rights situation.

Q: *What were our business interests?*

PRYCE: The USAID program at that time was very imaginative. We were trying to expand in fruits and melons; we were trying to expand agricultural production. We had, I think, banana interests there. It probably was the United Fruit Company who had a large plantation there. We had potential oil exploration. We had a number of Americans who were involved in the agricultural production, coffee, some bananas, sugar, and some mining. It was fairly broad in economic interests.

Q: *Did the United Fruit Company have a disproportionate influence there or not when you were there?*

PRYCE: They didn't. I think they had had at one point but I think they had a more progressive point of view at that time. They didn't have the influence they once had. We also had good relationships with the labor unions who were, we thought, largely responsible labor unions and that the communists who at one point had been very influential in the unions had really lost influence. I'm thinking now we had a tire manufacturing company; Goodyear I think had a big operation. I think we were also involved in pharmaceuticals and to a small degree in petrochemicals. It was a broad interest.

Q: *Nat Davis, a well known figure in the Foreign Service and at one point director general of the Foreign Service, was our ambassador wasn't he?*

PRYCE: Yes, he was.

Q: *He was in Chile when all hell broke lose there. How did he operate?*

PRYCE: When I got there he had already been nominated, or it was clear that he was a front runner to be considered as ambassador to Chile. He again operated across the board. He had had

close relationships with the more liberal party, Mendez Montenegro, who was in power during most of his tenure. I think the embassy had generally considered that the more liberal party would win the elections but they did not so we were very careful with the conservative MLN who did win the elections. Ambassador Davis very carefully balanced our relationships to maintain a positive relationship with the government in power and at the same time maintain our relationship with the opposition party.

Q: *What about the Guatemalan military? I assume we had attachés there. Were they part of the equation?*

PRYCE: They certainly were. They were an influential force. As I say President Arana had been the commander of the armed forces and the president who took office after President Arana was Laugerud Garcia who had been chief of staff of the military. He turned out to be an intelligent leader and a person who tried I think to be evenhanded and correct in both his political posture and in his views with us and with others. There was definitely a strong military influence on the government, on the government people. These elections took place not too much before I left but there was a definite military influence.

Q: *Did our attachés have good contacts there?*

PRYCE: They did, and to the best of my knowledge our attachés were faithful to U.S. policy of in effect trying to keep the military out of politics and also trying to dampen the sometimes tendency of the military to become more involved than they might. They tried to inculcate the military with professionalism with limited success at times. But this certainly was the policy and I don't think that there was secret backtracking on that. We had a very effective mil group commander, Colonel Muninger, who died in a line-of-duty helicopter accident working with the Guatemala military. We also had a very effective defense attaché.

Q: *What about Cuban influence at this point, how did we see that?*

PRYCE: I am trying to think back. I don't think we saw that as a major problem. It must not have been. I'd have to refresh my memory but it was not as I recollect. The Guatemalan government had no relationship with the Cuban government and there was fairly little Cuban influence with the exception of money that I think the Cubans were funneling to some of these insurgent groups.

Q: *At this particular point in time, I have the impression that the various Central American governments and Mexico were all pursuing sort of their own policy and there was no looking at this as a whole which later became much more important as events in Nicaragua developed. Was this true?*

PRYCE: I would say that's right. Eventually Nicaragua and El Salvador as they developed, put a much greater focus because there were armed insurgents who were trying to overthrown elected democracies, especially in Salvador, and there was a problem. I'm getting my time frames mixed up but I'm remembering later on when Ambassador Bowdler was assistant secretary we were trying to get the Nicaraguans to get Somoza to leave and accept a democratic successor. At one

point we thought there was a chance of doing that but Somoza kept hearing from his personal buddies in the Congress and elsewhere that there was no need for him to leave. It was very difficult for the State Department to have an effective policy of getting Somoza out when the government was speaking with two voices. But that was later on.

At this time I don't think there was not a worry on the U.S. government as there was later in terms of what was happening in El Salvador. The conflict had not broiled up at that point. In Nicaragua we were again - I remember Ambassador Bob White at that time I think was DCM in Nicaragua - worrying very much about how we can try to foment democracy and there were others in the State Department, in every country where we were trying to strengthen the support for democracy. But there was not that overall focus on Central America that came later.

Q: *When did Davis leave?*

PRYCE: He must have left in late '71 or early '72 and then Bill Bowdler became ambassador. He came from El Salvador to Guatemala and he was a very, very effective ambassador. I think he was ambassador for two years. I remember one of the things he did was he thoroughly covered the country. He went to every province and he again, I think, was very much in control of our policy which was an embassy wide policy of trying to promote democracy, trying to promote stability, and at the same time also working on economic development.

Q: *Tell me, this election which was annulled you might say...*

PRYCE: Yes. Ambassador Bowdler had left by that time. He had been called back to be deputy assistant secretary of State for Central American Affairs and Frank Meloy was our ambassador during the electoral period.

Q: *How did things develop from the embassy perspective and policy and all of that? Here we had been promoting democracy and then you have this election and all of a sudden the electricity went off when the returns were going the wrong way for the government in power.*

PRYCE: There was consternation and we made some representations that this was not healthy but in the end we accepted what happened. I remember sending a cable - it was one of the few that I kept - because I felt that my job was to let everyone know that the elections were being stolen. As you remember you had to get permission from the Department to send cables to all the other posts. The ambassador was happy to have us send the cable to Washington on the morning after the elections when it was clear that they were being stolen. It was basically announcing to one and all that there was a robbery taking place and that the elections were being stolen so that Washington was very much aware of what was happening. As I said we made representations but we did not go in and say we are going to break relations or we are going to cut off your aid. In essence we accepted the results.

Q: *When did the quasi election take place?*

PRYCE: It must have taken place in early 1974.

Q: *This was shortly before you left?*

PRYCE: It was about six months before I left. It was contested but then we were a little stuck because the candidate who didn't win fairly quickly accepted the results. It was a little difficult for us to be a little more catholic than the pope. As it was happening we were in there saying don't let this happen, and there was some talk about whether Fuentes Moore would accept the results or whether he would try to rally support even to the point of trying to get support from the military.

You basically had two military candidates; you had Laugerud Garcia and his chief of staff and Rios Montt who was one of the senior generals running against each other. At that point very frankly, Fuentes Moore's loyalty to the military was greater than his loyalty to democracy in the sense that he felt that the country would be torn apart. To give him his due he probably felt that the earlier real civil strife would erupt again and it had gone down so he basically did not want to rip the country apart again and he accepted the results. Once that happened it was difficult for us to be more catholic than the pope in a sense. We accepted the results which were accepted by the opposition party.

Q: *You had mentioned that we put a great deal of effort into making sure that people didn't get shot and that sort of thing. Why would this be happening?*

PRYCE: Well, because there were still these great mistrusts. There was a segment of the MLN which did not really believe in democracy and felt that as long as these insurgents...

Q: *MLN being to the right?*

PRYCE: The right. MLN is the Momento Liberation Nacional. It was not the liberal party which was Partido Liberal which was more to the left but not extreme left and not controlled by the communists. There were elements, goons, in the right wing parties who simply felt that their opponents would ruin the country were they to take power. They believed that these people were completely controlled by the communists, the Soviet Union and Cuba, and that they had to be eliminated. There was this temptation to take violence in their hands. There was a tradition of violence in Guatemala and people acted on those sentiments at times, much to our consternation.

Q: *What sort of things were you getting back from Washington after the election, anything in particular?*

PRYCE: Basically in the end we were getting back, the opposition is accepting results so who are we not to accept them. We then went ahead and tried to stem the flow of violence as much as possible and to work with the people who were elected.

Q: *Did you have any problem as chief of the political section or the embassy as a whole with the junior officers who usually tend to feel these things strongest the first time they have been up against this sort of thing?*

PRYCE: I don't think I had a problem, no, because we were all of one mind. We were working very hard to try to make democracy work and we did have our say. In essence we effectively let Washington know what was happening and made our recommendations. I guess in that day and time in the service as a whole, there really was more discipline. You had your opportunity, and certainly we were not constrained on our reporting. We were able to report things as we saw them and to have Washington know how things were developing. My colleague, among others, was Don Johnson who later went on to be ambassador to Mongolia and who is now deeply involved working to solve the attempts to bring peace to Northern Ireland; he is working for Senator Mitchell now. I think all of us were in it together in trying to get the word out, and we got the word out. We were frustrated that we didn't make a little stronger representation but the ambassador reported. He made his views known and Washington was not about to make a major issue of this at this point and we kept it that way.

Q: *What were you getting from the political opposition in the country? Were they coming to you?*

PRYCE: They were. As I said in the beginning they were coming to us and saying, "Gee whiz this is not right. Can't you do something about it?" We said we would see what can be done. Then they were coming and saying, "We're really worried about our personal safety." We told them we would do what we could to help them, and we did. One of those things where I think the U.S. government may have made a difference, at least for a while, was in terms of helping to keep some of the opposition leaders alive. Eventually several of them were killed.

Q: *You left there in '74, where to?*

JOHN A. FERCH
Assistant Director, USAID
Guatemala City (1971-1975)

Ambassador John A. Ferch was born in Toledo, Ohio on February 6, 1936. He received his BA from Princeton University in 1958 and his MA from the University of Michigan in 1964. As a member of the Foreign Service, he served in countries including Argentina, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Cuba, and Honduras. Ambassador Ferch was interviewed by William E. Knight on September 27, 1991.

FERCH: Bill Bowdler was assigned to Guatemala and he asked me to go with him. For me the move was attractive because there was a bigger AID program. So I went with Bill to Guatemala.

Q: *This was what year?*

FERCH: This was 1971. I was in El Salvador from 1969-71 and then went to Guatemala, which is right next door you know and literally about 150 miles up the road.

I went there doing the same job, but a bigger job. Once again we thoroughly enjoyed ourselves. Guatemala is a fabulous country touristically and we had the good fortune of being there between the nasty mindedness of the Guatemalans. The revolution in Guatemala, which began in 1960 with the uprising of Jan Sosa and continues to this day, was in a pause, except for the first nine months we were in Guatemala. During that time we were shepherded around with guards, etc. After that, Sue and I literally traveled over all of the country, taking Embassy 4-wheel drive vehicles. It is a beautiful, beautiful country...volcanoes, lakes, Indian culture, colonial towns.

So I progressed professionally and enjoyed myself. I enjoyed all of my posts.

Q: *Was that soon after Nat Davis? Did Bowdler succeed Nat Davis?*

FERCH: Yes. I am almost certain Bowdler succeeded Nat. Nat was my big daddy in the Foreign Service. You know we have had so many programs in the Foreign Service in which people are always trying to think of ways to do things better and somehow they sort of wither away. When I came into the Service, this is backtracking now, every new officer had a senior mentor assigned to him. Nat was my mentor. That program didn't last long. He was very nice, very helpful.

So I stayed in Central America six years. By the end of that time, 1975, I had been abroad almost 11 years and that was long enough. The oldest child was 15 and it was time to go back to the States. I also wanted senior training. I think I was an "old" FSO- 3 by that time. I don't remember all of my promotion dates, but I must have been a 0-3. I was assigned to the War College.

GEORGE F. JONES
Political Officer
Guatemala City (1974-1977)

George F. Jones was born in Texas in 1935. He graduated from Wabash College in 1955 and received a Master's Degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and Stanford University. His postings abroad have included Quito, Accra, Caracas, Vienna, Guatemala City, San Jose and Santiago, with an ambassadorship to Guyana. Mr. Jones was interviewed in 1996 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: *You left Vienna in 1974, then where did you go?*

JONES: To Guatemala. I had had my excursion tour out of Latin America and I was now ready to come back into it. So I looked around for a job in Latin America and there were several things under discussion and I remember it was three weeks before we were due to leave Vienna, my successor was arriving, and I still didn't have an assignment. I called up the guy in personnel who was handling my transfer and he said, "Haven't those orders been issued? You're going to Guatemala, everybody here knows that, didn't anybody tell you?" [laughter]

Q: *So in 1974 you were off to Guatemala. What was your job?*

JONES: I was head of the political section. There were two other officers in the section, Donald Johnson and Raymond Burghardt. I had dinner with Don two nights ago, he has just completed a tour as Ambassador to Mongolia, and the State Department's candidate to succeed him there is Ray Burghardt. [laughter]

Q: *I hope they've improved their quarters. I interviewed Joe Lake who ran the mimeograph off of the bathtub with a piece of plywood put over the back of the bathtub. I think at one time they were working in an apartment house where his wife and his son were both involved in helping run the office because there was nobody else around. [laughter]*

JONES: I would also hope that it has improved somewhat. Although I gather that conditions remain about as rough in Mongolia as they are anywhere. Among other reasons, because of the terrible climate.

Q: *Well, back to Guatemala.*

JONES: Yes. So we had a very high quality political section there that went on to do great things.

Q: *You were in Guatemala from 1974 to when?*

JONES: From 1974 to 1977.

Q: *Okay, that was three years, when you arrived in 1974, what was the situation in Guatemala, politically and economically?*

JONES: Politically that particular period was something of a lull between storms. The President was Kjell Laugerud. A general with a Norwegian name, who was probably the best of the military presidents that Guatemala had in the post World War II era. He was not a saint, by any means, but he was by temperament more of a conciliator and less of a tyrant than most of his colleagues who made it to the presidency. So it was a military dictatorship, on paper it was elected, but the elections had been repeatedly stolen over the years. We were able to have reasonably good relations with his government, he certainly sought good relations with the United States. Because the level of human rights abuses was relatively low at that point, we were not under such tremendous pressure as we were both earlier and later, to really turn the screws on the Guatemalan government.

Q: *What were American interests there at this time?*

JONES: The issue that took up the largest single chunk of my time was the Guatemala/Belize dispute. Guatemala claimed Belize was a part of its territory. There was considerable concern that with a military government in power, the Guatemalan army might simply take it into its head at some point to invade the territory and seize it. Belize at that time was still a British colony, and because of the dispute there were no diplomatic relations between Guatemala and Britain, but there were consular relations. One of the nice aspects of Latin America is that, I think

uniquely in the world, they long ago invented this doctrine that political relations and consular relations are separate, and if you break relations with a country you don't withdraw your consul--it's very pragmatic, you've got to figure that your citizens have got to travel to the other country anyway, and so you need somebody there to issue the visas. So Guatemala never closed down its consulate in Britain, and they allowed the British to have a consul there. Of course the British named someone who was senior enough to be an Ambassador and functioned as an Ambassador. We worked very closely with him in exchanging information and looking for ways to resolve the dispute--the British of course were interested in getting it off of their back. They had to station troops in Belize which they would much rather not have there, they would like to be able to pull them out and get disengaged and disinvolved from this remote corner of the world. Our interests largely coincided with theirs because we were very interested in not having a war in the Americas, not having a military action between any two countries, including Guatemala and Belize, with all of the consequences that we saw later in the Falklands. So I spent a large part of my time--you would get pieces of information that the dispute had heated up, or it had cooled down, and you were always involved in trying to assess just how likely it was that the Guatemalans would take some hot-headed action. And also analyzing various proposals and ideas for resolving the dispute.

One of the real problems the Guatemalans had was in terms of the maritime boundary; if you drew the boundaries by conventional rules, they would have a very narrow corridor out into the Caribbean. So one of the solutions to the dispute was to try to encourage both sides to agree on modified maritime limits--there was no disposition on the part of Belize or of the British to cede any of the land territory, but there were indications that they were willing to compromise on the issue of the maritime boundary. That would solve one of the Guatemalans' problems and might help push the overall dispute along to resolution. During my three years, we didn't get anywhere. These territorial disputes move extremely slowly if they move at all. I think we were essentially pretty much where we were when I left as when I arrived. I did feel that the U.S. influence, exercised primarily through the embassy, had helped restrain the hot-heads in Guatemala--had helped convince them that if they did invade Belize they would have not only the British but also the Americans very much against them.

Q: *The British couldn't counter an attack with their troops as a response?*

JONES: They could have held off the Guatemalans until reinforcements arrived, no question.

Q: *I assume our policy was that we wouldn't recognize and we would look very hard on anybody who seized territories.*

JONES: That's right.

Q: *Was this spelled out again and again to the Guatemalans?*

JONES: Yes, mainly in private. We tried to avoid embarrassing them by rubbing it in more than we had to publicly. It was our assessment, which we had to make over and over again in reporting to the Department, that the Guatemalans were unlikely to attack. The British were always more nervous than we were (understandably given their situation). The British were

always alarmed by some new piece of intelligence or other information that they interpreted as meaning the Guatemalans were getting ready to move. It was the embassy's judgment that it was very unlikely that the Guatemalans would in fact do this, that whatever else you thought of the Guatemalans, their leadership was not stupid and it was not going to plunge into this, given the obvious consequences. For whatever reasons that was the right analysis since no Guatemalan action ever took place then or later.

Q: *What about American commercial interests in Guatemala?*

JONES: They were not great, there wasn't a huge amount of American commercial interest. The other major issue that consumed our time (at least in the political section) was in the broadest sense, the issue of human rights. From the perspective of U.S. human rights organizations there was only one aspect to Guatemala, which was the aspect of government security forces killing innocent people, which certainly occurred in Guatemala, before, during and after my time there. But from the U.S. Government's perspective, the situation had other aspects as well. One of them was the fact that Guatemala had and has the oldest guerrilla movement in the Americas, it has had a continuous guerrilla movement going on since 1960. There was no indication that it was anywhere close to coming to power, but its activities were a concern to us. Then, and perhaps the greatest concern of all at that time, there was simply the Guatemalan propensity for killing each other for political reasons. Guatemalans are wonderful people and I enjoyed tremendously knowing them, but I never served among a people who would so casually eliminate each other as they would in Guatemala. Most politicians carried weapons all of the time. A significant number of my closest contacts were killed either during the time I was there or after I left. Meme Colon, the former mayor of Guatemala City, Danilo Barillas and a host of others. Trying to report on and analyze this self- destructiveness in which the Guatemalans were engaged, was a major preoccupation. The specifically human rights side of it was a growing concern because of growing interest in the United States. First of all we had the amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act in the Ford administration and I remember standing in the embassy in Guatemala and listening to Jimmy Carter's inaugural address on the radio, in which he used the term human rights over and over.

Q: *That was January 20, 1977.*

JONES: Right. So there was a trend in the United States and also there was a trend in Guatemala, particularly after things grew worse and worse. As near as we could tell (there was a lot of debate about it) Laugerud had control over who would succeed him and he picked (I won't say the worst General, because there were certainly a lot of competitors for the worst possible General he could have picked) one of the worst people in the senior levels of the Guatemalan army, Romeo Lucas, that he could have possibly picked to succeed him. Something we didn't understand then and I don't think we ever understood was if he felt compelled, if he felt he didn't have any choice, or if there was some mysterious tie to this guy that we didn't know about. We thought Laugerud had done a reasonably good job, given the fact that he was a military dictator, in restraining the violent forces that were involved in Guatemala. And to sort of throw it all away by turning the government over to a troglodyte, a Neanderthal, was incredible. And things didn't get any better for years after that.

Q: *I take it that you didn't have a United Fruit company type of thing, or some kind of American firm that had...*

JONES: Honestly I can't remember if United Fruit was still active in Guatemala at that time or not.

Q: *Well, you're answering my question. So it was not on your plate as an issue.*

JONES: I think a lot of things had happened, the nature of the banana business had changed, it became less profitable, so that U.S. companies were not as dominant in it as they had been previously, and no one company had the dominance that United Fruit had once had.

Q: *What about the Cuba factor at this time?*

JONES: Not in a striking way, the way it had been in Venezuela with the landing of a boat on the seacoast, or that it was in a number of other places. It was clear the Cubans were giving assistance to the guerrillas, they were giving military training to the guerrillas who went off to Cuba. There probably was financial and military equipment support as well. Although, I think the guerrillas did pretty well financing themselves and arming themselves, by domestic actions, banks were always getting robbed, and it was always a nice question as to whether a given incident had been carried out by criminals or if they were guerrillas who were collecting money for the revolution. The line between the criminals and guerrillas got a little fuzzy at times. They also would stage a raid and capture some weapons. I don't think Cuba was critical to the continuance of the guerrilla movement, it was doing all right on its own at a relatively low level.

Q: *How were its relations with its neighbor to the north, Mexico?*

JONES: They were okay. The Guatemalans worried about and were a little suspicious of the Mexicans as any of the Latin American countries are of a larger neighbor. But they were not tense, I remember the president of Mexico came to visit Guatemala toward the end of my time. You had Guatemalans across the border and in Mexico, but I think they were not the numbers of them that there were later, and you did not yet have them organized into formal camps as they later became. So that wasn't as much of an irritant to relations with Mexico as it subsequently became. Irritants on both sides because the Mexicans didn't want to have these people on their territory and yet the Guatemalans felt that the Mexicans were allowing the guerrillas to use Mexican territory as a base, there were people who were slipping out of the camps and moving back across the border to cause trouble.

Q: *How were relations with the other two neighbors, El Salvador and Honduras?*

JONES: They were good, there were no particular problems. There were also military governments in both of those countries at this time, so they were birds of a feather. There was no reason not to get along well.

Q: *I'm not sure about the timing on this, but while you were there did the Somoza regime go down the tubes? Had it collapsed while you were there?*

JONES: No, that was a little later. It was in 1979 when Somoza was overthrown. That had not become a Central American issue at that point.

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

JONES: The Ambassador the first couple of years that I was there was Frank Meloy, who went from Guatemala to Lebanon and was murdered in Lebanon almost immediately after arriving. Most of us who had known him were still there in the embassy and it was a great shock to the embassy staff when we heard the news. He was succeeded by Davis Eugene Boster, but everybody called him Gene. I think he was there a year, maybe less than a year before I left.

Q: *From your perspective how did they find the country? They've got a military dictatorship, our interests were not overly great, and most of the time it sounds like we were nagging at them about human rights.*

JONES: That's true. I'm tempted to say that was true of most of our embassies in Latin America. That's changing and hopefully that will change entirely someday. As countries become industrialized and full participants in the world economy, then you have a mature dialogue, there are all kinds of common issues that you can talk about. When the countries are not yet at that level then the connection, the relationship, between the United States and the country, is much less rich and varied. A lot of what you are dealing with them on is complaints, you are nagging at them. Or they at you to a lesser degree, but still to some degree. Because the thing that Washington wants you to do above everything else, is to get them to stop causing trouble, whether over a border controversy, or human rights, or a military coup, or their expropriation of an American company. Those were the things which were the big issues during most of my time in Latin America. Because their economy and their internal development hadn't reached the level where those irritants simply wouldn't occur--there would be no question of their invading a neighbor, there would be no question of their expropriating a foreign company, they wouldn't be abusing human rights, there wouldn't be military coups. Those things are all characteristics of less developed countries and when you get beyond that stage, those are no longer issues. So the U.S. Embassy is no longer nagging at you about them. [laughter]

Q: *What about, from the political officer's perspective, the contacts you would make? Some of those countries obviously don't know anything about that, but you have the ten families of any Central American country--did you find that there were people you went to, other than the Generals?*

JONES: There was not an economic oligarchy in Guatemala as there--at that time--I'm groping to say whether or not it's a factor of time or simply the difference between one country and another. I think it's probably more a factor of time, not only in Guatemala but in other countries as well. Back in the period when coffee was overwhelmingly the export, the coffee plantation owners not only in Guatemala but in other coffee exporting countries, they did constitute an oligarchy. You had similar situations in other countries where you had one dominant crop and its control was in the hands of a few families. Again, there is a factor of development that occurs here. There are infinite stages of development that you go through, not just a simple step of one

day you are less developed and the next day you are developed. They had moved beyond that stage, the economy was more diversified. There were certainly businessmen who exercised political influence, but they were by no means a secret group that was running the country. The military ran Guatemala then and for a long time afterwards. Although there were ways in which their interests were allied with those of the powerful businessman and it was quite common for Colonels to--businessmen would take a Colonel and make him a low interest loan or sell him a valuable piece of property at a low price, or something like that in order to establish a relationship with him that they could draw on in the future. Nevertheless, the military really governed Guatemala in its own interest, in its own perception of Guatemala's interest and it wasn't being manipulated by other groups.

Q: *Did we have a military representative, an attaché, or program there that was dealing with the military, military to military?*

JONES: Yes.

Q: *How did you find this as an instrument for what you wanted to find out about Guatemala?*

JONES: [laughter] I expect you know the answer I'm going to give to that question, because I expect it's the answer you get from everybody. The military attachés were almost useless as sources of information, not only in Guatemala but elsewhere as well. In the first place their function was to be an intelligence officer but they were not professional intelligence officers, most of them were serving a single tour of duty as an attaché. Very few attachés went on to become Generals. It was not regarded as a career- enhancing specialty in the Army or in any of the services. So it did not attract the best people, they were not professional intelligence officers, they were from another specialty who were dragooned into a tour as an attaché. The Latin American military were smart enough to know that what they did say to a U.S. military attaché was going to be reported and rarely did they say anything that was of any significance or that helped us out. The military attachés used to send in a lot of newspaper clippings to DIA, the Defense Intelligence Agency. We used to joke that that was their main function. In their defense, they had a very hard task, especially in Guatemala, but generally in any of the military dictatorships that I was familiar with. The task of finding out what the military thought and what they were up to, was an extremely--they were a very hard target. They were not talkative about the institution and discussing its intentions with foreigners was, to put it mildly, not encouraged. In Chile it was very tightly controlled, I've forgotten if we observed this in Guatemala, but I wouldn't be surprised. If you were invited anywhere by a foreigner you had to report it to your superiors and it had to be approved before you could go. If you invited a whole bunch of military people, if they decided to go at all they would pick two or three who would be their chosen representatives and everyone else would decline. [laughter]

Q: *From your perspective, what about the role of the Central Intelligence Agency there?*

JONES: I certainly had lots of conflicts and lots of run-ins with the CIA over the years, but they were a different kettle of fish from the attachés. First of all, the CIA people were professional intelligence officers, they were making a career out of it, almost all of them that I knew were very dedicated to their career, very hard working, and they were good quality people. Their

product, the intelligence product was certainly useful. How useful it was varied from country to country and time to time, and a lot of the agency product, too much of it, covered the same areas that the embassy political officers were working on. This was a constant source of irritation, and I don't think they told Washington that much more about normal, overt politics that was of any tremendous interest. The same point could be made about much of our reporting, was there really any need for Washington to know who was in and who was out, and what the inner machinations were of party X compared with party Y. There was an insatiable demand for information from Washington which drove both the embassy and the CIA, and yet one wonders what Washington ever did with the mountains of information that it got. Other than to fill up the files and demonstrate how well informed they were. I always thought that by far, we were the best informed government in the world. We produced the best information of any foreign service in the world. I had much more doubt about our knowing what to do with the information that we got. [laughter] At times I think there was a lot of information for information's sake, rather than relating it to things that we really needed to know.

But having said that, there was a part of CIA's reporting dealing with what the communist party was thinking and again, varying from country to country and time to time, but there were times and places where they had really good penetration into the leadership of the extreme left and were able to give us some really useful information about what the left were up to. They were not much more successful that the military attachés with the military target. Again, that was just an extremely difficult target to penetrate. If you want to talk to a political leader, even a far left political leader, it's relatively easy to get to him and being a political animal he wants to talk, he likes to talk about politics. It's very hard to get to a foreign military officer, he's on a military base, he's constantly associating with his military colleagues, he's cut off from the world. That's one of the major problems, why there has been so much difficulty with Latin American military over the decades, because they are so isolated. Much more than our military, they are so cut off from the rest of the society and when you get to them, their whole training is to keep their mouths shut and salute, it's not to sit down and spill their guts to a foreigner. By and large the CIA's information on the military was very scarce and we didn't get a lot out of it.

Q*: Central America and up into Mexico, from the people I've interviewed, it's always seemed to be a place where the American labor movement or labor attachés, spent a considerable amount of time working in there, more than any other place. This seemed to be one of the main thrusts of our policy over a fairly extended period of time. Was this true in Guatemala when you were there?*

JONES: We did not have a full time labor attaché. One of the officers in my Section spent part time on labor. Many aspects of Guatemalan society were sad, it was sad that they kept killing each other, it was sad that the military had seized power and had no inclination to give it up and let people choose their own government, and the human rights violations were tragic. The story of the labor movement is just another very sad chapter in Guatemalan history. The efforts to try to build up the labor movement--I think the American Institute for Free Labor Development, AIFLD (which is a branch of the AFL-CIO) did very useful work in bringing labor leaders to the U.S. for training, running training courses in Guatemala, and in many other countries, but it was a very uphill battle. The business class had no interest in unions, no belief in unions, they would

lock them out and break the union at the first opportunity that they possibly could. It was not a happy story.

Q: *When you were there, and again this was 1974 - 1977, were there any major events such as earthquakes, coups, state visits?*

JONES: [laughter] I'm glad you mentioned the word earthquake. We were almost through with Guatemala without mentioning the most extraordinary event of my time there. The February 1976 earthquake, which was a 7 on the Richter Scale. Because it hit at 3:00 in the morning and the homes of the poor were normally adobe with no reinforcement whatsoever, the loss of life was enormous. I think there were about 30,000 people killed in the earthquake. It was one of the most lethal earthquakes, I think it ranks up there among the top 20 in the history of the world. Because everybody was home in bed and the roofs fell in on them and killed thousands of people.

Q: *Where were you?*

JONES: At home in bed. We were very lucky because we had spent some time house hunting and we had found a nice modern house and we said that we would take it, and we signed a contract on it, but there was some refurbishing that needed to be done. That was all agreed to with the landlord and then the day came when we were to sign the lease and we were told that the landlord had decided to rent it somebody else. So the house we wound up in was not nearly as attractive a house, but it had been built by a former Minister of Public Works, as his own home, so it was very well built. [laughter] The house had no damage from the quake, we lost a number of personal possessions, glasses fell off of shelves, and vases got broken. Days or weeks later when we drove by and the saw the house that we had been intending to rent, part of the roof had fallen in and all sorts of things had happened to it. We were very glad that we had not gotten it after all. [laughter]

Q: *What did the embassy do with this disaster? How did we respond?*

JONES: There were a few people who actually slept through the earthquake, amazingly. Those who didn't, I don't think anybody went back to bed, it was not an experience to go back to sleep after. After we had reassured our family (we had four children between the ages of 7 and 14) and surveyed the household, I went in to the embassy. In the middle and upper class sections of Guatemala City there wasn't a lot of visible damage. A few tiles off of roofs and so on, but there wasn't the impression that a lot had happened. Actually, I was more impressed once I got into the embassy because the books were off of shelves, water coolers were overturned--there was more visible damage inside the embassy than there was in my own house. We found out later that some of the copper pipes, plumbing and so on had been broken and they had to be replaced. The DCM, George Andrews, was already there and told me there was only one working telephone in the embassy, the switchboard was out. The phone was down on one of the lower floors, so he went to his office and told me to stay by the phone. The first thing we did was to call the Operations Center and report what had happened. Somehow the news organizations found out that was the one working phone in the embassy (probably from the State Department because we

had given them the number when we had reported in) and so I found myself talking to CBS and other media people calling to find out what was going on in Guatemala.

Of course the embassy's long-term response took place over weeks and months afterwards. Everything else in the embassy ceased, in terms of normal activities. For the next several weeks I forgot about the Belize/Guatemala controversy and human rights violations and worked full time on the earthquake--all of the details of getting the assistance mobilized and the right kind of assistance. We began a major relief effort, we got the military in Panama to send in helicopters and field hospitals and tents and that kind of thing. AID mobilized its resources and there was a lot of assistance given to rebuilding people's homes. In fact, later on the Peace Corps was active in trying to teach people how to build an adobe home but reinforce it so that the roof would not fall in.

One of the characteristics of well-publicized natural disasters is that everyone in the world wants to be helpful and all kinds of assistance arrives that is not useful. So we had to try to get people to concentrate on what the needs were--try to get the Guatemalans to tell us what they really needed and then get that word out to those who were trying help. It was an exciting time, because we felt that we were really doing something worthwhile. A lot of overtime was put in. We got an urgent request--I was called at home to say that a NIACT Immediate telegram --NIACT for night action--had come in that required an immediate response justifying the need for assistance--probably for Congressional testimony by someone. I and an AID officer went in and we drafted a response at 3:00 in the morning to this telegram. I made the decision not to wake the Ambassador or the DCM; we had extensively discussed the arguments for relief aid in the preceding days. The next morning Ambassador Meloy read it and said maybe he should ask us to write all our telegrams at 3 a.m. That did not normally happen, very few other times, if ever, did I send a telegram out at 3:00 in the morning in the course of my career. We had the feeling of being part of a common effort, embassy and AID were working together more closely than we normally did, normally we were off each doing our own thing. Here we were working hand in hand. It was very rewarding. There was something of a let down afterwards, I'm told that the psychologists say that there is always a post-stress syndrome. You are doing fine at the time of greatest stress, but when it's over your psychological and physical adrenalin disappears and you're back to normal and you no longer have all of the excitement and the special things to do and you go through a period of depression. We got through all of that and eventually got back to normal.

Q: *By any chance, were people talking about the horrible example of how our Ambassador acted? I think in Nicaragua some years earlier when there was a bad earthquake, he and his wife wouldn't allow anybody to use their house.*

JONES: That was in 1972. We didn't have any situation like that. Of course we had a career Ambassador in Guatemala and a very fine one. One of the things which made it such a rewarding experience was that there wasn't anything of that kind. We had the military and AID and the embassy all working together. There wasn't the feeling that anybody was letting the side down, or refusing to make their best effort in the catastrophe. I think it was really an outstanding case of cooperation and coordination among all U.S. government elements. I thought at the time that there should have been a greater recognition of it by the Department. Of course there is no

question that it loomed larger being on the scene in Guatemala than it undoubtedly loomed from the perspective of the Potomac. [laughter]

HOWARD L. STEELE
Project Officer, USAID
Guatemala (1976-1977)

Dr. Howard L. Steele was born in Pennsylvania and graduated from both Washington and Lee University and Penn State University. Assignments abroad have included Brazil, Guatemala, Bolivia, Honduras and Sri Lanka. Dr. Steele was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: Let's do it chronologically. Guatemala was your first one?

STEELE: Yes. 1976-'77.

Q: What were you doing there?

STEELE: I put together a loan proposal for the Agency for International Development mission in Guatemala with the help of some wonderful people that I brought in, lots of them, specialists from around the USDA and other colleges and universities. We put together a loan proposal to build interior assembly markets owned by indigenous Mayan producers in the highlands of western Guatemala. The idea was that you kept, protected and stored this beautiful produce that they were producing. They were producing temperate vegetables and fruits in the highlands. They also had some semi-temperate things like okra and other tropical products, pineapples and others, in the lower lands. But mostly these centers would have been in the highlands where they would assemble the product and there would be protected storage, then truckloads of high quality produce could be assembled to be shipped to Nicaragua, to ship to Honduras, exported to the U.S., or wherever, doing the grading close to the point of production, and then also sending well-graded produce into the central market. That fell down on hard times. The loan paper was approved. We had 2 indigenous leaders that were agreeing to cooperate with each other and blend their organizations of indigenous farmers together. Then what happened? The U.S. withdrew its financial support from the Guatemalan government, and the guerrilla warfare really got bad. I was visiting Guatemala with my youngest daughter in 2001, the first time I'd been back into the highlands, since about 1980. I was pleased to see they have freezing plants and beautiful fruits and vegetables being produced all over the highlands. Our ideas were being used. The ones who first put our ideas into practice was a producers' organization called Quatro Pinos (Four Pines.) So, you know, I didn't see it develop while I was there, but it came on later.

DAVIS EUGENE BOSTER
Ambassador
Guatemala (1976-1979)

Ambassador David Eugene Boster was born in 1920. He served during World War II on Harvard's Communications Training Center Staff. His Foreign Service career included positions in Mexico, Poland, and ambassadorships to Bangladesh and Guatemala. Ambassador Boster was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: *You went to Guatemala as Ambassador in 1976 and stayed till 1979. How did this assignment come about?*

BOSTER: I got this assignment because after the third coup, I was getting pretty frazzled out there. I was tired. So when I returned to Washington I spoke to Carol Laise, who was then Director General. I told her I would welcome another assignment. She said she would keep her eyes open. That resulted in a telegram in due course saying that the Department intended to propose me to Montevideo. That looked alright to me and I agreed to the proposal. Then came a second message saying that Montevideo was not available, but that the Department wanted me to go to Guatemala to take Frank Meloy's place, who had just been named as Ambassador to Lebanon, where he was murdered by terrorists within ten days of arrival. So I went to Guatemala.

Q: *What were US interests in Guatemala during the 1976-78 period?*

BOSTER: Some of our main interests were in the country's economic development. Our AID program was of course much more modest than it had been in Dacca. We were interested in the development of credit facilities and agricultural production. In general, we were trying to foster increasing cooperation between the two countries. Toward the end of my stay, and even more so after I left, the Nicaraguan problem began to loom in importance. These discussion were primarily undertaken by Bill Bowdler, our Assistant Secretary of State, who visited and consulted with the government. During my time, the main interest was in maintaining good relations. We were interested in a good aid program and stable relations.

Q: *It is often claimed that American business interests drive our policy toward Latin America. Did you have any pressure of that kind?*

BOSTER: It was not the case in Guatemala. I don't remember any specific issues which were raised in response to American business interests. There were US businesses in Guatemala, but they were going along fine.

Q: *How was the Guatemalan government while you were there?*

BOSTER: My principal contacts were with President Laugerud who was in office for the major part of my assignment. I would see him with some frequency. He was extremely cordial. Spoke excellent English and a wonderful person to deal with. The Foreign Minister was one of the ablest people I have ever known. It was an ideal situation--a congenial, intelligent President and a congenial, highly intelligent Foreign Minister. One problem we had to resolve during my tour there dealt with the draft of the US government's report on human rights, as mandated by

Congress. They were very upset about us preparing a report on another country's human rights record. They felt this was an intrusion in their internal affairs, that no one had a right to such intrusion, except maybe the United Nations, and certainly that no single country had that right. As far as the Guatemalans were concerned, we could keep our aid if it was conditioned on passage of a human rights test. Brazil took that same line with us later. Frankly, in my own mind, I thought the Guatemalans may have had a reasonable position.

Q: *Did you report this reaction back to Washington?*

BOSTER: I reported the Guatemalan reaction but not my own view. I remember that some people in the Foreign Service, including me, felt in the beginning that this was some kind of unnecessary complication of our relationships with other governments, that human rights in foreign lands may not have been our business, and that in any case, our pursuit of it was to the detriment of our relationships with other countries. They would have been happier to shove the whole issue under the rug and felt that if the human rights proponents, particularly in the State Department, could be kept under control, matters would be far better.

Of course, since 1976, US interests in human rights around the world have strengthened and have become a basic part of our approach to foreign policy. In some relationships--with Romania, for example--it is key. I was wrong to think of it as mere meddling. In fact, the US support for human rights has worked and we no longer think it is anything strange.

Q: *What role did you think CIA was playing in Guatemala. Were you comfortable with it?*

BOSTER: Yes.

Q: *Were you at all concerned with what was going on in Nicaragua?*

BOSTER: This problem began to loom as I was leaving. In the period that followed me, this problem became extremely important. But I was not involve very much at all, except perhaps in my last few days at post.

Q: *How about the internal situation in Guatemala?*

BOSTER: It had been pretty bad before I came. It was never very good, even while I was there. People were being killed, but compared to what it had been earlier--people told me of seeing bodies floating down rivers each morning. Laugerud came in as a healer, to some degree. He was much more moderate than his predecessor, according to the conventional wisdom in Guatemala. Things were quieter. It was not absolutely normal, but an improvement over the recent past. There was a right vs. left syndrome with the EGP, a far left terrorist organization, creating the major problems. It was not a major threat to the government, however.

Q: *I get the feeling that our relationships with Guatemala were not very important in the 1976-78 period. Am I wrong?*

BOSTER: I certainly don't want to leave that impression. We were watching closely what was happening to the left and whether it would represent a threat. But since the situation was better than it had been, relatively speaking.

Q: *Did the US Ambassadors in Central America at the time communicate and exchange views?*

BOSTER: Our dialogue was principally with Washington. There were annual Chiefs of Mission conferences for all US Ambassadors to Latin America, not just Central.

Q: *Did Mexico loom as the big colossus to the North?*

BOSTER: Not in Guatemala, no.

Q: *How about Belize?*

BOSTER: Belize did represent a problem. This was an issue between the British and the Guatemalans because Guatemala felt that Belize was their territory. There was some tension between the UK and Guatemala. The Guatemalans were not talking to the British so that to some degree we served as a transmission belt. It helped each side understand where the other stood. We did try to ease Guatemala's concern and urged caution and prudence. We tried to do what we could to dampen things down.

Q: *Did you retire from Guatemala?*

BOSTER: Yes.

JOHN T. BENNETT
Deputy Chief of Mission
Guatemala City (1978-1979)

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BENNETT: By 1977, I was becoming itchy about staying in Korea. I had lost my chance for the DCM's job when Sneider decided to replace Dick Ericson with Tom Stern--the two traded jobs, and Ericson went back to become the number two in Political/Military Affairs. Sneider explained that I was doing such important work so well that he couldn't afford to replace me. The Department seemed to think nothing was likely to open up elsewhere that would be very interesting. It looked as if I was trapped in Korea and confronted poor career prospects.

When my wife went back in May of 1977 to look after her mother who had become ill, she also talked to friends in the Department, including Tony Lake. He apparently took an interest, and I got assigned to Guatemala as DCM. I was delighted.

When I arrived in Guatemala, it was already known that I would be Chargé for some period of time. That was gratifying, though it cost me the DCM job in Bangkok, where I had been requested by the new ambassador, Mort Abramowitz. That would have been an even greater job. Unfortunately, the Guatemala assignment was already in concrete -- it was too late to get another person there in time, and he would have to be Chargé.

I arrived in the midst of a general strike over a rise in bus fares. They had risen from 5 to 10 centavos (less than a US cent), after years of being held constant. But this was a poor country and so the cost was significant for the multitude who depended on public transport.

The strike had been developing for some time. The government had asked the US to sell it tear gas and that required State Department approval. Consideration bogged down in a fight between the country desk and the Human Rights Bureau which thought quite rightly that Guatemala's record in this area was dismal.

But the government was running out of tear gas and was getting frantic. After a few days, I realized that this looked like turning into a disaster. Lacking tear gas, the police and the military would use rifles and bullets to maintain order. It was a case where the new arrival could see the likely outcome easier than those on the scene -- probably because I had most recently talked to the people in Washington and had the best sense of what was bothering them and how they thought.

The talks I had had before hand were not very informative. Neither the country desk nor the human rights people had brought up the impending strike or the request for tear gas. They were interested in the overall situation but not the immediate crisis that was building. The human rights guys were more interested in Korea than Guatemala and on that I had a good deal to say -- mainly to the effect that it was often bad, but people weren't being killed (there were rare exceptions). Indeed, overall, Korea was constantly improving life for its people.

And the tear gas business did turn out badly. Approval of the tear gas was delayed, the police did use rifles, and people were killed -- I no longer remember how many. It had done no good to send a message suggesting that this was likely to happen. This incident was the first direct experience I had of the system totally ignoring what was supposedly the best advice that their people in the field could give them. There would be more.

Guatemala had come highly recommended as a tourist attraction. That was to prove to be the case. I began traveling as often as possible, going out into the countryside. My wife and son joined me when they arrived. The country had spectacular weather in the highlands -- cool year round, with a dry and a rainy season. Both the Caribbean and the Pacific were within a few hours driving distance, so that it was possible to warm up and to swim or fish. The volcanoes were near by, they could be climbed, and some were active. Mayan ruins and artifacts from earlier periods (e.g. Olmec) were everywhere. Indians continued to live in what I conjecture was a Mayan form,

modified by centuries of Spanish influence -- their Catholicism was certainly heavily overlaid with pagan belief and forms. There were the relics of the Spanish era, particularly in Antigua which has a picturesque quality despite the ruin wrought by repeated earthquakes.

The *piece de resistance* was the Peten -- the section of the Yucatan Peninsula which Guatemala had not lost to Mexico or Belize. We made several trips there, two by air and one by car that was a bit of a nightmare for a time.

The embassy had vehicles, I got one full-time with a driver, and I had to take at least one bodyguard for most of the things I needed to do. The car trip to the Peten was our first there. There had been torrential rains for a time and bridges were out in many cases. The road itself was unsurfaced, nearly washed out in many places, and no gas has come through on trucks for several days, so the stations were unreliable. We went anyway. It took two days, one day almost to the Caribbean coast where we stayed overnight. And then another to the ruins at Tikal. At one point, we stopped off at an army post and were able to beg five gallons of gas -- which was just enough to get us through. No one would say yes or no, but kept referring us to someone else down the chain of command. Finally, a private who was actually in charge of the pump, decided how much we were to get. And then didn't accept any money -- though we gave him some cigarettes.

Tikal itself was something to see. A city of temples in the middle of the jungle, with the whole works -- strange animals, monkeys swinging through the trees, a heat and humidity hard to describe. Facilities were primitive with a capital P. The cabins where tourists stayed were the crumbling facilities that had been used by the archeologists who opened the site years earlier, the beds of rusting iron, the linen stained from years of washing in muddy water and the walls, moldering. The food wasn't much either. Showers delivered a trickle of questionable water. We worried about drinking the water, but in that heat, one had to keep his consumption up. In any case, we all had borderline diarrhea.

On a second trip, we visited another site, Yaxa. My wife drove up with people from the Canadian Embassy and I flew. It had not previously been open. They had cut a road in, indeed they were still doing so as we arrived. We stopped where they were working. The man supervising the crew cutting trees was an American -- he was called Butterfly Bob because he collected them in vast quantities. This was his idea of a vacation. He showed us the skins of the snakes -- big and poisonous -- he had killed in the course of that day. He later presented us with a glass lamp base with dried butterflies collected there inside it.

Nicholas Helmuth was the leader of the expedition. An archeologist, he lectured and raised money in a campaign against the illegal traffic in artifacts that was endemic to the region, as well as developing new sites.

He had not been the first in this area. The raiders had beaten him and had known exactly where to dig -- for example, at the foot of memorial stones (stellae) and into the huge piles of stone that constitute the temple buildings. The stellae, covered with glyphs describing the site and when and by whom it was built, often were badly damaged or destroyed in the process.

We found Mayan graffiti scratched into the soft surface of the stone (more like clay) that had been used to build their structures. We climbed to the top of one temple, entered a chamber that had a view across the top of the jungle, and there were what appeared to be crude sailboats scratched into the wall. It made us wonder if they had had sailboats back then, sometime between BC or up till 1500 AD as it was thought. There were small lakes around, more like ponds, and they hardly seemed navigable for any purpose.

But all of this lay in the future. I had first to meet the hundreds of people who worked or were important to the Embassy. At one end there was Juan Maegli, a classmate at Harvard who I had not in fact met till one of our class reunions. At the other end, would be the Foreign Minister, Ramon Castillo Valdez.

In the Embassy, I had to pay attention to the political counselor, Arnie Isaacs, and the economic officer, Gene Schreiber. The Admin officer had also to be a concern -- he wanted hand-holding and I was going to drive him in any case, as this subject area was always a problem in embassies. The administrative people tended to be the least competent and often the most worn down by life in the foreign service as demands and complaints filled their days. Finally, the consular section was a big operation, one which created more ill will for the US than any other. The consul, however, was both competent and sensitive as to how much and what I wanted to know in order to be satisfied that things were going well.

I was also concerned about Embassy security, after my conversations in Washington. The building was a modern blocky design of concrete with lots of glass. The fence around it was iron pickets, so that those outside could see what was going on inside and could undoubtedly get over it easily.

The entrance to the Embassy building led into a large open lobby at the back of which were the Marine guards, standing behind a desk. My worry was that people were in the office area as soon as they got by the Marines. There was no really secure section, short of the vault and the code room where classified material was kept and transmitted to Washington.

A second worry was that the consular section was on the same ground floor, providing two other entrances to the office area, though each was closed off by a door. The waiting room could contain more than a hundred people. Often, the line of people waiting went out the front door and around the corner and down the street. A couple of terrorists could join the line and acting quickly would have had no trouble entering and perhaps taking over the building.

We did have Guatemalan guards as well as the Marines. But they normally stayed in the basement garage, where the car pool was located. They were Guatemalan police whom we trained, armed, and paid a salary supplement. I felt certain most would act correctly in an emergency, but I had little faith in their initiative. Their physical condition was best portrayed by the fact that only one of my five body guards was able to climb Agua, the 13,000 foot volcano that obliterated Antigua Guatemala (the old Antigua) several hundred years earlier. He was still a soccer player. The others had gotten fat and out of condition doing what body guards do -- sitting around waiting for something to happen.

It was clear that nothing major would happen about improving the security any time in the next year because there was no money and it turned out to take years. I talked with the Security Officer about what could be done without newly appropriated money. One thing was to put locks on doors between sections of the Embassy -- simple bolts that could be closed from either side in an emergency. A second improvement was to install video cameras, so that we could tell what might be happening in halls without exposing ourselves. A third was to install metal doors and keep them closed with key or combination locks so that access was denied to anyone not authorized.

Late in my tour, I also went out for target practice with the Guatemalan guards. My son joined me and got to shoot the same weapons at the range. Firing an Uzi or a shotgun from the hip was a new experience. My point, other than curiosity, was to indicate that the charge was interested in their training.

I was also concerned about the AID mission. There were actually two, one bilateral with Guatemala and the other, ROCAP, the Regional Organization for Central American Programs. It had been started to cooperate with the Central American Common Market. Both were relatively small. The Guatemalan program was doing a handful of things that were marginally worthwhile. Activity was limited by the ineffective and corrupt government and more importantly, the right wing, particularly the military and the old elite, who didn't want Americans messing about with their power structure. However, ROCAP programs operated mostly in El Salvador and the civil war there made it impossible to do much. Many of the specialists lived in Guatemala and commuted to Salvador a few days a week. Moreover, Nicaragua was showing signs of coming apart, and programs there were slowing to a crawl. I talked the Ambassador into agreeing to sending a message to Washington recommending closing ROCAP down. The ROCAP director predictably fought it. But his arguments were pretty weak. In the end, Washington kept it, because John Bushnell, the senior Deputy Assistant Secretary for Latin America, thought closing it would send the wrong signal ("that the US lacked interest in the area") at a time when we were trying to get Somoza out of Nicaragua without having the country blow up.

Finally, there were both a military (Army) attaché -- a colonel who I thought very well of -- and a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) run by a Navy Commander who I never trusted, believing that he was off on his own doing things that should not have been done.

There was also a CIA contingent with which I came to work very closely. While I was chargé, they were as open as I could ask, their instincts were good, they kept me informed, and I think we did some good work.

Gene Boster, our Ambassador, was a likeable professional. He had decided to retire in order to take the job running Radio Free Europe. He had been close to the previous Guatemalan president, Laugurud (Norwegian extraction), in large measure because the US was providing substantial assistance to rebuild the country from the devastating 1973 earthquake. However, he had no special relationship with the current president -- another ex General by the name of Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia who is best described as remote, taciturn, and probably not very smart or honest.

Boster had largely cut his contacts with government officials whom he thought were scoundrels or worse. In particular, he disliked the foreign minister, Ramon Castillo Valdez, who should have been his major contact -- a fact that I did not really understand until we went for his farewell call and to receive his medal which all departing American ambassadors got --the order of the Quetzal, second class (who got first I never knew, but I suppose visiting heads of state), or some such name like that. Boster was kept waiting and became increasingly agitated to the point where he was about to leave. I suspect the minister of doing it deliberately, based on what I came to know of him. He had to give the medal, but he could also indicate his distaste.

The politics of the country were new to me. Guatemala was poor and divided on racial lines among three groups -- the Indians, the Ladinos, and the Europeans. The Ladinos were Indian racially but had become urbanized and lost their deep connection with their Indian roots and Indian culture. They had become a kind of middle class and clearly felt squeezed.

The Europeans were mostly white, descendants of the original Spanish or relatively recent arrivals, rich, often educated outside the country. Many were Americans who had come in successive waves. For example, one group comprised descendants of Confederate officers who had emigrated after their defeat in the Civil War. Other Americans had come with United Fruit which remained a political power in the country, a law unto itself, even unwilling to have much to do with their embassy. Others had come during World War II -- for example, to build the airfield which had become a way-station for planes flown to Europe via Brazil or to buy chicle (collected from trees that grew wild in the Peten) so our soldiers could have chewing gum in their field rations.

Another subgroup had been washed up before World War II from Europe. For example, the Czechs who had started Bata shoe were there and were still rich, although they had lost control of the Czech company. There were Jews who had found the country a haven when no other country would take them (except Trujillo in the Dominican Republic).

The Europeans as a whole (including the Americans) were reactionary in the extreme, supporting the repressive military government, and I believe were directly involved in the violence. In any case, they were not greatly opposed.

For example, the wife of one I knew well had been kidnaped by a group of extortionists, and he had had to ransom her. But he had also put out a contract on the kidnappers, and, he said, they had all been killed. He argued that the justice system didn't catch criminals and didn't punish them even in the rare cases when they were caught. That attitude pervaded the elite.

The ministers other than the foreign minister seemed to be non-entities. The Minister of Economy was a notorious lightweight, but the Embassy and AID had to deal with him. He signed off on projects and also gave some help to the Commercial and Economic officers.

The Finance minister was a colonel in the army -- presumably he was put there to make sure the graft didn't get diverted. We had little to do with him, but he once summoned me. It turned out he had a long cock-and-bull story involving communist plots to take over. What he really wanted was US backing for his bid to become the next president. This would have put him in conflict

with the army high command, the leader of which became the next president in the normal course of things, after having spent a term as Minister of Defense. I passed his offer of anticommunist cooperation with the US to Washington -- which could do little with it and never responded.

The military and the church were the two "institutions" which ran the country. The influence of the Catholic Church was hard to measure. It suffered from growing competition from evangelical protestant denominations that had had considerable success in proselytizing. But its hold on the Indian population and on the establishment seemed to guarantee it a role. Its problem was the lack of Guatemalan clergy -- many came from abroad, and they were coming in inadequate numbers. The Guatemalan church also did not know how to deal with many of the young foreign clergy who were radical. Liberation theology brought them into direct confrontation with the establishment.

The military were interesting. Recruits were Indians and Ladinos, just picked off the street in a press-gang operation. By a mixture of terror and privilege, carrot and stick, their loyalty became assured. If they failed to buckle under, they were killed like so many others, probably after a good deal of torture. At the same time, the officer corps became the avenue of upward mobility for small-town poor but bright Ladinos, leavened with some Europeans like Laugurud. They were educated in the military academy, but more importantly, the day-to-day contact with their fellow soldiers made them street-smart in how the military worked -- the key to surviving.

Politics had established the military as the normal successors to the presidency. A senior general went from Chief of Staff to Minister of Defense to President. One always knew who the next president was going to be, for two successions. That stopped being the case after we left -- a civilian Christian democrat, Venezio Cerezo, won but was rendered powerless by the military who kept up coup threats until he stopped trying to reform anything.

My point of contact became the Foreign Minister. He spoke good English, having gone to school in the US. He was a Mormon, married to an American from Utah and had a pack of kids -- but the wife and kids, except once, stayed in the US, we presumed for their safety while he was a minister.

We became friends of sorts. I did go visit him on his chicken farm one weekend, with my family. He must have had quite a bit of money to own a business of that size. But otherwise I always saw him in the office.

Although Boster was very critical of him, I decided that if the US had an embassy there, it better talk to him, if for no other reason than to keep track of what was happening and what they were thinking.

It took me quite a while before he felt free to talk. Initially, I fabricated a couple of reasons to go chat. I turned these into pleasant sessions for him, during which he would go on and on about his beliefs. They were strongly held but irrational in a peculiar way. Lots of Americans thought he was nuts. That was not too hard to conclude. When I would go for a 15 minute appointment and he would run on for an hour or two, I began to think I was making some progress.

Guatemalans were paranoid about the US. Castillo Valdez, like the others, thought the US determined their destiny. He had endless examples of how unwise, if not malign, the US was. The generalizations left me feeling there was no way to get through to him.

One of their peeves was the US human rights policy. I used to argue with him about this, but that would only get him going. Finally, I decided to try to stick to specifics.

Grist for the mill was first the war in El Salvador and then the one in Nicaragua. Indeed, Nicaragua soon became the preoccupation. Somoza was asking for military help from the Guatemalans who were tempted. He even made a secret trip to Guatemala which, however, did not produce anything. Castillo avoided ever saying that he knew about the trip. But he used to have fits about what the US was doing. I kept arguing that he should be supporting us because we were trying to produce a democratic coalition to succeed Somoza. He didn't believe we could do it, and he was right at the time, though he gave us no help and indeed, did everything he could to make the task more difficult.

I reported these conversations at length back to the Department which never gave any sign that it saw them, much less was horrified or reacted in any other possible way. I know they were read because visitors mentioned them, but they left the Department with little leeway to act and thus do anything about them.

My own role in the Nicaragua affair was minor but interesting. Bill Bowdler, then the Assistant Secretary for Intelligence, had been picked to try to negotiate with the opposition and Somoza. He had to fly through Guatemala City, and I would go out and chat with him while he waited for the plane to continue on. He would tell me what was going on and often show me his instructions. He kept a copy in his pocket -- he wrote them himself, and then got approval. But he did not send out much information on the negotiations because the cables, even those with the highest classification, kept getting leaked by the right or the left in Washington. That all but made his negotiating position impossible.

At one point, the Nicaraguan military attaché in Guatemala was picked as a possible Minister of Defense in the coalition government we were promoting. He had to be flown to Costa Rica clandestinely to be interviewed and to come to some sort of understanding about his policies and role. The US Air Attaché for the region was stationed in Honduras. He flew his plane to us. I smuggled the man into the military side of the air field, using my official car, thus avoiding the immigration people. They took off with no questions asked. They didn't stop their engines or get out or file a flight plane. It was simply billed as a routine training flight. It was the same drill the next day, early in the morning when he came back. I worried but not much. It went off without a hitch.

Perhaps the one thing I managed in the negotiations with the foreign minister was to keep him from really understanding what we were up to. It threw them off, but they at least didn't do anything really stupid or harmful.

At the end, however, I was asked to get them to lend us back some powdered milk and flour we had given them under a food relief program. It was to be flown to Nicaragua because food supplies were running out. Castillo Valdez strung me along for several days -- I had the feeling at the time that he was doing so and made my doubts clear in my messages. Eventually a chartered plane came down from the US to pick it up. And the delays continued. We finally got some, but not what we had asked and it was late to boot. I conjecture this was the US' reward for doing things in Nicaragua the Guatemalans didn't like and for our not being up front with them.

Another interesting exposure was the visit of Congressional groups. The one that struck me as the most bizarre was that of Tom Harkin, then a Representative but later a Senator from Iowa. He brought committee staffers with him to look into the human rights situation. They seemed to feel that the Embassy was not on top of the situation, that it might even be in league with the government in its misdeeds. We gave them a car and driver and turned them loose -- to go see opposition politicians without their telling us. I could not have cared less who they saw -- in fact, the more they saw the better in my view -- but that was not what they wanted to believe. In addition to being suspicious, the staffers were rude as well, accepting invitations to a meal and then being late and unapologetic. My wife was furious.

We were as open as we could be with them. I did not feel that there was much the US could do. The aid we gave was small, conditioned, and often responded to our needs, particularly in having the military attaché and the military assistance group represented. We kept careful count of the murders that we believed were political, and used the running total as a scorecard to see if things were getting better or worse. We had also made clear our governments censure for the whole business. When one of the liberal political opposition, a presidential candidate, was assassinated, I went to the funeral home, shook hands with the politically important mourners, and signed the condolence book. I did the same when the Minister of Defense was assassinated in his car. I didn't much care for him, since he was probably involved in past murders, but what was sauce for the goose was sauce for him too.

The pattern of torture and murder was several hundred years old, contrary to what newspapers report as starting since the overthrow of Arevalo in the early 1950's. It started with the Spanish settlers who ruled by force in the area between the capital and the Caribbean coast. They had mined the land, as well as the people, overgrazing and overcropping until it became an arid, eroded waste heap. The Spanish settlers and their minions had then carried their bad habits elsewhere, first to the Indians living a poor and isolated subsistence farm life in the highlands west of the capital. The damage there was limited by lack of access; the area was really only opened after World War II when the road was put in that connected with Mexico. Before that, if you wanted to go from a city on the Mexican border, you took the train down to the Pacific, a boat south, and then another train back up to the capital.

The most recent area to open was the Pacific coastal plain, which fell at first quickly and then gently from the mountains to the ocean. This area had been settled after World War II when AID built highways into the mountains and along the coast. Big landowners had become rich growing corn, sugar cane, cotton, and cattle. Many lived in the capital and commuted by small plane to their ranches daily. It was more comfortable and much less dangerous. As a result, Guatemala

had the largest private plane ownership per capita in the world -- even larger than Alaska where it is often the only way to get around.

The down side of this coastal development was that it depended on highland Indian laborers who spent a good part of the year away from their homes and families working at derisory wages. They were, moreover, kept terrorized and badly treated in that they were often compelled to work in dangerous conditions, e.g., when insecticides and herbicides were sprayed from airplanes without regard as to whether they hit humans. The solidarity of traditional Indian village life could not be preserved under such conditions. Yet they were driven to it by population pressure on the highlands farm land which was increasingly deforested and cropped to death. The description of corn farming told the story -- they cut the trees down on the mountain sides, tied a rope to a stump and swung down the steep hillside cultivating their corn and beans. Guatemala's torrential rains soon washed away what little top soil there was. Hunger and malnutrition were the initial consequences. The second was the migration of landless and land-poor to the Pacific coast farms. Off-farm labor was not new -- the coffee fincas had also depended on it for many years, but mostly only during the harvest season and the distance from home was much less.

Another area of increasing contention was the areas where the mountains went into the Peten. This area had long been closed by the lack of transport. Roads opened up these new areas to settlement, but it was widely understood that military officers were acquiring control of large parcels and working them with the same mistreated Indian laborers.

Domestic politics also got me involved. The mayor of Guatemala city, Maldonado, was another politician. Affable and handsome, he claimed to be liberal and seemed to impress many Americans. He made me uneasy, too good to be true in a political arena dominated by tigers.

The vice president, Villagran Kramer, was also a civilian who in Guatemala was widely considered a communist, which was consistent with the elite's support of Attila the Hun. How he got on the same ticket with Lucas Garcia escapes me, but there he was. And unhappy with the way things were going. He invited me to pay a call early in my tour which I promptly did -- but getting there proved to be somewhat alarming. His military assistant came by for me. I didn't understand the need for such arrangements, but I suspect he did not want the government to know whom he was seeing. In any case, I had my own car follow, with body guards. He wanted to review with me his plan for the reform of the country -- naturally with him as the chosen instrument. I duly reported this, but also suggested it took no account of the power relationships in the country. In any case, I liked Villagran -- he seemed a decent person -- but it would have been quixotic for the US to get tied up with him.

Life for him became increasingly precarious so that he eventually resigned and left the country, taking refuge with the Inter-American Development Bank which kept him fed and safe until he could safely go back in the mid 80s. When we returned to Washington in 1979, we saw him a few times socially. He had seemed sad, but he clearly enjoyed being in the US -- relieved from the threat of assassination, I suppose -- continuing, I think to play politics at home and among the exiles.

Another figure who was informative, Jorge Skinner Klee, a lawyer with a powerful cynical streak that led him to say things he didn't mean, was fun to talk to but also informative. At the time, he was staying clear of politics but eleven years after we left I read he had become a member of the National Assembly. He was quoted in the New York Times, but his irony over the fact that the government was responding "unequally" to the murder of an American (compared to our official concern over the murder of Guatemalans), had been taken literally by the newsman. Still he was a lost soul, bearing witness but a prophet without honor.

At the time, our intelligence people were mainly concerned about the leftist terrorists who the right charged with most of the murders. They were no doubt there and effective, but like the Minister of Defense they killed, it was often retaliation or a political act, designed to get them support, through fear as much as anything. These people were no saints. They had assassinated an American ambassador years earlier, and we continued to fear they would strike an American again. Hence the extreme security measures -- the Ambassador had seven body guards, at times, including two Americans brought down when conditions got particularly threatening.

Our knowledge of what the left was up to seemed to be quite good. I was surprised to find that we knew almost nothing about what right wing terrorists were up to. I saw to it that we learned. Not just what they planned to do, but what they had done -- I did not believe they would claim responsibility for actions that they had not committed as they were clearly ashamed and would be hurt if these were admitted publicly. It was not reassuring and I sent a message to Washington to make sure that these reports were widely read. The right, it was clear, was up to the same stuff as the left -- and in a much better position to carry it out, using the army. In retrospect, I was astonished that we hadn't focused on this question earlier. But that seemed to be the case.

By spring, I heard who the new ambassador was -- Frank Ortiz. He turned out to be very pleasant, but also very secretive and up tight about his own prerogatives. Feeling there would be little scope for me, I decided to ask for a transfer.

One of my last assignments was to attend the Chiefs of Mission conference in Costa Rica. It turned out to be a revelation about the area. Two of the people I had known well, Frank Devine, the Ambassador in El Salvador with whom we had served in the Dominican Republic and Larry Pezzulo, the Ambassador in Nicaragua whom we had known in Saigon. These were the two Central American countries about which the US worried most, followed by Guatemala.

Devine described the problems of dealing with the Salvadorans -- an oligarchy with the same lack of self-control and bloody-mindedness as the Guatemalans. He seemed to be very cool on doing anything with that government, as he described the embassy being fired on by the right wing.

Pezzulo described his negotiations with Somoza and others. It was fairly frightening -- he did not seem to trust his own Embassy staff and was quite uncertain about his personal security. He described meeting with Somoza and John Murphy, an American Congressman who had been a classmate of Somoza's at West Point. Murphy did much of the talking. In other words, the US was negotiating with itself. Pezzulo's arrival had been recent, so of course, some of this was a function of his being the new boy on the block.

The bottom line of this meeting was uncertainty about what was to come and what to do. The inability of the US to influence the Nicaraguan government -- we never had a chance of controlling it -- led to the Reagan (and CIA director Casey) position of total hostility and confrontation. Nicaraguan society seems to have been changed by the Sandinistas and I suppose by the American intervention creating the Contras, so that the subsequently return of the more moderate Chamorro government seemed unlikely to produce much progress.

I left the Ambassadors' meeting, confirmed in my view that I was right to ask for a transfer. I met my successor, Mel Sinn, who like me I learned later, found Guatemala professionally hard to take and retired after his tour. He, his wife, and their dog apparently did manage to enjoy their time there however.

Since I had to ride everywhere and needed exercise, I played tennis at the Ambassador's court when I could find a partner and it was free. I also jogged at the Marine House. It had an acre of wooded flat land in back, with a wall around it and a convenient path through it. I would put my body guards out on the corners (making them face out, not in looking at me) just so that I wasn't a sitting duck and then run for an hour, practicing my Spanish dialogues as I did so. It passed the time and kept me in reasonable shape, as well as improving my Spanish -- which had grown rusty with disuse, after we left the Dominican Republic. So I had begun to relearn it almost from scratch, listening to tapes, watching television shows (mostly US series with Spanish dubbed in) and doing daily hour-long lessons with a tutor. I got pretty good by the time we left. But it goes so quickly when not used.

One of our favorite spots to spend a night or a weekend was Antigua. Our favorite place to stay was with Paul Glynn, a retired USIA officer. He had bought two old houses that were next to each other and had remodeled them, making them very pleasant. He expected to make a good bit of money out of his investment, but the market is narrow and the political situation unsteady, so we never learned how he made out. He also exported craft items, both wholesale and retail, and we bought a good deal from him. He had developed his own sources of manufacture and provided designs, capital, and marketing. But the output was so limited, that he had to keep his suppliers secret or his customers would go directly to them. We spent one Easter with him, thus seeing all of the elaborate ceremonies that have grown up around this event. The processions in the street lasted all day, but the murals "painted" in flowers on the cobble stones, were soon sacrificed to the glory of God as the crowd walked through them.

We had other friends in Antigua, including an archeologist, and the widow of the one who developed Tikal, the most famous Mayan ruins in the Peten. Talking with them taught us a lot about that field, including the jealousy and rivalry that made cooperation among them difficult. There were also a number of rich Guatemalans who had houses there -- and rich Americans who came down for the winter to get out of the northern cold.

Another favorite place to visit was Chichicastenango. This had a famous market on weekends, at which Indians sold their crafts and an old church full of Indians who seemed to follow their own ritual, praying and burning incense to receive a boon. They seemed wrapped in their own cocoon of preoccupations, lost to the rest of us who could not comprehend their beliefs or communicate

more than a few words for the simplest things. It is astonishing how isolated people in other cultures seem. The Guatemalan Indians were by no means the most remote.

I returned to Washington briefly in August to attend the opening of the new class year at the National War College. It wasn't long enough to learn very much, but as usually happens, it gave me the chance to meet my new colleagues. Then back to Guatemala to begin to introduce the new ambassador and pack up.

FREDERIC L. CHAPIN
Administrative Assignment
Washington, DC (1973)

Ambassador
Guatemala (1981-1984)

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

CHAPIN: During this period I was asked to be Deputy Chief of Mission at several embassies and finally my time in Washington was running out. It was longer than most people had been there. So I did accept to go to Cameroon as DCM but then I was found to have a congenital medical problem and the Department would not clear my going abroad and I was treated for about a year and a half and I went on some various administrative assignments including the first two international personnel reduction campaigns during the Nixon Administration. One of those took me on a special mission to Central America where I was to conduct an intensive review of the staffing of the five Central American countries, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Guatemala and Panama, and I was able to make a number of recommendations which saved a lot of money including elimination of an administrative radio network in these countries which was [reporting to CINCSOUTH] in Panama and which did not transmit any classified information, therefore, really didn't have any security function. But each country had a radio station and served to convey administrative chatter and social chatter and commissary orders. . .

Q: *A special ham radio network for governmental . . .*

CHAPIN: Yes. It was under a private contract and costing millions of dollars a year and a series of other personnel cuts. That was called Balpa 2, Phase 2. One of the things that I did was to recommend that the only military aircraft be located in Honduras where the Air Force played a much more prominent role than in any of the other Central American countries and that the Senior Defense Attaché be the pilot and head of the crew. That remained that way for years and was still that way when I left Guatemala in 1984 and that was a consolidation . . .

***

Q: *Now let's go into the transition from Acting Ambassador to confirmed ambassador. How did this work out?*

CHAPIN: Well, I was offered a variety of choices, none of them particularly appealing, the best of which was ambassador to Guatemala. Secretary Haig had told me in January when I agreed to go to Salvador that upon completion of my service I would be taken care of. But the kinds of places that the Department seemed to have in mind for me were: the high altitude post of Bolivia where there was an intractable drug problem which to this date has never been solved--in those days we were not pursuing it actively); Beirut, where war raged and continues to rage; and Liberia, where there had just been a coup. Of the various choices, Guatemala seemed to be the one which I thought would be the most appealing to members of my family and, while it offered a deteriorating situation and an inhospitable government with which we had had very limited relationships, nevertheless I was willing to take it on. We had not had an ambassador for over a year and we had a . . .

Q: *By that time it was 15 years since Gordon Mein had been killed.*

CHAPIN: Yes. It had been some time.

Q: *So that wasn't a problem at all.*

CHAPIN: No, but the insurgency was increasing. There had been some improvement in the interim but insurgency was increasing and there were murders on the street of Guatemala City as well as massacres in the Indian populated mountain areas. The United States had very limited programs in Guatemala. Guatemala had renounced U. S. military assistance in 1977 because of the attitude of the United States toward human rights violations in Guatemala and, despite major efforts, even a cash sale program was not effectively revived in Guatemala before I left in March of 1984.

On the economic side, also because of human rights violations, the United States was simply providing assistance to the poorest of the poor. This was a category of really humanitarian assistance rather than developmental assistance. It represented authorizations including PL 480 surplus agricultural products of about $9 million a year for a population of some 8 to 9 million people. But actual disbursements from 1978 through 1981 only averaged $3.5 million which is absolutely nothing in economic and macro-economic terms. In fact, the benefit that Guatemala received from preferential treatment under the sugar import quotas in the United States exceeded the effective economic assistance which it was receiving for the least advantaged or the most disadvantaged sectors of the population, largely programs in the Indian dominated rural areas.

Q: *Did you go almost immediately to Guatemala or was there an interim period?*

CHAPIN: Well, it took a few months for the usual briefings and approval by the Senate so I left Salvador at the end of May and arrived in mid-August 1981 in Guatemala and was there until early 1984, not quite three years. In Guatemala we had problems with regard to the murder of two priests, one of which occurred before my time, and the murder of other American citizens

before I arrived, and threats to the American missionaries, notably the Maryknolls. This was not unique as far as American missionaries was concerned. The priests and nuns of the Catholic Church in Guatemala were largely foreigners and they were suspect and many of them had to leave.

Q: *Were there a lot of Irish or were they Latinos from other parts of . . .*

CHAPIN: No, they were Europeans. They were Belgians, Italians and representatives of various nations but largely not other Latin American priests and nuns.

We also had a number of problems with Americans who were arrested illegally and charged with crimes that they had not committed of a security nature. One was a young American who was charged with leading a bank of guerrillas even though he spoke only a few words of Spanish and was demonstrably in Panama on the date that the event that he was charged with having committed actually occurred. We had a great deal of difficulty getting him released and his case became involved under the government of General Raosmond in a series of summary executions by firing squad after minimal trials. Fortunately, I was able to bring enough pressure on the Raosmond government so that the American was eventually released. However, I earned the undying enmity of the Minister of Defense, a senior military officer who was over the special military tribunals that had tried the American. That general was to succeed General Raosmond and my relationship with the succeeding government was anything but happy. Nevertheless, I'm happy to say, all the Americans who were detained--peace corps volunteers, visiting protestant ministers, the young American I mentioned, all of them--were released after relatively recent periods of time and none of them were tortured and none of them were killed.

Q: *Did you have some further detective work to do there, producing evidence for some of these things?*

CHAPIN: Yes, the investigative services in all Central American countries are rudimentary. We had problems with American citizens, but we even had more serious problems with Guatemalans who were employed by an American AID contractor who had a program for the bilingual education of Indians and others in local languages and in Spanish. Many of the Indians in Guatemala, or over half the population, really did not speak Spanish at all and this, of course, excludes them from the central path of Guatemalan life. There are professional anthropologists, many are Americans, who really advocate that the Indians be left alone but, in my view, this is an impractical suggestion in modern times and leads to a continuation of vast discrepancies in income levels and cultural levels between two halves of the population of Guatemala.

Q: *Is it nearly half and half or aren't there more Indians?*

CHAPIN: There are really more Indians. Of course, there's never been an adequate census so it's very difficult to say what the population is in the mountainous areas. When we talk about free and fair elections, we should remember that, because of the administrative and logistic difficulties, polling booths are not established in the predominantly Indian areas high up in the mountains, and less than a half of the potential voters actually have access to the ballot. It is not

like El Salvador where the Indians have been incorporated into national life and polling opportunities are available in all areas except those totally dominated by the guerrillas.

The Guatemalans who were killed by the Guatemalan government, and in this case specifically by the Guatemalan military, total 8 of whom several were directly employed by an AID contractor and others were family members of those persons so employed or peripherally connected with the bilingual project. We never were able to obtain any kind of apology from the Guatemalan government for these murders and I was, in fact, twice withdrawn as ambassador back to Washington as a protest against the murders.

Q: *Was it anti-American or was it something they had been doing extracurricularly?*

CHAPIN: The Guatemalan military have always been suspicious of any efforts to improve the lot of Indians and incorporate them in the society. In the first case, there is some evidence that the AID contract employee was a lawyer had given some advice to some mine workers in the area where he was working the bilingual project and that the mine owner had appealed to the Guatemalan military to take care of the individual concerned. This led to his arrest and to his disappearance and eventually confession by the Guatemalan government had indeed killed the four individuals--the lawyer concerned, the driver of his vehicle, his brother who is tangentially connected with the project, and the mother-in-law of the brother who was hitching a ride in the jeep.

In the other case, there were two women who were picked up off the streets who were associated with the project and the motive for that arrest is unknown. Subsequently, another member of the project and his wife were detained under unknown circumstances. Three of the bodies turned up in a vehicle in a staged accident in the northern part of Guatemala as part of a scenario that the four had sought to establish contact in Mexico with members of the guerilla opposition. For many reasons we were able to disprove the entire theory and the press and all independent observers in Guatemala concluded on the basis of the evidence which we were able to produce from family members and other sources that the death was not as a result of an automobile accident but rather that the three persons found in the accident, the so-called accident, had been driven to the scene of the accident and an incendiary bomb had then been thrown into the vehicle after they were already dead.

Again, I did not earn any great credit with the Minister of Defense.

Q: *Granddaughter of Isabella.*

CHAPIN: As a matter of fact, the Minister of Defense who, by that time was Chief of State, Mahia Victoras, made a point of denying to me the standard decoration which is issued to all ambassadors who had been in country over two years. The subsequent and popularly elected president, Venicio Serrano, some four years later in a special ceremony here in the Guatemalan Embassy, awarded me not only the medal which I would have been entitled to but the Grand Cross of the Order of the Kedzal in a special ceremony to make up for this insult.

Q: *In August of 1983, was it?*

CHAPIN: August of 1983, yes. Mahia Victoras took over in a relatively bloodless coup in August of 1983 and I was recalled in November of 1983 over the second series of murders and the staged automobile accident which was--no, as a matter of fact, over the second series of arrests. The staged automobile accident was to come later in 1984. I did not return to Guatemala until January of 1984 when I was really returning to be caretaker. The new Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs, Tony Motley, had decided that there should be a new ambassador, and a political appointee who had long sought the job, in fact before I was appointed to Guatemala in the first place, was appointed to take my place.

Q: *Who was that?*

CHAPIN: That was Ambassador Piedra.

Q: *I noticed there was something in the newspapers about the time of the coup that Mahia Victoras was visiting an American aircraft carrier the day before the coup. Was that a major story or was it just something accidental?*

CHAPIN: There had been a decision to send a carrier task force to the Pacific coast area off the Pacific coast of Central America for some time. This soon became involved in the command difficulties which I outlined before with regard to U. S. military forces. The task force was, of course, under Navy command and through appropriate military channels an invitation had been issued, that is the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I assume. I was informed of the invitation but was not the conduit for the transmission of the invitation to General Mahia who was the Minister of Defense. He was invited along with the other Ministers of Defense in Central America to go on board the carrier on a weekend and the U. S. Commander CINCSOUTH in Panama had decided that it was a fortuitous opportunity to invite the various Presidents of Central American countries to go out to the carrier on Monday.

Well, immediately following the visit of the various Ministers of Defense under Navy orders the carrier task force plunged deep into the Pacific and was out of helicopter or plane range (or would be out of plane range) of the Central American coast on Monday morning. I learned of this by chance and protested to Washington on Saturday that it was totally impossible politically to have the Minister of Defense visit the carrier and for me to go and tell the military President of Guatemala, a general, that his visit on Monday was cancelled because of operational considerations. I was able to turn this matter around with a great deal of pressure at the high levels of the State Department and a great deal of bad feeling in the Defense Department, but political considerations finally outweighed operational considerations and the carrier task force was turned around and was back in sufficient distance so that planes from the carrier were on the ground in Guatemala City on Monday morning and I was out at the airport to bid farewell to President Raosmond. When the coup actually occurred the airplanes from the Air Force base where I was were already in the air fully armed and the helicopters were flying over the city.

The difficulties between President Raosmond and the military had come to the fore about a month earlier and President Raosmond had told Secretary of Agriculture Bloch a few days prior to his prospective visit to the carrier that he had almost been ousted by the military at that time.

In fact, Secretary Bloch's entire visit to Guatemala had been designed in early July to show the personal support of President Reagan for President Raosmond. The visit was successful as far as it went but the difficulties within the military, President Raosmond's extensive support for the protestant movement in Guatemala and his difficulties with the Roman Catholic Church hierarchy there as well as his mercurial behavior all contributed to the inevitability of his downfall and it was just a question of time. We had been speculating for some months prior to the actual August coup as to when such a coup might occur so that, while the specific date was not anticipated, the visit to the carrier had absolutely nothing to do with the coup.

Q: *Did he actually visit the carrier?*

CHAPIN: No, he did not. The coup was occurring.

Q: *It must have made it look at the time as though the United States was party to this operation.*

CHAPIN: There were efforts to give that spin and I was very active with the media in pointing out that this was nonsense. In fact, I used a Central American term when queried by the press. I said it was [babo sarras, poras babo sarras] which means "nonsense" and was thoroughly discussed in the press for my correct use of a rather arcane Central American Spanish usage which is nevertheless sanctioned by the Royal Academy of Madrid, and was incorrectly translated as an improper term by some American correspondents in their stories to the United States. Nevertheless, we were able to show that there was no connection whatsoever.

Q: *Then you left there in early 1984.*

JAMES F. MACK
Guatemala Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1979-1981)

Mr. Mack was born in Connecticut and raised in New York State. After graduating from Cornell University, he joined the Peace Corps and served in Honduras. In 1966 he joined the State Department and was sent to Vietnam in the CORDS program. Mr. Mack's other overseas service was primarily in Latin American where he served as Political Officer and Deputy Chief of Mission at a number of posts before being named US Ambassador to Guyana. Ambassador Mack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy March 20th, 2004.

Today is the 12th of September 2005. Jim you are the Guatemala Desk Officer?

MACK: Yes, I was the Guatemalan /Belize Desk Officer so I covered both countries. The reason for this was that at the time there was, and I believe still is, is a serious border dispute between the two countries. In fact, at one time Guatemala claimed all of Belize, which in 1979 was still a British colony. I think the Guatemalans have since reduced their claim but it is still rather substantial. Anyway that was the big issue at the time I was on the desk. The British were

anxious to unburden themselves of Belize, which was one of the few remaining British colonies in the Caribbean at that point. Also, important in their thinking was the cost of maintaining defense of the colony. Because of the ever present threat of a Guatemalan incursion they had to keep a couple of thousand troops in Belize, including a unit of Harrier jump jets, which was an expensive proposition to them. At the same time, they worried, as did the elected internally self-governing Belizean government of George Price, that a grant of independence without a border settlement could provoke a Guatemalan invasion. So they were stuck.

In any event the border issue consumed a significant amount of my time as a desk officer. During this period, I worked very closely with guy named Millard Burr from the State Department Office of The Geographer. Burr came up with the proposal to guarantee Guatemala *sovereign* access to the Caribbean sea from their main port of Puerto Barrios. The problem was that without an agreement, while ships did enjoy physical access to Puerto Barrios in accordance with the international law of the sea, it was not the *sovereig*n access that Guatemala felt it had to have for political reasons. So when we received word that the Guatemalan dictator might be willing to cut a deal, Burr came up with the idea of granting the Guatemalans a mile wide sovereign channel through Belizean waters to Puerto Barrios. The problem we had to solve was that smack in the middle of the proposed sovereign channel were several very small islets called the Sapodilla keys, which belonged to Belize. We knew that George Price was adamant against giving up an inch of territory, so Burr came up with the idea of granting Guatemala *usufruct* of the islands in perpetuity which would allow Guatemalan to claim it had won sovereign access to the sea.

Now *usufruct* is a word I had never heard before, but exists in international law, It means *use as if it were sovereign*. For Belize that meant they would retain theoretical sovereignty, but Guatemala would get to use them as if it were the sovereign owner. We though this was a brilliant solution that would acceptable to everybody, end the dispute, allow Belize to peacefully achieve independence and win us the Nobel Peace Prize. Just kidding but we were very excited.

Unfortunately, the problem ended up not being the Guatemalan dictator president and notorious human right abuser Gen Lucas Garcia , but the democratically elected Belizean Prime Minister George Price. Price was adamant that he wasn't going to agree to any deal that as much as *implied* loss of any sovereign territory even some water and a few islets. And so, Price lost the opportunity to settle the deal then and there. The British were pushing Price very hard to accept.

Q: I was wondering why we were making a deal or acting as though we were outside authority. Why weren't the British doing this?

MACK: Oh the British were very actively involved. Lord Carrington was very, very involved in this.

Q: He was a Foreign Minister?

MACK: He was the head of the FCO, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at the time. He was very, very active in the process and the British dearly wanted to get out. I am sure I am missing some details twenty-six years later. But that occupied a lot of time. My other important

issue as desk officer was Guatemala's horrendous human rights record under the military dictatorship, which was waging a war without quarter with Marxist guerrilla group.

Thousands of people were killed in the rural areas were the insurgency raged. In the urban areas, hundreds were gunned down by Lucas Garcia's people working from death lists which it was my understanding he personally approved, kind of like the evil Ming the Merciless in the Buck Rogers movies. It was pretty awful. Not that we could do too much about it since the US already had cut Guatemala off from military assistance a long time before. Remember this was under the Carter Administration. But what this also meant was with no US assistance, we could not use the threat to cut it off as a lever to force greater respect for human rights, although I'm not sure that Guatemalan government would have been susceptible to pressure in any event. They had decided to fight the insurgency, and any suspected of supporting it, their way, which was brutally. In some ways they were successful. Not that they are better off today because for it. In fact a lot of the lawlessness, high level corruption and impunity in Guatemala today can be traced to that period.

In any event, all this was happening in the context of Central America going down the tubes. Remember, the Sandinistas come into power in '79 or '80 in Nicaragua. The insurgents were rapidly gaining strength in El Salvador. The Chichoneros were growing in Honduras. These were not the most happy times to work in the Office of Central American Affairs. And the nights were very long. We were seriously understaffed.

Q: Well now who were the Guatemalans dictator and his crew killing. Were they basically Indians or were they people who had gotten in his way, or were they unidentifiable group that was fighting him?

MACK: In the rural areas anybody who was perceived to give aid and comfort to the guerrilla was a target. I didn't have much access to what was going on. The Embassy could not travel to the worst areas because of security reasons. I really didn't know much unless an American or a missionary living there got caught up in it. In urban areas however they were going after anyone perceived to opposed his regime. Those killed were not necessarily communists at all. They may have been labor union leaders or democrats. I am sure there were some communists among them. I had some contact with the people that the dictator was going after when they would come to Washington. This included a Vinicio Cerezo who later became President. But he was certainly no communist at all. He survived a number of assassination attempts and so anybody who was opposed to the dictator seemed to be fair game for Lucas Garcia.

Q: Well now, this during the Carter Administration?

MACK: Yes, and Carter was going full bore on the whole issue of Human Rights. So here we are in 1979 in a situation in which on the one hand the leftist insurgencies in Central America were rapidly gaining ground, and on the other President Carter's Human Rights policies were coming on strong. The State Department was kind of caught in a bind. On one hand, obviously we didn't want to see all those governments in Central America be taken over by leftist guerrillas. On the other hand, we wanted to carry out the Human Rights policy. In the case of Guatemala, we did

not have a friendly government to support. In fact, they did not want anything to do with us. They were not receiving any military assistance from us.

Q: Were they picking up any support from the Right – the Jesse Helms types and all that?

MACK: I don't recall that in case of Guatemala. I just don't recall. I can recall very vividly El Salvador but I cannot recall the case of Guatemala.

Q: But, did you get caught up in the rest of that. The El Salvador and Nicaragua business.

MACK: Well we all worked in the same office. And we were all overworked in the same office. Central America was staffed at a level for the sleepy old Central America days. A total of seven officers covered Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Belize. To give you an idea of the work load, after I left, that office grew to nineteen. Our Deputy was Rich Brown, who passed away a couple of years ago. To say Rich was a very hard working guy was an under statement, and he expected the rest of us to emulate him. Just to give you an idea, when someone left before seven p.m., Rich would comment wryly that that person was "taking the afternoon off". The fact is that most of us habitually left work a lot later than that which put a lot of strain on those of us who were married with kids, which was practically all of us. We really began to worry about people there. They were wearing. A few years later, the deputy office of Central America Affairs died of a heart attack.

Q: Was anything happening in Belize from your perspective?

MACK: Our focus was to bring the Belizeans and Guatemalans together to resolve the boundary dispute to allow Belize to become independent. That really dominated everything. At that point, George Price had been Prime Minister of that self governing colony for many years and he wanted to be the leader who took Belize to independence. He eventually did, but independence was delayed for a number of years because of the border issue . I cannot recall what year, but it was several years after I left the desk.

Q: Did we have a Consulate General in Belize at that time?

MACK: Yes, we had a small Consulate General and interesting people assigned there. The consulate had been there for one hundred and fifty years. It was located in an old wooden building that had been shipped down piece by piece from New England and erected in Georgetown. It was made of pine, a pretty old building. I think it had been painted so many times over the years that by 1980 I think the paint was thicker than what the termites had left of the wood. The standard joke was that the building was being held up by one hundred coats of paint. It definitely was not a secure building and it was a firetrap. I don't know if they are still in it today.

Q: They had a bad hurricane but I guess that they survived the hurricane?

MACK: They had a real bad hurricane was 1961 as I recall. It was really bad.

Q. Who was the US Ambassador in Guatemala during your time on the desk?

MACK: Frank Ortiz, he just passed away. He was in Guatemala at the time that I was there. He had a very difficult job given our terrible relations with the government, the human rights violations, the insurgency etc.

Q: That must have been a difficult place for the officers there and the staff.

MACK: The security was awful. And there was a lot of killing going on. The leftists were active too and they were carrying out assassinations. It was a very, very nasty situation.

Q: You were doing this from what '79 to '81?

MACK: Yes!

Q: Did you feel the cold hand of the Reagan takeover because it really hit Central America, I mean ARA . Or were you too far down?

MACK: No. I mean there was certainly major change when Reagan came in but remember the Republicans did not control the Congress. So the Carter Human Rights legislation stayed in place. We still had to abide by the law. But the Carter Political Appointees who had wielded tremendous influence, who staffed the powerful Bureau of Human Rights, which had grown to wield an enormous amount of power and practically had veto power of any policy initiative proposed by the careerists working on Central America, were gone.

Q: Had we pretty well written Guatemala off?

MACK: We just couldn't do very much with Guatemala because of the human rights problems. It was a very difficult place to work. The country was in the midst of a very serious insurgency and a large part of the country was closed for casual travel; lets put it that way. The government was organizing the rural indigenous population in the highlands into local militias to defend their villages against the insurgents. This turned out to be a rather effective program. But these groups also carried out their own vendettas.

ALBERTO M. PIEDRA
Ambassador
Guatemala (1984-1987)

Alberto M. Piedra was born in Havana, Cuba and raised in Europe. After a brief stint in Fidel Castro's government, he left Cuba to finish his degree at Georgetown. Piedra worked for OAS, then was appointed Ambassador to Guatemala. Some of this other posts included special advisor to the General Assembly of the United Nations and a appointment on the Human Rights Council in Geneva. Piedra was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: In 1984 you were nominated to be Ambassador to Guatemala. How did this appointment come about?

PIEDRA: The person who sponsored me was Jesse Helms. I hardly knew him personally, but I knew some of the people who worked for him. I knew some of the people who had been in contact with Senator Helms. Plus the fact that I was a good friend of Ambassador Middendorf who also had at that time a good deal of influence in the government. I was also a good friend of Jeane Kirkpatrick who had a lot of influence. I was a good friend of many people in the government at the time that backed me. So it was a combination of Congress plus the State Department who basically supported me.

Q: You were already inside the system by being in the OAS.

PIEDRA: Correct. When I started in the OAS Tom Enders was the Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs and he knew me also. Then came Tony Martinez who saw how I operated at the State Department and he did not object. I don't know if I was his prime candidate, probably not because he told me personally afterwards, "Alberto you have my total support now that you have been appointed Ambassador." And I did get his support. I don't think there was any major opposition. Senators Dodd and Pell backed me without any problems.

Q: These were Senators on the Foreign Relations Committee.

PIEDRA: I had absolutely no problem with the Foreign Relations Committee. It was unanimous.

Q: I wonder if you could explain a little about Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina because he plays a fairly strong role in our Latin American policy at that time? Not only Senator Helms but as you mentioned you knew some of his staff members. It was almost as if Senator Helms had, and maybe still has, his own sort of Central American foreign policy. He feels very strongly about this although he doesn't come from a particularly Spanish-oriented state.

PIEDRA: He did have his own staff which was interested in Latin America, but I don't think this was true of only Senator Helms. Afterwards I operated with other Senators as well. For example, Senator Dodd from Connecticut became a very good friend of mine and came several times to Guatemala and stayed with me. He also had a staff that was very interested in Latin America at that time. The other Senator who came very often was Kerry from Massachusetts. In fact, when I left Guatemala, which is ironic, I came in with the most conservative, if you want to use the term, in the Senate and I left with the compliments of one of the most liberal in the Senate which are Senators Dodd and Kerry. In fact, Senator Kerry had inserted into the Congressional Record three or four pages in which he quotes from the Foreign Minister of Guatemala and his own personal experience in Guatemala saying that I was one of the best ambassadors he had ever known. So I am very proud, I have to admit it. On the one hand, Senator Helms was instrumental in my getting the position and on the other hand when I left the greatest compliment given to me was one by Senator Kerry.

Q: Going step by step, when you went to Guatemala, how were you prepared by the State Department?

PIEDRA: They have what they call an Ambassadorial Seminar which I think was a three-day affair.

Q: So it wasn't a very extensive course?

PIEDRA: No. But it was useful. But, of course, in my case the usual questions of security, how to handle one self for security purposes, etc....part of it was the process of adaptation. I, being of Latin background, the process of adaptation was very little or nothing. So there was really no problem. We adapted almost the very instant we arrived. On the other hand, the other part of it was interesting. The entire Ambassadorial Seminar, I think, is extremely interesting. I think Tony Martinez gives them now.

Q: He does, I have interviewed him.

PIEDRA: I do want to mention that Tony Martinez during my stay in Guatemala was totally supportive of our actions there. We had no problems.

Q: Before we get to the situation in Guatemala, what was your impression of the Embassy's staffing and it effectiveness when you were there?

PIEDRA: I have no complaints about the Embassy in Guatemala at all. From the day I arrived I found support, people who were friendly. I found no antagonism even though there is always the danger of it being a political appointee and having been appointed by Senator Helms.

Q: Particularly in the Foreign Service there was the impression that Senator Helms and the people he would appoint would be ideologues who would go in with a fairly extreme rightist point of view.

PIEDRA: That is correct. That is why, I said it before, that I am proud in many ways to say that when I left Guatemala the persons who gave me the greatest compliment was Senator Kerry from Massachusetts and Senator Dodd.

Q: What were American interests in Guatemala when you arrived and during the time you were there?

PIEDRA: As you know there was a military government in Guatemala when I arrived. You ask me what were the main objectives? Primarily I would say to reestablish free elections in a democratic process in Guatemala. Establish respect for human rights in Guatemala was another priority. Unfortunately it is true that there have been many violations of human rights in Guatemala. I mean that is a fact of life.

Q: Could you describe how we defined human rights and what were our concerns about human rights?

PIEDRA: Violation, for example, in this particular case in Guatemala of freedom, not only the freedom of expression which is one of the basic things, but freedom to be able to move around. To be able to participate in a democratic government with free elections. To respect your neighbor and his property. All of these things which were not the norm in Guatemala.

Q: There were kidnappings, killings, etc.

PIEDRA: Yes. And what the tragedy of Guatemala was, and that happened very often in Central American unfortunately, was that you never knew who did it. There is no doubt that in Guatemala violations were committed from both sides. It is not a question of only the government committed all sorts of violations, and the army in many ways, but the other side was also responsible for violations. So it was a very complicated thing. It is true that the army very often from what we heard committed all sorts of wrong doings.

I do want to clarify one thing which I think should be clarified. When I arrived in Guatemala the situation had improved already. Under the regime of Vitor the situation began to improve. I honestly believe that during my stay in Guatemala that the whole situation of human rights improved very significantly. I am not trying to get credit for it...circumstances or whatever you want...but it was a fact of life.

Q: But the United States through its Ambassador was putting tremendous pressure on Guatemala. So we had democracy, human rights and...

PIEDRA: Development. As you know you can not have development if you don't have stability. So therefore in order for you to have development the first thing you must have is stability politically and otherwise because otherwise you cannot invest, you cannot do anything. Our basic idea was to try to set the scenario so that development could take place...investment could return to Guatemala. For example, in Guatemala the flight of capital was horrendous. Many of the wealthy were taking the money out and putting it in Miami, etc. Why were they doing this? There were many factors. Maybe some people were doing it because of greed, others were doing it for other reasons. But there was no doubt that many people honestly did it because they felt unsafe in Guatemala. So therefore they thought it was better for them to have their money out. Therefore, if you want all that money back, the first thing you have to do is get stability in the country. If you don't have that stability it is very difficult to convince anybody to put their money there. I think this is one of the main reason apart from the human aspects of it that we were so much interested in getting political stability in the country and at the same time improve the human rights situation, possibly eliminate completely all violations, and try to convince people that Guatemala had the human and material resources to be developed.

Q: One of the stories is that our main concern in Central America is promoting American business exploitive relationships. You think of the American Fruit Company and all that. I wonder if you could talk about our commercial interests in the region.

PIEDRA: Obviously we do have commercial interests, but I honestly think that we cannot talk about the exploitation of American business in Latin America today. You may have talked about

these things 30 or 40 years ago. I am not denying that big companies did some things that were probably not correct ones. I don't want to get involved in that because that is something of the past. We ought to talk about the bad things but we never talk about the good things that they left in terms of communications and so forth. I don't want to get involved in that.

But to talk about exploitation right now in Guatemala specifically, I don't think that is correct.

Q: Just to get a feel for this, as American Ambassador, American commercial development outside of doing it for development purposes, I mean, really didn't even cross your radar practically. Did it? To help American business wasn't a major priority.

PIEDRA: We did try to foster foreign investments and American in general because it would help the economy.

Q: The thrust of the Ambassador was to develop the economy of the country...

PIEDRA: To try to help them develop. It is not our role to develop the economy of Guatemala. Our role is to try to help them. To try to make it easier for them to develop themselves. AID and foreign aid was given to try to help them to develop...give them the technology and knowhow. They do need assistance. Very often they do not have the knowhow and knowledge. From that point of view AID did a very good job while I was there.

Q: I wonder if you could give a little idea of what the situation, political and economic, was internally in Guatemala when you arrived there in 1984?

PIEDRA: I honestly believe that there was a very significant improvement, even from the political point of view and I will tell you why. I honestly believe that Vitor really wanted the country to go back to democracy. If he had not wanted it, he could have avoided it at that time.

Q: How long had he been in power?

PIEDRA: Not very long.

Q: But there had been a military...

PIEDRA: Remember he took over from another general.

Q: So we are talking about a succession of military governments for some time and you came when there was a very significant change.

PIEDRA: That's right. I talked to him many, many times. In fact, when I left the country he was no longer president, having been replaced by a Christian Democrat who was freely elected. I took the time to go to his home...he lived in a small apartment in Guatemala...I wanted to go and say goodby and thank him for being instrumental in bringing back democracy. I really believe that in spite of other faults he may have had he really believed that the country had to go back to some type of democracy. And he should be given credit.

Q: The election was when?

PIEDRA: It must have been in November, 1983.

Q: You were there.

PIEDRA: Yes. He took office in December, one month later.

Q: Had the United States played any role by offering more aid, etc. in exchange for democracy?

PIEDRA: No, we didn't make any conditions at all as far as I can remember. I never said, "either you do it or else." We just told them point blank that if a coup or junta took place we would take it very negatively. We showed strongly our interests in democracy and human rights and it was obvious to them, but it was not specific with strings attached.

Q: You mention in human rights that it came through kidnappings, killings, threats and terrorists were coming from the right, left and all, but who was on the right and who was on the left?

PIEDRA: It was very difficult to tell. You see they had four revolutionary movements so you could tell more or less, but not specifically who were their representatives let's say in Guatemala City. For example, I used to go to Guatemala quite a lot before I became Ambassador. I remember one day in Guatemala City -- Guatemala City was a dead city. The restaurants were empty. You couldn't see people on the streets. You put on the television and all of a sudden the program would be interrupted and it would say the rebels, or whatever you want to call them, declared a state of seize, blah, blah, blah. In other words it was a situation which was really dramatic. And of course shootings were going on and it was a total disaster.

When I arrived and Majea Victor took over the situation improved very significantly. People were beginning to think that maybe he really wanted the country to come back to a democracy. Restaurants began to open again and there were people on the streets, etc. When the elections took place it was like the Fourth of July.

Q: Tell me, why did Guatemala go this way and El Salvador has remained until at least yesterday a major area of contention with the Nicaragua Sandinistas stirring up a lot of trouble?

PIEDRA: I think there are several differences. First of all I think you cannot compare the Guatemalan army with the Salvadoran army. You can say whatever you want about the Guatemalan army, but they do have esprit de corps, they have a high morale, at least among the officers. I don't think you find that in the Salvadoran army. The Guatemalan army, and I am not justifying it, I think it is terrible, did wipe out the guerrilla movement. El Salvador never did that. Why, I don't know. Maybe because they were so corrupt. So in Guatemala from that point of view there is a significant difference. I am not saying this was justified. The ends do not justify the means. But they did act in such a way that the guerrilla movement ...don't forget that you couldn't go from Guatemala City to Antigua. The guerrillas would interfere along the main roads. In other words, it was a situation in which they occupied large portions of the country. The army was able to liquidate most of the guerrillas with tactics that...I want to repeat a hundred

times that you and I would not agree with. Therefore when Majea Vitor came to power the country was in a totally different situation then it was before. So from that point of view there was greater stability in the sense that there were not guerrillas threatening to occupy cities, etc. as there was previously.

Q: Honduras was not an area where we were as concerned about as we were with El Salvador. Were the Nicaraguans trying to do anything there or were they...we are talking about the Sandinistas?

PIEDRA: Yes, they did. But you see by the time I got there the guerrillas were concentrated in the remote areas of the country so they did not constitute a threat to the major cities, communications, etc. They were more or less in isolated regions. But there were three or four areas in the country where they were operating. But they did not constitute such a burden to the cities. You could roam around Guatemala City with no problem.

Q: Did you have to worry about your security? Could you talk about what it is like being an Ambassador...?

PIEDRA: That's another story. It was two different things. We are talking now of guerrillas. The political aspect of it. The threat almost disappeared in the cities but it existed in the mountains, etc. That is correct.

Now, common criminality. That, unfortunately, began to increase. You are asking why? There are different versions and different theories concerning that. But the fact still remains that from the point of view of common criminality it began to get worse and worse. Some people claim it is because the economic situation deteriorated at the beginning. I don't know if you can give credence to that or not because in reality it is true that it deteriorated in terms of the consequence but on the other hand it also improved because better economic measures were taken. Another reason and it may be more correct, I don't know, was that many of the old policemen were kicked out. There was a clean up. Many claim that many of these people who were before involved had the arms, etc. and became common criminals. Perhaps a weaker democratic government played a role as well.

Q: What did this mean for being an American Ambassador there?

PIEDRA: From our point of view and in all honesty I never felt fearful at all. We had very good security. Sometimes you wondered if we had too much security.

Q: Some years ago we had an Ambassador killed there, John Gordon Mein.

PIEDRA: Correct. I have to admit that I never felt in any way insecure although we had a lot of security at the Embassy. Personally I had two American bodyguards all the time next to me, plus about 10 Guatemalans. You know, advanced cars, etc. There was always the danger that something could happen, but as long as I was there nothing happened.

Q: What were the main issues that you dealt with with the government? Were there any crises? Our Central American policy was at the foremost of our foreign policy during this time. Was Guatemala somewhat removed from this?

PIEDRA: Yes, Guatemala does not have a border with Nicaragua so from that point of view we were fortunate to be a little bit removed from that situation. We were, obviously, the stepping stone because we had a lot of Congressional Delegations. They were continuously coming. They would call one day and say that Senator so-and-so was coming on a tour of Central American and planned to stop over in Guatemala and wanted to see the President, the Foreign Minister, the Minister of Defense, etc. They would go from Guatemala to Nicaragua or Honduras. So we had a constant flow of people coming in and out. Now we in Guatemala, thank God, we were not involved.

Q: Because it came out later that there were an awful lot of things going on...part of it became known as the Iran-Contra Affair...

PIEDRA: We were not involved at all. As far as my knowledge is concerned we were not involved in the whole question of the Iran-Contra affair.

Q: Then you didn't feel pressure, let's say, from the National Security Council or from the Desk to do something about this or that?

PIEDRA: No. Because to avoid any possibility of people claiming to have instructions for the Embassy, the first thing I did was to say that any instruction that I receive at the Embassy had to come directly from the President through George Shultz, the Secretary of State, and Tony Martinez. I didn't care whether an instruction came from the NSC, the CIA, DOD, etc. (I repeat, none did), I wouldn't have accepted it. They would have had to send it through the Department of State.

Q: It was very much a freewheeling time for that area where you had the NSC doing things that nobody else knew about and all that.

PIEDRA: I can assure you that as long as I was in Guatemala, nothing, unless I don't know about it, like that happened. I was very, very clear about this and everybody knew it. I remember I told George Shultz and Tony Martinez. I also discussed it with Elliott Abrams.

Q: From a policy consideration I would think there would be a sort of "Thank God, Guatemala is not a major problem."

PIEDRA: Wait a minute, I want to clarify. It is not a major problem, but it could be. Don't forget Guatemala is the number one country in Central America.

Q: How do you mean the number one country?

PIEDRA: In terms of resources, in terms of everything. Guatemala is the most advanced country. Guatemala City is the Paris of Central America, if you want to use the term. Guatemala has a

very dynamic private sector, a very sophisticated one in fact. It is the most advanced in may ways of them all. So it is key. Now, fortunately for us it was not directly involved in all of these things. Indirectly, yes, because don't forget the guerrillas in Guatemala were backed by the Sandinistas and by Cuba.

Q: In looking up before this interview, there were problems when the new freely elected president came in, Serrano. He was working to institute land reforms, tax reforms, etc. but was backing off because he was really concerned about going too far because of the army. Was there an uneasy relationship or was that exaggerated?

PIEDRA: I don't really know. One of the things that Serrano did that some people criticize and some don't, was that he managed to win over the army. Now whether there was a quid pro quo there I really don't know. But everybody thought that the main opposition would be from the army. The army was always very suspicious of Serrano because he was much more leftist leaning and they were always fearful that he might turn towards Castro. Now the private sector was not in favor of him for the same reason. So when he came to power, people were anxious as to how he was going to react. For whatever reason, Serrano did not turn in that direction. He played both cards but he did not take a very leftist turn as many people expected. On the contrary, in many ways he maintained very good relations with the army, at least on the surface. Obviously there were some colonels who probably were not very happy for whatever reasons. He backed certain sections of the army and not others so there might have been some malcontents. But in all appearance things were calm in general.

Q: What were you as the Ambassador and by extension the United States government doing to help the situation?

PIEDRA: Well, don't forget that I was there only during the first 8 months of the Serrano regime. In the first 8 months, apart from the mentioned fears in certain sectors, as the months developed many of these fears declined. However, after I left, the thing started to deteriorate. By the time we left...you saw the results in the election. Serrano lost in a miserable way because people became frustrated.

Q: But it was still an election.

PIEDRA: Oh, yes. Serrano is a firm believer in democracy. I am sure of that. But in terms of his government, people were disillusioned.

Q: Did we have an AID program going in Guatemala?

PIEDRA: We did have one. I don't know how exactly it is operating.

Q: We are talking about the time you were there. What was the main thrust?

PIEDRA: Basically, as I said before, it was very much directed towards the agricultural sector. We did water projects, showed farmers new techniques in how to grow things, etc. AID was performing a very good job in many ways.

Q: There has been a major influx of immigration from Central American countries and Guatemala is one of them. Guatemalans, among others, were seeking asylum in the United States. There wasn't the guerrilla war going on as in El Salvador but they were claiming sanctuary in churches, etc. What was the feeling at the Embassy towards this?

PIEDRA: You can not generalize. I am sure that some people in reality felt threatened. But on the other hand I also think that some people...very often you want to come to the United States and there are different ways of coming. To come to the United States sometimes is not very easy. Now the only way you can do it is by saying that you are a political refugee. I am not going to say that this was the normal thing. But in certain cases I think these two things can overlap.

Q: I was in Yugoslavia for five years. Yet there were people who left Yugoslavia claiming refugee status and actually they were really what you call an economic refugee.

PIEDRA: Yes, that is what I am trying to say. However, sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the political and economic refugee.

Q: Did you have problems with members of the Catholic Church from the States?

PIEDRA: No. They would sometimes come with complaints about human rights and we would try to investigate it but they never created any problems for us.

Q: Well, let's say you get a complaint about human rights. After all one could say that if a policeman beats up a minority in Los Angeles, the Guatemalan Ambassador in Washington isn't going to send out someone to investigate. But what were we doing?

PIEDRA: We would if it were an American citizen.

Q: But what if it wasn't an American citizen? You would get a report saying that there had been a killing in such and such a place; this would get in the papers; and then they would say what about this?

PIEDRA: Well, first of all we would try to find out the facts as they were...sometimes, as you know, these things are difficult. If there is something that is legitimate and we think it of serious consequences we would go to the Foreign Minister, or whoever it was, first and go through the proper channels. If necessary we would take it to the very top and say, "We are very concerned because we hear this is going on, and as you know we are opposed to any violations of human rights. We do not believe this is a question of getting involved with internal affairs, it is just a question of justice or humanitarianism."

For example, if we knew of a sudden kidnaping of somebody...one case when I was there had to do with trade unions. I went in to see the Foreign Minister and said, "This is terrible, how could it happen? Can you imagine the impact this will have abroad if something happens to this person?"

If they got the message they would try to solve the problem.

Q: I take it that there was understanding on the Guatemalan side of the government that when we made these protests it was not just meddling.

PIEDRA: It all depends on how you say these things. If you go there pounding on the table, that is ridiculous. But if you go and say, "Look, Emanuel, we just found out this. How could this be possible now that Guatemala is going on the right track? Now that Guatemala is doing the right thing. Now that the prestige of Guatemala is coming back after so many years of being considered the worse. Can't you investigate to see what is happening? I am sure you are not behind it." And let them do the rest. They know we are concerned. They know that we know about these things and we are putting it in general terms of "Hey, do this!" You don't say that, but they get the message.

Q: I take it that within that society you worked very hard to be on a first name basis?

PIEDRA: Yes. That is why I have always maintained that if you want to be a good diplomat the first thing you have to do is cultivate human relations. Because it is much easier for you to operate once you have this good personal relationship at the very beginning.

Q: What about Cuba? Did Cuba Embassy play much of a role?

PIEDRA: There was no Cuban Embassy in Guatemala.

Q: How about the Soviets?

PIEDRA: They don't have an embassy either. You see Guatemala did not have diplomatic relations with the Soviet countries at all. They didn't have any communist country in Guatemala at the time.

Q: What about Mexico?

PIEDRA: Relations were not very good. Guatemala vis-a-vis Mexico is similar to what it used to be between Mexico and the United States. Because, don't forget, according to the Guatemalans the whole Chiapas region was originally Guatemala and the Mexicans took it away from them. So therefore there is the feeling of big brother on top who has abused Guatemala.

Now, by the way, it is to the credit of the Guatemalan government that it established good relations with the Mexican government. There were many implications of all this because it had to do with the whole question of guerrillas coming into Guatemala from Mexico. The guerrillas are according to Guatemalan sources, very often going into Mexico, staying there a while and then come back.

Q: Did we stay out of the problems between Mexico and Guatemala?

PIEDRA: We didn't get involved because it wasn't that serious. I mean, it wasn't a question about war. It was just a sort of antagonism for historical reasons which was reflected now because of the suspicion that Mexico was protecting the guerrillas. The Mexican government, of course, has denied this saying that they can't patrol the border. Whatever the reason, the Guatemalans interpreted this as a sort of protection that the Mexican government was giving at the time to allow the guerrillas to linger there, etc. Therefore when there were some incidents...as you know there were some refugee camps which, after meetings, were pulled back a certain number of miles to avoid this problem.

Q: How about with Belize?

PIEDRA: That is a very touchy problem. But from what I have heard Savana [ph] now is going to change the whole thing.

Q: Guatemala had a claim there. Was this something that we got involved in or sort of left it to the British?

PIEDRA: We did and we didn't. We did in the sense that we wanted a peaceful solution. So from that point of view, yes. We did not get involved directly because it was a problem between Britain and Guatemala directly and had nothing to do with us. But, of course, we would not like a conflict there or a problem so we were always sympathetic to any kind of agreement which had been reached between both countries. Guatemala right now realizes that there is no possibility of their recovering Belize as part of Guatemala. But I do think they want rights towards the sea, etc.

Q: Did you and your Embassy get involved in the various peacekeeping efforts...El Salvador business dominated everything, the guerrilla war there. We were getting involved militarily, at least through assistance. Mexico and Venezuela and other Central American governments were in the Contradora...Was Guatemala involved?

PIEDRA: Well, yes they were involved. It was not a problem, but that is where diplomacy came in. Where did Guatemala stand in all this? Mexico wanted Guatemala always to be basically on their side. So from that point of view we were directly involved.

Q: I am sure you were getting cables all the time with instructions essentially to tell the Guatemalans this was how we wanted to see things and all. This is done to every post. On the Contradora position did you find the Guatemalans receptive, understanding of our concerns?

PIEDRA: I would say they were receptive. But the question here is that Guatemala wanted to follow a sort of independent, sort of neutral policy. We would have liked Guatemala to take more of a pro-US position in the whole Contradora process. Guatemala didn't want to antagonize either the US or Mexico so they took sort of a neutralist policy.

Q: At least they weren't against us.

PIEDRA: No, they were not against us. Sometimes they took actions that we would not have liked them to take.

Q: Were there any other major problems that I haven't touched on?

PIEDRA: Guatemala was not directly involved in the Sandinista problem. I am glad you mentioned the Contradora because, of course, that was an important issue that for a time did play a significant role, especially when we had the roving ambassadors. First we had Shlaudeman and then Philip Habib. They came to Guatemala a lot to keep in touch with the position of Guatemala vis-a-vis Nicaragua. But it was all on a diplomatic level. It was never on any other level except the diplomatic level.

Q: What was your impression, you were on first name basis with many of the leaders there and all, of what was happening in Nicaragua with the Sandinistas, etc.?

PIEDRA: Well, privately, they were against the Sandinistas in general. But publicly they played it neutral. You see, one of the problems is that they were never sure of our attitude in the long run. In other words, they were never sure whether one day we would drop the Contras. They were not absolutely convinced that if they took our side...if we ever dropped the Contras and the Sandinistas were the ones who ruled, then they would find themselves in a very difficult position.

Q: A lot of Americans...

PIEDRA: They kept reminding me of what happened in Vietnam. And that is why they played this neutral attitude.

Q: How about the media? How did you find the press within Guatemala, and did you also get American reporters coming looking for horror stories? Was media a problem at all?

PIEDRA: I have to admit that as long as I was Ambassador in Guatemala we had no problem with the media except one case. Our security had decided that we should improve our security system around the Embassy in Guatemala and we had to close one of the streets, etc. That was used by one of the newspapers as a pretext to attack the Embassy for our policy in general. Saying that this is once again a demonstration of American imperialism, blah, blah, blah, and they think they can control everything, etc.

My personal opinion was that the attack was not so much an attack on us as it was a way to attack the mayor of Guatemala City whose rival in the mayoral elections had been the head of the newspaper involved. The mayor, of course, was the one who gave us authorization to do things. I think in order to hit the mayor he used us.

In terms of foreign correspondence who came, yes, sometimes they tried to...but I generally would say no. Even 60 Minutes interviewed me for half an hour, but used only 2 minutes.

Q: 60 Minutes is sort of a muckraking TV show in which, if you appear on it, you are usually going to appear looking awful.

PIEDRA: They were asking me about human rights. I said to myself, "I bet you anything they are going to ask me and I am going to say the situation improved, etc., and right after that they will show somebody lying dead in the street." They did do that, but they didn't do it right after I spoke. With me personally, they didn't embarrass me.

Q: Was there any problem with drug smuggling or anything else at that time?

PIEDRA: Towards the end of my tour the drug problem began. There were rumors and talk, etc.

Q: So this was not on your priority list?

PIEDRA: It was beginning but at that time not a major problem.

Q: So you left in ...?

PIEDRA: August, 1987 and then I was appointed to the United Nations with Dick Walters.

PAUL E. WHITE
Deputy Director, USAID
Guatemala City (1986-1989)

Mr. White was born and raised in Indiana. He received his education at Sacramento State College, Valparaiso University and the East-West Center in Hawaii. He joined USAID in 1970. During his career with that Agency, Mr. White served in Vientiane, Seoul, Phnom Penh, Panama City, Lima, Guatemala City, Tokyo and Mexico City. He also had tours of duty at USAID Headquarters in Washington. Mr. White was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.

WHITE: No, when I worked in Laos, I worked with a guy, Tony (Anthony J.) Cauterucci, he was my boss and I was his deputy. When I went to Panama in the Seventies Tony was also the head of the office I worked in, I was his deputy. So Tony in 1986 went to Guatemala as the mission director and he asked me if I'd come and work with him again. So we'd worked together in the Sixties and Seventies, so here's the chance in the Eighties. We were very good friends. I decided, okay, I'll give Latin America another shot.

Q: So you're in Guatemala from 1986 to 1989. What was the situation in Guatemala at the time?

WHITE: Very tense. I think it was like the wild, wild West. The military was out of control. There was a lot of tension between the Indians and the government. It was just a dangerous place. People carried weapons. It was not a fun place to be.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WHITE: Ambassador Alberto Piedra [Ed: served from August 1984 to August 1987] was an interesting guy. He was **a** member of Opus Dei. He wasn't very happy with our family planning program there.

Q: Opus Dei being a Catholic, very disciplined Catholic order of laymen.

WHITE: …laymen, and he was very supportive of AID, Ambassador Piedra was but he was nothing like Ambassador Michel, who followed him, who knew our program so well and was so supportive. During that period was also, the peace negotiations were starting in Guatemala. I was not involved in that at all but the big political scene was that there were discussions there.

Q: Who was negotiating with whom?

WHITE: Well that's a good question. Trying to get the combatants to lay down their arms and convincing them that they would not be imprisoned if they peacefully tried to put Guatemala back together again. A number of things were happening. Obviously the military, the Guatemalan military were heavily involved in that, as were the United Nations, involved as well. So that was kind of a backdrop for what was going on there.

The AID program itself was working in the highlands with Indians. We'd done a number of things that had not pleased the government. For instance, AID had a bilingual education program with the Indians and that was extremely controversial. Bilingual education was always controversial.

Q: When you say bilingual, is this Indian language and…

WHITE: …and Spanish. The idea was that the dropout rates and retention rates were so high that if you offered the first grade entirely in Mayan language, second grade half in Mayan and half in Spanish and by the third grade have them integrated into Spanish, the theory was if you did it that way you would be able to retain people longer in the system. And it's probably true, that result was probably achieved but it was extremely controversial, even among Indian villages. You would have villagers who would say, "I don't want my kid to go to school to speak in Indian language. I want him to go to school to learn Spanish." The argument is that if you start in Mayan and move into Spanish you perform better over the long run but that wasn't very obvious to some villagers. So within villages and within the government this was extremely controversial and was one of those things where AID in a sense forced the hand, as we developed the project and found a few people who were willing to work with us to implement it, implementing it even though it was surrounded with controversy. Usually we don't get involved in those kinds of programs.

Q: Paul, what was your portfolio? What were you dealing with?

WHITE: In Guatemala I was the deputy director, so I was almost entirely dealing with internal AID bureaucratics and working with the bureaucratic structure of the various project officers in the mission, making sure that they had good projects designed, making sure that we could argue with Washington for budget for those projects and dealing with personnel matters.

Q: When you arrived there, did you find inappropriate or not well run programming? What did you find when you went there?

WHITE: No, I wouldn't characterize it that way. Certainly I found some project managers who I felt were not on top of their projects the way they should be, but for the most part that wasn't the case. I found some projects that did not fit the new spirit of AID, of working with the private sector and a lot of the things that we had changed over the years. A lot of the projects were more, especially in the agriculture sector, were more traditional projects that AID had moved away from in most of the world. So part of my job was to update the portfolio and get rid of the kind of agricultural extension projects and things that AID didn't do anymore and move the money into more private sector oriented activity.

Q: Did you see, in Guatemala, were we spending a significant amount of money actually on the country as opposed to bringing in experts?

WHITE: Yeah, we certainly were spending money in the country. We also brought in experts. While I've generally said I don't like that, one of the things that we did was, we brought in a team of experts to look at a forty year retrospective study of what AID had done in assistance to the highlands of Guatemala, to go through all of the past records and look at projects and try to figure out from what we had done forty years ago up to the present, what had stuck and what had not. Which institutions that we created continued to function as institutions and in fact had grown and become Guatemalan institutions, which ones died the year after our money stopped. So that was an extremely useful study and it was done not entirely by expats, because there were some Guatemalans on the team. We insisted on having a Guatemalan anthropologist and a couple of others. But it was largely expat. But very useful in showing that projects that you think are extremely successful because everyone's toed the line and they've done everything they were supposed to do, two years after they're over noting remains.

Q: This has been one of the great complaints about our aid program. What was the assessment that you had? What kind of worked and what didn't work?

WHITE: Well, the other side of that story is that projects that really sputter along and that have difficult times and the project officers on the local side are really difficult to deal with often are the projects that are successful, because those are the people that have an idea they're fighting for and they're struggling for and they're willing to argue with you, instead of just toeing the line and getting the money they're really working to make an idea work. And they're dealing with other people and struggling to get money and dealing with the kind of change that happens in management. So at the end of the project you look at the AID evaluation, it looks like a series of fights and it hasn't gone anywhere, many of those projects are the ones that have, that were successful. So what I come out of that with is that it really depends on the leadership of a project. Success depends on leaders and it depends on leaders who are willing to take issue with AID, to stand up for their own principles. But we tend to like the people that work with us well.

Q: What type of projects seem to develop roots in that culture there?

WHITE: Well, the institutional development projects. When you're working within an institution to strengthen that institution, as opposed to working directly with farmers and you had a program that somehow was able to avoid the agricultural extension system or the university extension system and go in and set up demonstration projects directly with farmers and all of that, you might have benefited those few farmers that you were working directly with, but over the long run when the project's over there's no institution there to continue doing it. So the ones that really struggled with the hard job of institutional creation and strengthening were the ones that were more successful.

Q: Did we have like, farm agents, in other words, people who are out there to give help to a broad variety

WHITE: For instance, in Guatemala a lot of agricultural cooperatives were set up in certain projects and the cooperatives, working with the agricultural extension agents and the government is always difficult because that's usually a very weak institution and usually there's huge turnover. So you go in and you work with these guys and you train them, you send them off to the States and they get a masters and they come back really ready go and they come back in the same situation, a weak institution. The next day they're gone and they're working for Ralston Purina or something. So a better way seems to have been to work with local institutions, local cooperatives, where you're actually not working with the farmers but creating a cooperative structure that is lower level than a government agency, that's part of the community and that possibly has a chance to stay on and sustain itself. So that was one of the things. Another is working with the local NGOs (non government organization). Where there's a local NGO who was there before our project and will be there after it and you work with them to strengthen what they're doing. And that's another secret, it seems, is to work within the structure of what someone else wants to do rather than what the outside expert thinks should be done.

Q: What sort of NGOs were you finding, because this is a fairly new phenomenon, isn't it?

WHITE: NGOs are not that new. Working with them as a government agency is fairly new. AID started working with NGOs in the late Sixties, early Seventies and we've been working with local NGOs over all of that time. Some of them are church-based. I mentioned *Fay Alegria*, with is a church-based, Catholic-based, religious vocational education group. But we've also worked with lots of others, lots of local NGOs. The problem that you have with local NGOs is a lot of them tend to be humanitarian. They exist to give food to someone or provide other kinds of help and AID generally doesn't like social welfare projects. We want to work in technical areas. So part of our job has been to identify local agencies who have all of the heart in the world and help them build the brains to go with that heart. So, helping them to develop the management structures that will ensure transition of leaders, helping them develop budgetary capacity, helping them to develop the ability to write good proposals so they can get funding from not just AID but from other donors. So we've tended to work with NGOs in those kinds of structures, not necessarily just in a project mode.

Q: I take it most of your work was with the Indians in the highlands. Well how did you find the central government, which I assume would be more Latino, dealt with the Indians?

WHITE: Again, we had the same problems that you have elsewhere, a lot of prejudice. For instance, a good example is in the Central American Peace Scholarships Project, which I developed in Washington and now I had a chance to implement it in Guatemala. We would send Guatemalans off for training. As I mentioned, we send a lot of Indians off for shorter-term training and some for long term training as well. But I recall this one incident where the local Latinos that we had sent to a place for training ended up staying in the hotel where some of the Guatemalan Indians from Guatemala who were there on another training program. The Latinos protested that they didn't want to stay at the same hotel the Indians were staying at! So that's the extent to which sometimes that feeling is still there. It's difficult. There was a person in the Ministry of Planning that we worked with, the head of planning, in fact, who had a really good sense for what we were doing and was very supportive. We worked with him to try to ensure that there were line items put in the Guatemalan budget that would support continued work with NGOs and with Indian groups and were able to have a lot of influence because there's a lot of local currency.

In the old days, AID did a lot of projects that generated local currency. For instance, PL-480 commodities that were sold. Bring in wheat, you give the wheat to the bakers, they make the bread, sell it and some of the money goes back to the Ministry of Planning in a joint account that's jointly administered by USAID and the ministry. So there was all of this local currency and AID was getting out of the PL-480 business.

So we were able to negotiate, for instance, that that local currency would be put into specific line items in the Guatemalan budget that would support local NGOs, support local Indian activities and all of that. Now, I haven't looked recently to see if those line items have continued. But certainly over a period of time those line items existed and that was because the Ministry of Planning was strong enough and had the ear of the president and was able to make those kinds of changes. So I consider that a real achievement. Was it a lasting achievement? We have to look and see.

Q: Was there any reflection of, I know Guatemala has an extensive border with Mexico and all. Did this make any difference?

WHITE: In those days, the difference was that when the military was really killing Indians, the Indians found they could escape across the border to Mexico and escape the Guatemalan military, so it created a political problem along the border. That was the extent that I knew about when I was in Guatemala. When we get to my Mexico assignment I'll talk about some of the cross-border things between Mexico and Guatemala that we tried to do there.

Q: Why was the military going after the Indians?

WHITE: I think the sense was that they were subversive, that they were working to if not overthrow the government to cause trouble like the *Sendero*, all the way from local robberies to perhaps things that were more political in nature.

Q: Well did you have problems going into the highlands?

WHITE: No, but we worked the part of the highlands that was closest to Guatemala City. The further you got into the mountains, the more difficult it got. We had a couple of projects with sheep and other things in more distant places but for the most part we worked the area that was closest to the city.

Q: Was there a significant produce infrastructure in Guatemala, supplying fruits and berries or whatever?

WHITE: Yes, one of our projects then, it was just at a period when the U.S. market was starting these niche market kind of opportunities for winter crops from Latin America. So we had a number of projects that produced strawberries for the U.S. market and produced cut flowers for the U.S. market, a whole series of, asparagus. And those kind of things really boomed and we did it all through a cooperative program, developing cooperatives that did this and we helped them with quality control, with packaging and all of that, with contact with the market in the U.S.

Q: What about women? Were we trying to empower women or not?

WHITE: We were, yes. Part of that Central American Peace Scholarships Project was that there was the "Experience America" and that was to continue to work with people after they returned home. Another element that was really different from what AID had done in the past is that I set a target that fifty per cent, I think actually it was forty per cent, of the trainees had to be women. And that was at a period when I looked at AID's program world-wide and it's something like 18 or 19 per cent of all of our trainees were women. We exceeded that. We did 55 or so per cent of all the trainees in that 15,000 were women. So that was a major step forward. People said, "You'll never be able to get highland Indian men to let their women go the States for training." So that was a challenge and we went up to the area and recruited people and found that that was not a problem at all. That was just an old wives tale. So we were able to send large groups of women, sometimes ten or 15 or 20 at a time, for training in the States but also in the undergraduate programs we recruited a lot of women.

Q: Well when, let's take women, came back from this shortish training, what would they do?

WHITE: Well, it's amazing the kinds of things that happen. We sent them up for very specific kind of training. For example if we found of village of candle makers and so we sent them up to learn how to do a better job of making candles and some of the training was more specifically on leadership development, the kind of thing that USIA used to do. But what we found was it was not necessarily the training that was given that made a difference in lives but things that they saw while they were in the States. So a lot of the Guatemalan women went to Florida for training and one of the things they did, as a part of their training they would have a chance to go to Disney World. They also had a chance to go to, in Miami, to a Miami flea market. And we found later that all over the highlands women had developed flea markets. One of the things that they learned from that trip was that you could get things together and market them and people would buy stuff that you'd never think they would buy. So all of a sudden there's this little development of things that no one had, that was not part of what we were looking at and I haven't seen any follow up studies recently. but I would really be interested and I keep talking to people about going down and looking at the people that we trained here all these years later to see what else

they've done that we might trace back to things that they saw in the U.S. or things that they learned during in training, as well.

Q: You were there during the Reagan Administration, still. What about the family planning, birth control, which a Republican Administration usually was not supportive, but how did that…

WHITE: Well, I've seen those transitions several times and I guess I think the stink is usually raised in the U.S., with people that have strong political leanings. When you get out to the field, between the UN family planning program and all of the other donors that offer family planning, if the U.S. was not offering some specific activity like abortion there are twenty other ways that that program continues without us and it's not a big deal. Even though it's a big deal here.

Q: Did developments in Nicaragua, you didn't border on there but this was the one radical state in Central America. Did that play out? I mean, were there reflections in Guatemala?

WHITE: I don't know the answer to that. Certainly I didn't see anything there. One of the things we did, the lady that worked with me on all of the training, this happened largely after I left Guatemala was that the peace accords were finally negotiated and the dissidents laid down their arms and we developed a huge training program to reintroduce them into society, giving them new skills and all of that. The lady that worked with me on all of my training ran that program. She was really excited about the results, that the people she was working with were both eager to be trained and that the programs were good and people were going out and actually going into the marketplace with new skills. I didn't look at that program but I communicated a lot with her when she was doing it. But Nicaragua, I'm not sure that there was any impact there. I think people looked at Nicaragua as, Somoza was overthrown, that showed that the left could do some things but Nicaragua was a special case. It might have encouraged the leftists but it maybe also gave some encouragement to governments to work harder to try to not let that happen. That might have even pushed the peace process faster in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Q: Was there a military government when you were there?

WHITE: No, it was a civilian government when I was there.

Q: How did the military perform?

WHITE: I didn't have any dealings with them. My sense was that the military was largely autonomous and that they ran large areas of the country like up country in the highlands. It was like a warlord situation, where the military was running it, not the government.

Q: Well, did the military warlords impact on your programs?

WHITE: No, only to the extent that earlier, that program of bilingual education, I think the military really didn't like that program. That had shut down before I got there but I had a sense that the military was heavily involved in shutting that program down and in fact the guy that ran that program, the AID guy, went to Pakistan after Guatemala and during my time in Guatemala he came back to Guatemala on vacation and he had worked so closely with the Indians he went

up country to visit some of the people that he worked with, many of whom had crossed over, become refugees in Mexico and he was killed up there. His body was found floating in the ocean and we tried everything we could, we had every agency in the U.S. government that we could, try to trace it, because everyone felt that he was probably assassinated by the military because of his previous involvement. We could never find any smoking gun there but we certainly lost a good officer. Frank Fairchild was his name.

JAMES MICHEL
Ambassador
Guatemala (1987-1989)

Ambassador Michel was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri and educated at Harris Junior College and St. Louis University. Joining the State Department in 1965, he served first as Acting Legal Advisor in the Department. His subsequent assignments were: Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs; Acting Administrator for Latin American Affairs for AID; US Representative to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD); and Counselor of the Agency for International Development (AID). From 1987 to 1989 he served as US Ambassador to Guatemala. Following retirement, the Ambassador engaged in Private Practice as Consultant for International Development. Ambassador Michel was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: Then you're off to Guatemala in '87.

MICHEL: Eighty-seven.

Q: Yes. How about your hearings? Was there much interest... And you. I mean, were you kind of tainted? Were the senators looking at you skeptically? How did you feel?

MICHEL: There was a delay from the time I was nominated. I thought that it would be nice to get there before the congressional recess, and they waited until after to be sure that nothing would come out. But the hearing was pretty straight forward. I was asked questions, and I answered them. No real issues there. Once the hearing occurred, the vote on the nomination was probably *en bloc*. I don't think there was a separate vote or anything like that. We had a bunch of us that they voted out.

Q: What about Jesse Helms and Jesse Helms' staff?

MICHEL: They were interested. They didn't have reason to think that I was going to be, from their standpoint, wild and irresponsible. I'd worked a lot with Congress over the years in both the Legal Adviser's Office and in Latin American Affairs. I'd like to think that I had enjoyed a pretty good reputation with Congress as being straight with them and not trying to fool anybody and seen as reasonable from the left and from the right. I don't think I had any real...

Q: There was a staff member, a woman, on Helms' staff who eventually married somebody either in Honduras or Guatemala. Was she...

MICHEL: Debbie DeMoss.

Q: Yea. Where did she stand? Was she around?

MICHEL: She was around. I'm trying to remember if Senator Helms even appeared for the hearing. She did, I know, because she spoke to me afterward; she spoke to my wife afterward. I just saw her, by the way, at Bill Pryce's funeral. She was there. .

Q: You arrived in Guatemala when?

MICHEL: I guess it was October, early October.

Q: Of '87.

MICHEL: Of '87.

Q: Can you describe two things: the situation in Guatemala in October when you arrived, and then we'll talk about what were American concerns.

MICHEL: There were two things going on in Guatemala. One was there had been a constitutional convention, a constituent assembly, and they had adopted a new constitution. There had been an election. The winner of that election, a Christian Democrat. Vinicio Cerezo, is somebody who had spent a lot of time in the Washington area, knew a lot of people in Congress, and in his campaign promises and in his discussions in Washington, he talked a lot about human rights, democracy, opportunity for poor people. A lot of this and a lot of his government was viewed with cynicism by established powers in Guatemala both in the private sector and in the military who had left not like Argentina, a defeated army. They had won their war.

Q: Their war being against the...

MICHEL: The poor people in their country. And there was still a small force of armed insurgents out there in the countryside when I was there. I think was '96 when they finally signed the peace agreement. But it was hard to find a thousand of them, and I think there were just enough of them that the army could retain power and resources and it wasn't a serious threat to the country. So you had this internal fragility politically with an elected government. There were jokes like, "The president's mother was very happy when he was elected president because at last he had a job." That was one of the jokes they told. There was not a lot to building on here, and the people who came into government included some who were very good and others who were more part of the political party apparatus rather than people who had real capability at governance. So it was a pretty mixed picture. Good presidents in the central bank, you had a good minister of economy, finance minister was pretty good, agricultural minister was pretty good, but some not so good, and some of the immediate staff, pretty political, less public spirited you might say.

There was weakness in the performance of the government that justified some of the criticism, so this was an ongoing situation. The other situation was the *Contadora* process of the Central Americans under the leadership of Oscar Arias in Costa Rica at the time, saying, "Let's, we Central Americans, get together and see if we can work for peace in this region because it's not in any of our interest to have this conflict going." By that time it was largely Nicaragua, a little bit El Salvador, but mainly Nicaragua by that time. So Guatemala was very interested in that, and you had one of the meetings in this process had just occurred when I got there. It was Esquipulas which is a town in Guatemala where they drew up some ideas about peace in Central America. Washington wasn't too keen on all of this.

Q: Yea. I was going to ask about that. It's one of these things, "Well, if it isn't our idea, it should be." Typical Washington response.

MICHEL: "We're not in control. We don't know what these guys will do." There was that in Washington. Fortunately for me, we then had a series of people who were regional ambassadors that the president had named.

Q: This was...

MICHEL: This was President Reagan at the time. But just a small aside of how we can confuse people, my predecessor in Guatemala was named Piedra, and *piedra* is "stone" in Spanish. President Reagan appointed former senator from Florida, Dick Stone, to be the Central America ambassador to the utter confusion of some Guatemalans who had to deal with Piedra and Stone! [laughter] Anyway, so there was that regional diplomacy that was done, and I didn't have to be too responsible for that dimension of it and could concentrate more on bilateral issues trying to encourage the strengthening of a democratic state and a diversifying economy that created some jobs and expanded health and education systems. We hade a hundred fifty million dollar aid program. There was no World Bank program because they were in arrears to the World Bank. There was no IMF program because they had not fulfilled their commitments to the IMF. So we were the economic policy dialogue partner about issues of exchange rates, interest rates - macro-economic policy issues. We were big in Guatemala.

Q: Was part of your goal to bring them into the World Bank orbit? In other words, get them up to snuff?

MICHEL: Yes. And not to do it for them but to help them want to do it. And working with the private sector. I used to ask the commercial officer to pick out an exporter of the month, and I'd go around and visit them. I cultivated those people in the business community who were the younger, smaller businesses that were outside the traditional areas of coffee and sugar and things like that, encouraging diversification.

Q: What were they? What type of things were they?

MICHEL: Oh, gee. Everything from rattan furniture and shoes to micro enterprises producing: pots and pans, solar heating, small landholders who produced high quality fruits and vegetables.

Q: Have they moved into the market now? It's so familiar to us, and that is to find supermarkets with fruits and vegetables off-season.

MICHEL: Yes. That was part of the technical assistance. We had a guy who worked for AID. He was from Mexico, and he knew the agricultural markets: When do you ship to Miami? When do you ship to Boston? When do you ship to California? When is the Mexican product in? When is the California product in? You don't want to go then, you want to go at a different time when there's a gap in the supply. In a country where the temperature's pretty steady through the year, if you can irrigate you can control when the water is there, because the water is otherwise there only half the year. If you can control the water supply, you can pretty much control when your crops will be ready for harvest, and they could time production to fit the market cycle. I went back a few years ago, had occasion to go to Quetzaltenango in the west of the country, located in the higher elevation where they terrace a lot with AID support. Those terraces are still there, and they go for miles. It was always gratifying to talk with these farmers. , These were people who previously had almost no cash income. Earlier they were throwing corn in rows down the hillside. When they went to higher value products, using mulch, irrigating, growing high value vegetables instead of corn that didn't grow that well, all of a sudden they were able to buy trucks and build their houses out of cement blocks instead of adobe, and they had plumbing inside and could send their kids to school. It was dramatic.

Q: How would you describe the social structure in Guatemala at the time?

MICHEL: You could see that it was evolving. I was very fortunate in having a DCM, Gerry Lamberty whom I recruited, who had served in Guatemala in the 1960's and had a historical perspective. So you could see that it was evolving. Things were happening. It was not as insular as it had been, but it still had a long way to go. It still had a pretty narrow group of people who really lived very well and felt a sense of entitlement: "I worked for this. It's mine." Certainly some hard-working people who earned, in a sense, but they earned in a context that having a little family wealth, having a little education, having weak government, they were advantaged in ways that they didn't always acknowledge. "I worked hard for this!" "Well, yes, but the situation was that hard work paid off for you. A lot of people worked hard, and it didn't pay off for them." So you had this narrow group of people who lived very well. You had a growing middle class especially in the cities, in Guatemala City in particular, but then you had a very large class of people who lived very poorly and, finally, at the bottom of the social structure you had the Mayan population, the indigenous people whose experience with Western culture over 500 years had been almost uniformly bad, and so they were vulnerable to people who, for reasons of their own, would tell them, "Don't have your children vaccinated. That's a secret program to sterilize them." "Don't send your children to school because they'll tell them lies and turn them against you.

Q: What was the motivation behind these agitators?

MICHEL: Keep them away. Maintain influence in your community by keeping the rest of the world out, some of it undoubtedly motivated by legitimate feelings that the outside world was not good for the Indian.

Q: What was the role of the military?

MICHEL: The military was all the government there was in much of the countryside when you got out of the cities. It was a large force. I think it was about 40,000 when I was there, not particularly well equipped, and antiquated stuff, helicopters that wouldn't fly, but a lot of them. They had power because they had been in government or in a position of influence, not directly in the government. There was their bank. They had their farms. They were into various economic enterprises. They were a powerful force.

Q: Was the military acting in the role that it has in some other parts of Latin American where this is a place where the relatively poor people could go into it, get into officer ranks.

MICHEL: Yes.

Q: And this made them socially acceptable.

MICHEL: Yes. I used to go to graduation ceremonies at the military academy at the request of our military attaché because they would have some kind of prize—binoculars to the best engineering student or something like that. You would see the mothers of these graduating cadets in their traditional *traje tipica*, traditional dress of the Mayan. And those were the mothers, and the sons wore the uniform of the army. It was a different dress, and it was the army uniform. There was at the time a defense minister, Hector Gramajo, who had been to command and staff school at Leavenworth and had been exposed to U. S. military doctrine, who certainly at a rhetorical level, was strong on the sense of the army being there to serve. I remember him giving a speech on Army Day. He said, "You're here to serve, not to serve yourself. The duty, your duty, is to serve, not to serve yourself."

Q: Did the army go our and do civic work?

MICHEL: Yea. The Corps of Engineers was trying to build a road across the north. It was pretty isolated territory, and they had the blueprints for a long time, and they did some other kinds of work in the less remote parts of the country. One of the things that I tried to do was to encourage the civilian ministries to get out there because there was some discomfort with the military performing all these functions of governance in the countryside. They were the only ones there in part because the transportation was not good, and they had the heavy transport to get out there whereas the normal automobile you would have a hard time on some of these roads. One of the things that I did was try to get, for example, a ministry of public works involved on some of the road building in the countryside. We would have US Army engineers who would train in Central America. The Army would come and do a lot of training in Honduras. I had a discussion with the commander, SOUTHCOM. I really don't want to see a large presence of U. S. military in a country where we're trying to encourage easing away from thinking of the military as the most important institution and build up the sense of civilian authority, so let's keep it down to a platoon level, no more than 50 people at once. So we would have platoons of engineers, medics, supply people—how to run a supply warehouse—come down and do training and working with their Guatemalan counterparts. I tried to get the relevant civilian ministry involved so that if the medics came down and they did exercises that involved them visiting the same village repeatedly,

and the thought was that if they go back two, three, four times over two years that you'll raise the level of health so that can be sustained locally. Everybody had an intestinal problem, and everybody had a respiratory problem living in the highlands. Damp. Cold. Not good sanitation. Sometimes water was not good. That was a matter of getting the military to work with us, to cooperate with it, and they did. Sometimes the civilian ministries were disappointing because they were pretty weak, especially in rural areas where the only government was the military. But the military was by and large cooperative and inclined to go back to the barracks and not try to run the country anymore, and the leadership of the military didn't want that responsibility.

Q: Had they been burned?

MICHEL: I think certainly the more thoughtful ones in the leadership roles saw that when you looked around the world, certainly when you looked around Latin America, you didn't see a lot of government leaders wearing military uniforms anymore. There had been a deserved negative reputation for Guatemalan military because of the ferocity of their counterinsurgency efforts in the late 1970's, early 1980's. They saw that the country would be better off if they pulled back, but they wouldn't pull back unless somebody was there to step forward. They were not going to pull back and leave a vacuum where trouble could happen.

Q: Was there a Cuban Sandinista or any kind of thing, influence in there or not?

MICHEL: No. What you really had was that the presidents of Central America and senior people in their governments all talk to each other, and that includes the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. So there was a dialogue that was going on, and there was a resistance by the Guatemalans from breaking that solidarity with their neighbors and leaning too far toward Washington.

Q: How did you view this? Were we trying to keep our hand in or encouraging them to talk to each other?

MICHEL: There was this other regional diplomacy that went on. I certainly didn't try to discourage it because look at the size of these countries. Look at their economic capabilities. There's been a dream of Central American integration since 1821 anyway, when they all became independent on the same day. The idea of these countries cooperating I thought was by and large a good thing, and there were people in Washington who agreed with that. It was a question of degree, I think.

Q: Was there any form of American influence? The old united troop thing of having big American concerns using these as plantations. Was any of that going on in Guatemala by this time?

MICHEL: Well, Del Monte fresh fruit was still there on the Caribbean side, and they were largely bananas. They were concerned about *not* projecting that kind of an image and, indeed, sold some of their land and production to a local firm that was set up. I went out to the inauguration of this local firm's effort in banana production, and the people from Del Monte were there and wishing them well. There was a banana law that gave a privileged tax status to the producers of bananas as there were in all the Central American countries, and they were very

interested in maintaining that law, which was a part of the economic promise on which they ran their business. If the law were to change, then they'd have to change other things in the calculations, so they didn't want to have to do that. But no, there was no exceptional private economic influence. There were companies that wanted to do business in Guatemala. We had a lot of commercial delegations. They kept the commercial officer very busy. There were two of them during my time. The second, Chuck Ford, is the U. S. Ambassador in Honduras today. He and his predecessor, Carlos Poza, would attract and organize reception for trade delegations that came from the United States, largely from the southern States. Chambers of Commerce and a state secretary of commerce or lieutenant governor would come down with them, and we put them together with these people in the modern Guatemalan private sector. The Caribbean Basin Initiative was still fairly new in those days, so you had the duty-free entry for the U. S. market that was interesting, and we tried to encourage some interest between southern states and Central American countries, and Guatemala was part of that. But no overwhelming private U. S. economic interest, a sugar company or anything like that.

Q: What about unions? What sort of role did unions play? The AFL-CIO for a long time... This goes back to the '40s, '50s, '60s, particularly, and put a lot of emphasis into training. How was this playing out when you were there?

MICHEL: Very active program. At that time Bill Doherty was the head of the AIFLD which was the AFL-CIO regional affiliate for Latin America, and we did a lot of work on training unions and a lot of work talking to employers about unions and talking to the government about unions. I'm reminded of one small anecdote where in my rule of law promotion capacity, I took an interest in an opportunity from the American Bar Association to have some arbitration experts come down and talk about, among other things, labor arbitration. We left it to the Guatemalan Bar Association to organize the seminar. And so the experts came down, and they had a labor arbitration seminar. The Bar Association didn't invite the union's lawyers to the seminar. They invited the company lawyers! When I learned about that—it was a two day event—I had a reception the first evening, and I invited all the union lawyers to the reception, and they showed up, and the people got the message, and they all came to the seminar the next day. [laughter] But that was a part of the process that was going on. There was the old way of doing things which was not to find ways to get along but to find ways to confront and to exercise your power over your opponent. The same thing with private sector-government relations. If you don't like a government policy, do you try to bring down the government, or do you try to lobby to get it changed? I could see some of the people in some of the business associations that were lobbying the government. It was a process. Unions, though, did have a tough time in Guatemala. No question about it.

Q: Were there ten families or thirty families or something like that? Some countries have this, some countries don't.

MICHEL: They used to talk about 14, I think, in El Salvador. I don't think it was that narrow, but certainly there was an elite group. I never tried to count them.

Q: You were late in the process, but earlier on our embassies tended to be caught up by the "ruling elite," and they were only presenting one side. It was a very comfortable way of dealing with...

MICHEL: Oh, you had to be alert to that, that these people were not representative of the country as a whole. And you had to get out and talk to others. One of the things that was difficult, though, was that so many issues were politicized. You had the far left and the far right. I felt that my freedom to go visit some of the human rights NGO's, for example, deal with them, was a little bit inhibited because of the risk that some of them, because they were politicized, would then use that to advance their agenda, and it would be seen by the establishment of the right as, "What are they really up to?" Some things that were controversial in the Guatemalan political context would not be controversial in our political context, and you had to just tread a little bit lightly on the one hand, while also encouraging and providing. And sometimes I would send somebody to represent me in dealing with some of these organizations.

Q: Had you been in Guatemala before?

MICHEL: Not for any... Not so I could say I knew the country.

Q: This was not your turf, particularly, when you went there.

MICHEL: No. I was dealing with Guatemala issues only to a limited extent. I did a lot of reading. I did a lot of briefing with the people who knew the country very well before I went. And, of course, once my nomination was public, I had a lot of visits from people from Guatemala, and I did visit there and talk with people.

Q: You mentioned your DCM had been there before. Did you use the country team to sit and say, "What do I do now?" You have your ideas, but I mean to strategize this problem of right and left, and let's not send the wrong message.

MICHEL: Yea. Here we get into one of my pet enthusiasms which is strategic management. One of the things that a new ambassador does is get a letter of instruction. You get your letter from the President which says you're authorized, and you get a more detailed letter from the Secretary of State that sort of lays out your brief. If you're somebody on the inside and you know how this government works, you manage to write your own letter and work it up through the system. Then if the reviewers who are between you and the Secretary and finally the Secretary all agree, then that's the brief you get. So there were some strategic goals that I tried to set out in this letter, and then I had that when I got to the post signed off by the Secretary of State. So we developed in the embassy the strategic plan in which we set strategic goals about support for democratic governance, the dimension of keeping the military on board and at the same time finding a military role for them that was not the role of running the country: the economic dimension, the social dimension, etc., and used the country team. We had an AID mission direction who had been there for a while and had a lot of experience, very highly regarded. It was one of the biggest aid programs we had in Latin America. We had outstanding economists. We had one of the premier defense attaches who had been born in Nicaragua, served all over South America, knew the region, knew everybody in the Guatemalan armed forces up and down. Good country team.

Q: On that subject of military attaches, there had been...and again, this goes back historically. The military attaches often in Latin America earlier on were not of top caliber where you took colonels and gave them the retirement thing. The South command and all, things had changed?

MICHEL: I think there was unevenness in the quality of the military attaches around the region, and if I didn't have the best, I had one of the best. There were a couple of clunkers, but by and large a good country team. We would sit down, and we would look at what's the action plan, what's the operational plan for trying to advance the strategic objectives. Who does what? When? And then we had a wonderful DCM secretary who enjoyed monitoring implementation. She wouldn't hesitate to call up the section head or the agency head and say, "You were supposed to have this done in April. Have you done it?"

Q: Sounds like you had your own little secretariat.

MICHEL: And we had the quarterly review of the operational plan. I don't know if you're having any more conversations with Paul White. Paul White might remember this. How can we take advantage of the Labor Department training events, because we didn't have any AID vehicle that would allow us quickly to respond. Well, Paul figured out how you do that - a program for educational opportunities. This would all get into this operational plan, and then I would send it to Washington once a year at least, and we would keep track of what we accomplished by the end of the year, and we could report on that and send a very long message to Washington. I'm not sure a lot of people read it very carefully. It was very important and useful for us.

Q: This raises a question often that it's nice to think you're appreciated and people are waiting with bated breath for what you're reporting, but at the same time they might come back with the wrong response, so it's nice to be able to feel you've accomplished something without the heavy hand of Washington.

MICHEL: We were not in the center of anybody's sights in Guatemala, and I always appreciated that.

Q: What about immigration? Was there much in the way of... I can't tell one from another, but living here in Washington, I seem to feel that when I go to McDonald's to get my coffee, I'm surrounded by Central American Indians.

MICHEL: My successor in Guatemala, Tom Stroock, came to Washington to get briefed up, and I managed to be here for that. My wife and I took him and his wife to dinner at a French restaurant. We got to talking with the waiters, and they were both from Guatemala! I remember raising the immigration issue with my successor in that very visible way, but it wasn't something that we spent a lot of time on. I remember Diego Asencio headed a commission on development and migration. We didn't have a sense of urgency. We didn't see hordes of people; we knew there was a continuous movement. There was a movie, *El Norte* that came out about Guatemalan Indians working their way through Mexico and getting into California and so on. The thought generally was that we would keep working away to help these societies modernize, improve

education and diversify their economies, create jobs, achieve political stability. We thought all of this over time will sort itself out. It was not seen as a front burner issue. One other issue of that nature that I'm still a little annoyed about is drugs. In Guatemala you had a little bit of marijuana being grown along the Mexican border on the other side of the mountain in little towns where the currency in circulation was more likely to be the Mexican peso than the Guatemalan quetzal. Our narcotics policy at the time was, "Go to the source!" That's was what they were doing in the Andean countries, and that's was what they were going to do in Guatemala. I said, from a Guatemala standpoint, that's Mexico. That marijuana never comes over the mountain to Guatemala. It's going north from there. Whether it's being grown there or in Nebraska doesn't make a lot of difference. If you're going to spend money and provide resources in Guatemala, let's worry about the fact of cocaine transshipment through Central American which has a potential to be a highly corrupting influence." They said, "No. We go to the source." I couldn't in those days get much enthusiasm for trying to look at the interdiction and breaking up of supply chains rather than attacking everything at the source. That's changed, but at the time, that was one of my frustrations, an issue that's become bigger on our screen than it was at the time.

Q: What about the Mayans? Were we trying to do much to get to them?

MICHEL: There were a couple of things in addition to the agricultural diversification and immunization initiatives. Both things were educational. One was working with the universities. We had a scholarship program working with the Universidad Landivar, a Jesuit university which had a campus in the highlands. I can remember going to the campus. Again, one nice thing about the woman students who are of Mayan origin is you can pick them out by the way they're dressed, so you can see them there. You know they're there. They were learning bookkeeping, practical skills, what we would think of the community college kind of thing which was a new idea. Paul White knows a lot more about this than I do. Paul's background is in education. He was the Deputy AID Mission Director. Then we had through the generosity of Congress throughout Central American something called Peace Scholarships. There were two kinds of Peace Scholarships: One was the community college two-year or more kind of a scholarship, and the other was the six weeks version. I used to argue with people on Capitol Hill who liked the two-year variety, and I said, "The poor people can't go away for two years. They have family commitments. They have obligations. They can't just go away to school for two years." The other kind, I thought, was much superior, and we did thousands of these. They involved training in-country including some English language, six weeks in the United States, living with a family, attending some practical course; again, bookkeeping, teacher training, business, health care, the whole array of things that you can do in a six week short course. When they came back home two things happened: One, refresher follow-up training and two, there was an alumni association. We provided support through local currency generated by our balance of payments through the government which was the outcome of our policy dialogue about macro economic policy. We put a little bit of local currency into this alumni association, and they had this little pot of money from which they could make small loans and grants to deserving civic action projects that were suggested by Peace Scholarship alumni who went back to their communities. The alumni association had meetings involving a lot of promotion of civic responsibility encouraging these people, largely young – not all, but largely young, to come back and use what they had learned not only for their own well being but for the well being of their communities. They would build little schools, for example, that were sometimes better than schools the government would build,

and a lot faster. Water projects, little things like that with these very small amounts of local currency, and the criteria for approval would be, "Do other people in the community support this? Will the mayor put some of his limited resources into it? Will somebody donate the land? Who will benefit and how much and for how long and how will you know this will be sustainable?" Those kinds of things. I don't know how many thousands of people we reached with that, but a critical mass: ten, twenty thousand.

Q: I don't know whether it's Paul White or somebody else I'm interviewing who mentioned that there were programs to bring Latin Americans, particularly Central Americans to... They would end up in Miami for a course, mostly women, and one of the things they would take a look at the flea markets in Miami and come back and an awful lot of small entrepreneurs... Just flea markets, but something that spread throughout the villages.

MICHEL: Yea. There was some of that. New businesses starting. The Vice-President of Guatemala had an enthusiasm for micro enterprise, and we worked with him on micro enterprise fairs and trying to encourage the very small producers. Often in the indigenous families everybody in the family is involved in the enterprise.

Q: Do you feel that a dent was being made in the division, prejudice against the Mayans?

MICHEL: Yea. I remember being at Easter Mass in the cathedral in 1989, and the bishop had some of the readings done in the Mayan language by Mayan readers. That was a big step. There were those kinds of symbolic things. Did any of this make a big dent in the quality of life of the Mayans? Not a very big dent. I used to go around with the health minister on vaccination campaigns, and Latin America, I think, was fairly early in the elimination of polio, and we'd do the polio vaccine and go to the Indian villages, encourage. "Good mothers, take care of your babies." It was a straight forward, simple kind of a message that the Minister of Health used basically saying, "You're good if you get your baby vaccinated, and you're not a good mother if you don't." So we got a pretty good return on that. But schooling, still a problem. Before I got there—a long time before I got there—in the late '70s, maybe '80, '81, I can remember AID-sponsored bi-lingual education instructors being murdered in Guatemala by forces who didn't want those people to learn to read and write.

Q: How did you see the role of the Catholic Church there and of the Protestant missionaries? What were they doing?

MICHEL: This was really another interesting dynamic because it was *very* dynamic. The Church, Catholic Church, the established religion, was under some pressure because the protestant sects were so active and were proselytizing, and people in the United States were sending money to them, and they were able to offer social services and so forth. And then you had earlier on Rios Montt, who was the general who had earlier run the country, who had a church which was the Church of the Word, one of these Protestant organizations. This caused a little bit of a problem for me and for the embassy because the bishop kind of suspected that the U. S. government was encouraging these Protestant efforts because some prominent people in politics were active supporters of some of these organizations. I don't remember anybody in the executive branch; some congressman, for example, sort of thing, "Well, ahhh. Well, now we see. This is all

Washington's effort to weaken the church." So that was something. I went and I visited with the bishop, and he was never quite convinced that there wasn't some plot here to undermine the church. But there was certainly a growing activism and a growing attraction to these Protestant religions and the evangelical movement.

Q: From all accounts, it had been growing by leaps and bounds in Latin America. What about on the Catholic Church, was liberation, theology, kind of a thing of the past?

MICHEL: I would say that the Church was somewhat liberal. It was pro human rights. As often you find in Latin American countries it was sort of suspicious of market economies and capitalism and things like that, but on the whole was concerned about the welfare of the people. I think they were pretty good. They were not corrupted, let's say, by the traditional power structure, I thought.

Q: What about the neighbors, particularly to the colossus to the north, Mexico. Did that raise any problems?

MICHEL: Problems? There were always little quibbles and a sense that the Mexicans didn't respect their neighbors. One of the things that Carlos Salinas did when he was elected president in Mexico that I thought was smart from where I sat, was he made his first visit outside Mexico to Central America. I remember meeting him when he came to Central America and made Guatemala his first stop. That really helped a lot. When I arrived there had been a little bit of squabbling, I thought, between the US embassy and the Mexican embassy because the Mexican position on Central America was not very friendly to the U. S. But that didn't really amount to much. I got along pretty well with the Mexican embassy, and I never found them causing me any mischief or trying to undercut anything. I thought Mexico was certainly an independent voice. There was one occasion I recall when Guatemala set up a reconciliation commission as part of this Contadora process that included different political parties. A woman who owned one of the big newspapers was the head of it, and a retired military guy was on it, and somebody from one of the leftist—by Guatemalan standards—parties, and they got a certain amount of grief. The woman who chaired this commission found a funeral wreath on her front porch one morning when they were going to have a meeting that day. It was kind of a message that says, "You're doing dangerous stuff here with this reconciliation business." It was ironic because her husband had been killed by the leftist guerillas, so she was not a sympathizer by any means, but this was the degree of polarization that existed. I tried to encourage the diplomatic corps in Guatemala to show some support for these citizens who were trying to advance the peace in their society and who were getting a certain amount of a rough time. I thought a show of solidarity from the international community would give them a little bit of insulation. They wouldn't accept money from the government because that might be tainting, and certainly the U. S. couldn't be forward leaning on this because that would be tainting. So I put this forward in the diplomatic corps chaired by the papal nuncio. It was Mexico that was very concerned that we not get into the internal affairs of Guatemala. That was a very Mexican position. So we had our issues with Mexico, but it was always civilized. In the end, it was the Swedes who came forward first with some show of support for these folks. Eventually others did, and then we could join in supporting them without any ostentatious show of support. Relations with Mexico were not a big issue.

Q: Did you feel you had to tread somewhat carefully because we didn't want to appear to trying to outflank Mexico?

MICHEL: No. No. Uh-uh.

Q: Did Chiapas border on Guatemala.

MICHEL: Chiapas used to be part of Guatemala. In 1810 when Mexico became independent, Chiapas went with Mexico. In 1821 when Guatemala became independent, they were a smaller country than they had been a Captaincy general.

Q: Chiapas has always been rather a restive part of Mexico. Did that at all extend into Guatemala?

MICHEL: Well, there was no real border there. People went to Chiapas to get away from the violence in Guatemala, and then people from Chiapas went into Guatemala when things calmed down. In other words, the people didn't necessarily know there was a border in all cases. This was traditional land, and at one time the border used to be north of Chiapas rather than south of Chiapas.

Q: What about Belize which is sort of an anomaly in that whole area being a former English...

MICHEL: British Honduras at one time.

Q: Did that have any...

MICHEL: That's another one of those that evolves very, very slowly. There was a time when the Guatemalan maps didn't show Belize; that was part of Guatemala. The British installed it, but Guatemala didn't recognize their title. Later on, of course, they did recognize Belize, and they all get along, and they sit in the OAS, and it's all very civilized, but there have been disputes over the border which continue to this day.

Q: Was this contra war business?

MICHEL: No. That was Honduras and El Salvador.

Q: Yea, yea. I'm sorry.

MICHEL: That's an earlier time. There was poaching and people going back, but the Peten in the north of Guatemala is the part of the country that adjoins Belize, and that's... Oh, there's 100,000 people up there. That's probably about it. It's largely uninhabited rain forest. The rain forest continues into Belize where it's largely uninhabited, too. I suppose there may be some population pressures now, but it was more a philosophical dispute than one that had a lot of practical consequence. I think that border has a lot of unresolved areas.

Q: Was there much American tourism into Guatemala.

MICHEL: No. The airline people lamented this; they recalled the days when there used to be a lot of tourism, and then you had the violence and tourists stopped coming. A lot of European tourists came to Guatemala. Beautiful country. Three cultures: You have the Spanish colonial culture, you get the local indigenous culture, and you get the modern Guatemala, and then the natural beauty and the temperature that stays in the 70's through almost all of the year. Land of Eternal Spring is their motto. Not true on the coasts and the rain forests of the north, but through much of the country it's really a lovely climate. We started to get some tourism. You had the people who never left from the 1950's and 1960's, the beat generation and the hippies and so on, who found that around Lake Atitlan the marijuana grew very easily, and they sort of dropped out of society. There were some other American residents in Guatemala. You had some business people there, and a growing tourism, but not a lot.

Q: Did you get any high level vice-presidential, presidential or any type of visits while you were there?

MICHEL: We had one vice-presidential visit.

Q: This would be George Bush.

MICHEL: This was later. This was Dan Quayle after George Bush was president. This was in 1989. That was an experience because it comes with a fairly large entourage.

Q: I remember reports come out. Dan Quayle did not rank very high at least with the press corps, so they made a lot of fun of him. Did this cause a problem?

MICHEL: There were no incidents, but it was more learning, coming, talking to these people, and then he left, and there was not a big issue. It was an opportunity. Here again, one thing that I'll always remember, is I encouraged him to have a breakfast with the heads of the democratic political parties in Guatemala to talk about democracy and politics and elections and did not invite the party of the far right that had been implicated in the two coup attempts that had occurred in the two years I had been there. The leaders of the democratic parties came to breakfast with the vice-president, and the far right did not come to breakfast with the vice-president.

Q: Tell me about the two coup attempts. What happened, and what were our reactions?

MICHEL: In both cases you had some people in the private sector and some people in the army who had delusions that everybody was going to rally around and this civilian government was so weak and corrupt and unreasonable that it didn't deserve to stay in office. I'm sure that there were promises made and maybe payments made to some of the military officers who led these adventures. The military command—the high command—and the minister of defense held firm. In the second one it was nasty because the coup plotters came to the Defense Minister's home and took his wife hostage. A nasty thing to do. They didn't have to go after families. And then they released her. But both failed. I was out there very visible with TV cameras and making absolutely clear where the U. S. stood, working the phones with Washington to get an OAS

resolution adopted on the second one. The first one was over so fast. I remember some critics and analysts in Washington speculating that the first one was not a real coup but it was something that people wanted to get attention, that they were feeling neglected, that they didn't expect to really take over they country, but they were like the missile tests from North Korea: Pay attention now, please. I don't know. I have no knowledge of that. We had no pre-knowledge in either case that these were happening. These were both surprises to me, and I wondered about why that was, but we had no inkling that either of these was coming, and we reacted immediately and firmly and clearly and publicly, and I think that was a useful thing in making that go away. One small irony relates to the invitation to the heads of the democratic political parties to come to breakfast with the vice president of the United States, an invitation that added to their stature a little bit. One of them turned out to be the next president of Guatemala who really perpetrated the most serious constitutional challenge when he tried to dismiss the congress following the lead of his Peruvian counterpart. The political forces rallied around and asked him to leave, and that was the end of it, but he did, unfortunately, create a more serious constitutional challenge than either of the coup attempts had caused.

Q: Did events in other parts of Latin America or the Caribbean resonate at all in Guatemala?

MICHEL: Certainly the Central American solidarity and the communication. The regional institutions were pretty active. The political leaders talked to each other. One of the things that was interesting to see and it's pretty commonplace now where you have this institutionalized, but throughout Latin America legislative leaders talked to each other; heads of judiciaries talked to each other; education people talked to each other in ways that were less common in the past. I think part of that is economics, but part of it, too, is the sense that they're not alone. They're not an island. But the focus was Central America, not broader than that.

Q: What about El Salvador? How were things shaping up during the time you were there in El Salvador?

MICHEL: Well, certainly in '87, '88 you had more conflict. The tide was turning, but you had a more active conflict, and people would come to Guatemala to get away from El Salvador including people in the American embassy in El Salvador who would come to Guatemala for a little R&R. But you could drive from El Salvador into Guatemala. The Guatemalan focus was largely centered on Guatemala, but there was this regional phenomenon going on in Central America in which they were pretty active. There's an historical rationale here at work, and that is that Guatemala was the Captaincy General of Central America. The capital of Central America was Guatemala. The Guatemalans retain a sense of a leadership role. I think there's not as much followership in the region as the Guatemalans would like, but the Guatemalans I think feel, partly because of the historical connections, that they have a role to play in Central America.

Q: Honduras. Does that have any... Honduras was having Indian problems, weren't they or not? That was mainly Nicaragua, I guess Miskito Indians.

MICHEL: Honduras, I don't think, loomed large in anybody's thinking in Guatemala.

Q: What about American education? Did you have people who went around to Georgetown or elsewhere and come back and were taking a lead in Guatemalan politics?

MICHEL: It wasn't that visible. As I described earlier, the short course, peace scholarships, covered a much larger sweep of the population.

Q: This was the elite who were coming out of the Georgetown program.

MICHEL: Georgetown was the principle institution working on these two-year scholarship programs. I guess I wasn't there long enough to see what the impact of that was. I don't really have a...

Q: I was wondering before, because in places often Catholic institutions had been supplying students coming out of...sent there by their families who were part of the elite.

MICHEL: Well, yea. Loyola in New Orleans, and New Orleans, of course, used to be the gateway city. Well, the finance minister was a Harvard trained economist. There were people, yes, who had that education, sometimes from catholic universities, sometimes from other universities, sometimes state universities in the U. S. Not a very big group.

Q: You didn't have anything like the Chicago Gang, the Chicago Boys.

MICHEL: Chicago boys.

Q: And in Chile about the same time.

MICHEL: No. We had the University Marroquin which was a private university financed by the private sector who had faculty and administrators who certainly knew and had connections with Arnold Harberger and people like that who had worked in Chile, and they were very much of the Milton Friedman variety of economics, free enterprise, and actually a pretty solid academic staff there.

Q: You left there in '89?

MICHEL: I left at the end of '89, and that was a short tenure. Two things happened: One is that Tom Strook who was my successor had played on the Yale baseball team with George Bush and wanted to come to Guatemala.

Q: Did he have any ties to Guatemala?

MICHEL: His daughter had been there in the Peace Corps, I think. He was from Wyoming, and he was in the state legislature and also was a successful businessman. The other thing was that the assistant administrator of USAID position—presidential appointment confirmed by the Senate—had been vacant for a year throughout the Bush administration. I got a call from the White House saying they wanted to send someone to Guatemala as Ambassador, and about the same time or a little later, I got a visit from the acting administrator of AID. The new

administration had not yet named their AID administrator, but the acting administrator, Mark Edelman, visited Guatemala, as a part of a visit he was making to Latin American. I had known Mark for years. He'd worked in the State Department; he had worked in the Senate. We got to talking one night during his visit, and he said, "You know, why don't you see if you might take on this job as Assistant Administrator of AID for Latin America?" I had become so enthused and learned so much about the development issues, and integrated governance and democracy into the AID program and then working in Guatemala across the board in trying to understand how does the road improvement relate to the agricultural production, relate to the education, relate to the health, relate to the water, relate to the environment, relate to the dispute resolution capacity. How does all this fit relate to the exchange rate? So that to me sounded like a wonderful opportunity. I enjoyed Guatemala tremendously. I enjoyed the management aspect of working with all these difference agencies and trying to get them to point in the same direction. But after having worked with the hemisphere, and learning in depth about one country, the idea of going back and working with the hemisphere with the focus on these issues that I had come to see in my own view of our relations with Latin America as really important and maybe in need of a little push to give them more prominence sounded like the most attractive thing I could do. So I came back at the end of '89 and with encouragement from senior people in the State Department, went over to the White House and was interviewed for this. I told them, "I'm not a Republican; I'm not a Democrat; I'm a civil servant, and I've served Republican administrations, Democratic administrations, and I do so loyally, and I'll try not to embarrass the president." And they said, "OK, that's good enough," and I think largely because of people in senior positions in the State Department vouching for me that President Bush appointed me then to that job, and the Senate confirmed me very quickly and easily, and I went on to another phase of public service.

DAVID R. ADAMS
Director, USAID Mission
Guatemala City (1989-1992)

Mr. Adams was born in Washington, DC and raised in Virginia and abroad. He was educated at John Carroll, William and Mary and George Washington Universities. Mr. Adams joined USAID in 1973 in Washington, DC. He served in Washington and abroad, dealing primarily with matters concerning Latin American countries and Kosovo. His foreign assignments include Bangladesh, Guatemala and Haiti, where he served as USAID Mission Director. Mr. Adams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

ADAMS: Well as I alluded to earlier, I began to do some research with respect to potential assignments to my next overseas position. Because I was coming up on the three year mark and I wanted to go overseas. Long story short, there was, I mean if I hadn't had a family, I would have gone to El Salvador. That would have really been interesting for me. But I had a wife and two children, so I had to think about their situation, and ended up in Guatemala. I saw when that position was opening. The head of the program office which roughly speaking was equivalent to the political section chief in the embassy. So I applied for the job. Actually I went down and did a short term trip, a TDY to Guatemala. Introduced myself to the mission director, told him my

background. Had him check me out, my references, and applied to that position on the top of my bid list along with a couple of others, and was selected for the job. I had to go to Spanish training because my Spanish was about a 1/1 at that point. So after getting my 3/3 I went to Guatemala.

Q: You were in Guatemala from when to when?

ADAMS: From ’89 through ’92.

Q: What was the situation in Guatemala in ’89 when you went there?

ADAMS: They were emerging from a period of a terrible civil war. It was worse in the early 80’s, but the friction and the murders and extra judicial killings continued up until even late ’89. They had the first, I think, democratically elected government for some time in power, that was led by President Vinicio Cerezo. He was in his third year. I think it was a four or five year term. So things were relatively stable, and they didn’t have the street crime they have now. So even though it was still tense, it was a situation where I felt comfortable taking my family. I did in the course of my assignment get a death threat. I am still to this day not clear why. It was one of these anonymous calls. It could have been against my wife who was involved with some union activity and was seen as a bit of a rabble rouser at the local school for teacher’s rights. But it is hard to say. So that was the only I think real blip in the three year assignment.

Q: Well what were we doing from your perspective in Guatemala?

ADAMS: Well the program just prior to my taking the job, which for AID was considered a plum assignment because it was considered a great country to work in, good for your career. There was a lot of money still, but they were on one of the downward trend in funding. It was one of those several countries that received quite a bit of money including as I said, balance of payments and cash assistance. But there were a number of neat development activities that were being well funded and ongoing, including a bilingual education that AID had pioneered in the country with Guatemalans instruction for native American children in their native language; Quechua I think was the primary language, and Spanish. So that was a big emphasis, as was non traditional exports which we were helping them develop, as we had other countries in the region develop their winter crops, to take advantage of the winter crop market in the U.S.

Q: When the U.S. market producers are down because of winter, South America kicks in, the grape business and a lot of other things.

ADAMS: So that was going well. There was also, in addition to writing a new strategy for our programs since it was evolving, to focus less on the balance of payments and political assistance and moving more toward a traditional development program. Health was another one. Health in the highlands, the health indicators were quite bad for the native American population. So that was my day job. My night job in a sense, something that I saw as a vocation and worked on weekends concerned assistance to street children and children who had been rendered orphans or were with a single parent because of the war. Most of them were teenagers at that point, but there were younger ones. I was fortunate because I had maintained my communications with my former colleagues on the hill. That was seen as a bit of a no-no, but I didn’t care because I had

these little back channel communications with these folks on the hill in my old committee. Long story short, working with them and somebody who actually managed an earmark for orphans and displaced children set up a new project with money additional to that which was coming into our regular budget, to fund a number of local Guatemalan orphanages and entities with kids of that nature.

Q: I wonder I would think that that type of work with orphans and ones who had been displaced and all, does this seem to be a place where church organizations would get very much involved. How did that work in Guatemala?

ADAMS: Interesting question. It was a mix, a mix of faith based organizations and secular ones. I really at that time wasn't looking, I was looking for organizations that were effective. For example the one that was sort of the primary implementer of the program was the Guatemala version of Covenant House, Casa Alianza. They are I think, they are secular. They might be linked loosely speaking to a group of churches, but the woman I worked with, Eugenia Monterroso was a lay woman. There were some other ladies who ran other orphanages. There was an American couple who I actually developed the program with who basically managed the umbrella project for us. They were very religious as I recall, but they weren't affiliated with a church. Tom and Kathy Taurus were their names. Tom is now a vice president with Save the Children which is secular. Anyway it was a mix.

Q: The protestant groups have gotten quite involved down there. Was it apparent there and was it a conflict with the Catholic Church or not?

ADAMS: You know not as much. I don't really recall that being a factor or an issue that we had to deal with, having to worry about the competition or conflict. You are right there has been a significant growth of evangelical churches. In fact it is interesting in my own, I was beginning to have some troubles in my marriage at that point, and I am Catholic, still Catholic. I found it more interesting for a time, I guess because of the emotional quotient if you will to worship at evangelical churches occasionally.

Q: I know my wife's church here in Annandale contributes to an orphanage that might not have existed at the time. Something called the little roses or something like that.

ADAMS: Our Little Roses in Honduras?

Q: Yes basically it was the children of single prostitutes.

ADAMS: It might be the same one because they are affiliated or they are supported by a group out of Christ Church in Alexandria and other Episcopalian churches. Is your wife Episcopalian?

Q: Yes. My wife is Episcopalian.

ADAMS: They are linked to the Episcopalian church. In fact I, it is a long story, but I visited them last year because I had gotten their name. We were opening up in Honduras.

Q: Yeah, it was Honduras, not Guatemala.

ADAMS: They are very good. They are very effective. My organization is not helping them. We offered them some money, but it didn't work.

Q: How did you find the orphan street children program, how effective was this?

ADAMS: Well it is difficult. I moved on before the real fruits of the project seemed to be obvious, but I did get positive feedback of course, from those whom we were helping saying, "Oh there are so many more children benefiting because you came in and offered us additional assistance and help in how to manage our program, manage our finances," that sort of thing. All I heard later was that the project did morph into something more. It added I think, a justice component whereby a unit was established in the government, in the justice ministry of Guatemala to try to protect the rights of street children in particular. But in terms of the genesis of the project, the way I sold it was timing was everything, because there was a lot going on in the news. You might recall back in '86-'87 and in '89 too there was a lot in the news about abuse of street children in Guatemala and Brazil.

Q: Particularly Brazil was…

ADAMS: Well sheer numbers.

Q: Horrific stories.

ADAMS: There were some bad things going on and stories out of Guatemala, and our, the head of the Latin America bureau for USAID was a former State Department officer, Ambassador Jim Michel. I had gotten to know Jim before I left through my work on the hill. He was politically astute. He, when I made the proposal I said, "Look, this is a hot issue in the news. I have a line on some money additional to our budget through my connections to my former colleagues on the hill." He said, "Hey go for it. This is great. Whatever you can do to strengthen relations with the guys on the hill." The staff director on his own time was working with orphans and kids, he and his wife. He was more than happy to work with me, so that is just a consensus to move forward.

Q: I am intrigued. You mentioned in passing that your wife got involved with the school and unions. How did that work out?

ADAMS: Well she wasn't involved in any programmatic sense with the schools. She was a teacher at the American International School. They had some real issues there in terms of teacher's salaries and benefits, and particularly how some of the local teachers were being treated, Guatemalans. Second class citizenry. So she befriended several of the Guatemalan teachers and felt that they weren't getting a fair shot or a fair salary. So she sort of lobbied on their behalf, and some of that lobbying involved making a bit of a stink at parent teacher conferences where a number of the Guatemalan parents, the more wealthy parents didn't want to contribute any more money. They are notoriously cheap frankly. That is one of Guatemala's big problems has been traditionally that their income tax is very regressive, because they just can't get the elite to pony up. They had to get it through the VAT tax and other types of taxes to get

their income. So their tax structure is seen as being one of the most regressive in Latin America. So that mentality carried over to, most of the parents were Guatemalan. The international may have been about 50-50. Anyway plus my ex-wife was a very vocal person, and if she grabbed onto something she would hang onto it like a junkyard dog and not be intimidated. To her credit she was very forthright and couldn't be made to back down.

Q: OK you left there in '92. Whither?

ADAMS: I came back to Washington. Because of the I guess bad experience including some other things that had been going on including our house being, I wouldn't say trashed, but not treated well by the renter, my wife was soured on the foreign service life. She wasn't' all that thrilled with it for other reasons. Prior assignments too it was a bone of contention. Anyway I had made noises about wanting to go to El Salvador, and had been offered a job there which in some respects would have been very attractive except my boss would not have been, I wouldn't have interacted very well with the fellow who would have been my boss. So I wasn't all that enthusiastic about it. But he would have been leaving in about a year so I was thinking maybe I could stand it until he left and rotated out. She basically said forget it. So I said, "All right, I am going to have to plan to stay in Washington for awhile." I was being recruited to be the deputy office director for the desks for Central America which was. Oh I know what it was, I am jumping ahead. I actually before all that happened, I applied for what was known as long term training because I had a couple of colleagues who said it was the best year of their lives in terms of their career getting away for a sabbatical. So I applied and was accepted into the foreign service fellows program at Georgetown University, out of Guatemala. That was a year, so while I was doing that year at Georgetown was when I was approached about the Central America job which I didn't take for reasons I will get to later.

Q: Well back to Guatemala, who was our ambassador while you were there?

ADAMS: His name was Tom Stroock. He was a political appointee.

Q: How did you observe his operation?

ADAMS: I wasn't too fond of the man because he had some preconceived notions that eventually he modified, but not totally. He was a conservative Republican appointee. He kind of treated career employees contemptuously in that if they went up against him, he was very dismissive and could be very threatening. He came into the country making statements like, "The only institution in the country that you can trust is the military." Then he got into hot water later. You might recall among other cases the one about the nun, Sister Diana Ortiz who was kidnapped. He and one of his political officers who was a bit of a right winger too, criticized her for being a lesbian, being involved in a lesbian love ring or some crap like that. That was an example of the kind of his mentality and behavior. So anyway he and I didn't have much of a personal relationship because I was a couple of layers down from him. My boss was the deputy mission director of USAID, and he reported to the director who reported to the ambassador. But it was a difficult time in that respect because Stroock was a problem.

Q: Well did you find from your vantage point was it one of these things where you had somebody who was making an extreme statement and taking an extreme position and sort of the work went on and you kind of worked around him? I won't say went against the orders but you know just kept out of the guy's way and do your own thing.

ADAMS: I was fortunate because he didn't have a problem. He knew what I was doing. He didn't have a problem with my work and the arena I was in. He approved of the types of projects we were doing and it was sort of the political sphere where I think he went astray. So when it came to the types of programs I was involved in or sponsoring there was no issue. In fact he was supportive. One point, the one time he was particularly happy with me was I took the initiative when the peace agreement was announced, the peace accord was announced in El Salvador in I believe 1991, I took the initiative to draft, OK this is a plan, a "Peace Plan" for Guatemala, from the perspective of what types of additional assistance would be beneficial, and could be catalytic and could help us solidify the democratic coalition that was being built in Guatemala. There wasn't an outright peace accord in Guatemala. Even though the conflict was much more low intensity than had it was just previously in El Salvador. Then years later I think the mid 90's they finally signed an agreement in Guatemala between the factions. So they were behind El Salvador in a sense. So Stroock was very happy with that, and sent a cable to Washington saying, "OK this is what we have to do to be prepared for a final peace accord in Guatemala."

THOMAS F. STROOCK
Ambassador
Guatemala (1989-1992)

A native of Wyoming, Ambassador Stroock was educated at Yale University. He was active in the petroleum industry in Wyoming and soon became engaged in Wyoming State government and politics. A member of the Republican Party, he was appointed Ambassador to Guatemala, where he served from 1989 to 1992. Ambassador Stroock was interviewed by Andrew Low in 1993.

Q: *Now I think we were at the point where you had now been nominated as ambassador to Guatemala. Rather than going over the whole confirmation process, if we have time maybe we can come back later and pick that up at the end, but perhaps it would be best at this point to jump to the point at which you were confirmed and then cover the preparation period when you were getting ready to actually go to Guatemala.*

STROOCK: Well once I was confirmed, I was in Guatemala ten days later. There wasn't much there, the preparation all came before. After I was nominated, they sent me to what I laughingly call "charm school." Well before I did that, of course, they had the usual investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the State Department Security. And there are a hundred funny stories to tell about that. A favorite is that the guy came to me afterwards, and he said, "I haven't had one person say a bad thing about you, Senator (because I was a State Senator at the time)." But he said, "Everybody agrees that the President would have been better off if he named your wife instead of you."

And the other one that's my favorite is my great pal, John Hilsom, who has since unfortunately passed away, was interviewed in his office in New York, and afterwards he sent me a telegram. He said, "Unpack your bags. They have just interviewed me. You aren't even going to be able to get on the *bus* to Guatemala!" (laughs)

Then we went to what I call "charm school," which was fascinating, and there were a hundred stories about the...

Q: *What is "charm school?"*

STROOCK: It's the Foreign Service Institute's course for ambassadors. Everybody who's going to go out as the United States ambassador, has to go through this. It was then three weeks--I think it's now two weeks because they've shortened it--but the last week that they've shorted was the most fascinating one. It was the one on security. You went down to New Brunswick, Georgia to the Federal Law Enforcement Academy down there. "FLETC" they called them, and took courses...

Q: *What were the other subjects that they taught in "charm school?"*

STROOCK: They teach you about how the State Department is organized. Since it's constantly being reorganized you have to learn about that. They give you courses in all the basics that are needed to be an ambassador. It's fascinating that some of the old hands who were coming back, for instance Paul Cleveland, who'd been the ambassador in New Zealand and was going out as ambassador to Malaysia, said that he found it fascinating. George Sotirhos, who'd been the ambassador to Jamaica and was going out now to Greece, found it fascinating--Certainly *we* did. We made good friends with Paul and Mary Lambert, who had been named to go to Ecuador, and to Loret Miller Ruppe had been named to go to Norway, we to Guatemala. One of the interesting people in our class was a girl--a *lady*--by the name of Joy Silverman, a handsome young woman from New York, who never got confirmed. She really lacked an education, but with her personality she would have been an excellent ambassador to the Barbados. But it's probably lucky she didn't get named because a couple years later, she'd had an affair with a man by the name of Wachtler, who was the Chief Justice of the New York Supreme Court. He had threatened her and her child, and there was an awful, terrible, horrible, scandalous lawsuit that fell on her.

Q: *(Saw Watler?)*

STROOCK: Wachtler? Was that his name? It was all over the pages of *The New York Times*. He threatened to kidnap her daughter. Joyce got divorced from her husband, Jeff whom we met, and so probably it worked out well that the Congress refused to confirm her.

Q: *What other preparation did you have for going to Guatemala besides "charm school?"*

STROOCK: Well, you are appointed a consultant to the Department, you're brought into the Department and put down at the Guatemala desk, and you "read in," as they call it, everything

there is to read about Guatemala and its history. I was really fascinated by it, spent a lot of time doing that. You read the cables. . . I spent the three weeks in "charm school," and I spent two periods of two weeks actually in the Department at the Guatemala desk. The other thing you do is that you have to go around to the Congress, the Senators, and introduce yourself so that you have a chance to meet one on one with the Senators who are going to be important to your confirmation and who are either going to vote for you or vote against you. I had a fascinating time doing that.

Alan Simpson particularly was very, very helpful--Malcolm Wallop was helpful in one incident: Staffers--and I can go on for hours about staffers to Congressmen--but they're terribly important in the confirmation process, and one of the staffers, on Jesse Helms' staff, a young lady by the name of Deborah DeMoss had taken it into her head that, because I was pretty well-known in Wyoming as Pro-Choice in the argument over women's rights, therefore I was pro-abortion, and therefore I was not suitably equipped to be the representative of a conservative administration in Latin America. Well, just because I'm Pro-Choice doesn't mean I'm pro-abortion, I think it has to do with individual rights. She was giving me unmerciful Hell and Jesse Helms was threatening to hold up my name, and Malcolm Wallop, who was one of Jesse Helms very good friends, spoke to him on my behalf. Then, Senator Jesse Helms, invited me to come over and meet him personally at the Senate. He escorted me up to the Senator's personal visitor's gallery and sat with me and told me in his charming liquid southern accent that any friend of Malcolm's was a friend of his, and that he would do everything he could to push my nomination through. Since he was the ranking Republican on the committee, he did. And I had very little trouble getting nominated, except we could never get the damn committee to sit still to hold nomination hearings. The nomination process has gotten lengthy, sloppy and nasty.

Q: *The confirmation process?*

STROOCK: The whole process by which the Senate confirms the president's nominations. A raft of us were held up, not because of any feeling on the part of senators that we were or weren't competent. They were willing to confirm us as individuals, but they had fights with the administration over totally extraneous matters: committee jurisdictions, bills that involved countries that we were never connected with. One of the things that I'm doing now with the Council of American Ambassadors is try to see if Council can't bring some decency, sanity, and time reference back to the nomination process. Frankly, I was non-controversial, yet it took from May until October to get a non-controversial person confirmed--that's six months. *Now* it's taking a year. The confirmation process is ugly and unfortunate and needs to be speeded up. It needs to be focused on the rabbit and not only on extraneous bushes in which the rabbit might hide.

Q: *Did you have any meetings with the President before you went down to Guatemala?*

STROOCK: Yes. This is after I was confirmed. My hearing was on September 22nd and my official swearing in was on October 10th, and we got to Guatemala on October 18th. Between October 10th and October 18th we went through Washington to pick up all the final documents and instructions. A lady at the State Department named Sharon Bisdee who's marvelous, handles all of this, and she'd been working with me since my actual nomination back in May. One of the things she organized was an interview with the President in the Oval Office: that was exciting

and fun. Marta and I went there and, of course, the President knew us personally, it was very warm and very cordial. He had a photographer there, taking pictures, and when Marta came in, he bent down to kiss her. Marta moved her head so that he would kiss her on one cheek and he moved his head so that he would kiss her on the other cheek. Their foreheads bumped, and the photographer got a picture of that. The President sent it to Marta with a note in it in his own handwriting on the bottom which said, "Dear Marta, Oops! Your friend, George." He was very kind and generous with us.

We spoke very little of substance at the time. He told me that I would be getting my instructions in writing, that I had already received instructions of the State Department, which I had--I had long conversations with Bernard Aronson, the Assistant Secretary of State who had been confirmed in June and was grabbing hold of the Inter-American Bureau called "ARA" in State Department parlance. Mostly what he said was, "If you need me, call me." I had his private number and I knew his secretaries from previous political lives. As I best remember he told me to remember that Guatemala is crucial to our entire Latin American program, and our Latin American Program is to expand trade there and to become really good neighbors. He was really concerned about the war on drugs, he was very concerned about the interdiction of drugs, and he was very concerned about the coming election in Guatemala. This now is in October of 1989, and there is an election coming up in Guatemala in exactly one year--in October of 1990. The President was concerned that the existing democratically-elected regime headed by Vinicio Cerezo, turnover control of the country to a legitimately, democratically-elected government. He was very strongly promoting democracy and very strongly promoting the control of drugs in Central America. Those were the substantive conversations we had.

Q: *Just for anyone who may be listening to this tape, part of our instructions are that any time we use State Department lingo, we're supposed to say what it means. So you used the phrase, ARA. Would you say what that means?*

STROOCK: American. . . Republics. . . Agency. I never did understand--It's the Assistant Secretary of State for (Inter-American) Affairs, and how that gets translated to "ARA"--I believe it's "American Republics Agency."

Q: *And you said Bernard Aronson was about to become the head of that?*

STROOCK: He had been nominated, confirmed in June. Bernie Aaronson was the only Democrat in the Republican political hierarchy in the State Department, and he had been named Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs.

Q: *Okay, and had you already met with Mr. Aaronson before you met with President Bush?*

STROOCK: Oh yes. I met Bernie early on when I first got there in June it was just before his confirmation process, and he was there on sort of an advisory capacity. There was no one in the Assistant Secretary's chair.

Q: *Did he give you a substantive briefing before you...*

STROOCK: Oh yes. He and I had several conversations over the course of that summer, both before and after my attendance of the school and then while I was down on the Guatemala desk and I came up to a couple meetings in his office that dealt specifically with Guatemala.

Q: *Can you list what things were high on his agenda? Issues for Guatemala?*

STROOCK: Quite frankly I'm the guy who established the agenda of issues for Guatemala. The big problems in Guatemala when I got there were the concern about drugs; the concern about the two attempted coups from the military, were going to try to take over from the *facade*, of democracy that the country had; and the fact that the country's economy, which had been very sound, seemed to be teetering on the rocks, they were headed for big-time inflation; and, as well endemic corruption down there was a concern.

Guatemala had always been a spot that the United States could count on because we had supported their military regimes, and as long as the military regime worked with us, we were prepared to tolerate the excesses of that regime. We were very concerned about Soviet influence in Central America. When I got there in October of 1989 the Soviet influence in Central America was still a major concern. Aronson's mission when he came on board was to take over the Nicaraguan situation and put the contra situation off the map; to stop fighting with Congress over what we should do in Nicaragua; to withdraw as best as might be from the support of the contras; to promote as best we could some kind of a reasonable solution to the horrible situation in Nicaragua. It was infecting and poisoning our relationship with Congress about all of Latin America. Aronson's job was to calm those waters; and he did it very effectively. His policies towards Guatemala were all aimed at, "If we do this in Guatemala, how will that reflect back on the Contra-Sandinista war in Nicaragua, and what will the effect be on our position across all of Latin America. All these relationships were very complex.

General Werner had been named the head of Southern command in Panama. General Werner was an extremely able officer, but in Panama there was this terrible problem with Manuel Noriega. He was the Panamanian army officer who at one time had been on our CIA payroll but had become a drug overlord and a gangster. Panama was the center of drug traffic, and thus was the center of terrible problems for the United States in many ways. While the sentiment in the Bush administration was that we had to use physical force to take Noriega out, Werner didn't want to do that. He felt that would reflect back badly on Nicaragua. Secretary of State Jim Baker and Aronson believed that they had to act firmly in Panama, otherwise the Nicaraguans would think they could get away with anything and probably would try to get away with anything, might even try to ally themselves with Noriega.

So the first casualty--and I saw it firsthand while I was in the Department--was that they removed General Werner from command, rather abruptly as a matter of fact, from Southern Command, and placed General Maxwell Thurman in his place. Max Thurman and I got to be friends, and Max got to his job in Southern Command just about a week or two before I go to my job in Guatemala. It was interesting to watch him inter-act with Bernie Aaronson. They changed what had been a policy of banging heads with the Congress, into one of, "How can we accomplish what we want to accomplish with the Congress; keep Soviet influence out of Central

America; and still interdict drugs and still promote democracy." That was the stew that was bubbling and cooking for Central America the whole time I was in Washington.

Q: *You've listed a number of broad topics that sound like they were major issues at the time you arrived in Guatemala, and if I could summarize maybe you could add to my list if I've missed some: drugs, attempted coups in the past, the shaky status of democracy in Guatemala, the Guatemalan economy, and the somewhat shaky nature of the economy and corruption as a defect of the Guatemalan economy and corruption as a defect of the Guatemalan economy, the upcoming election in October of 1990, the inter-relationship between our relations with Guatemala on the one hand and our relations with Nicaragua on the other hand and all of Latin America, and the developing problems with General Noriega in Panama.*

STROOCK: There was another development in the stew that one had to take into account: and that was the long guerrilla war that started in 1960. There were at the time as many as many as five thousand and perhaps as few as one thousand guerrillas still active in the high mountains in the Altiplano of Guatemala. They were the leftovers from what had been a very dangerous guerrilla movement that almost succeeded in taking over the country in the late '70's and early '80's. As we sit here and speak there are still remnants of that guerrilla movement shooting up people in the jungles and the high mountains, occasionally blowing up bridges and destroying electric towers. The guerillas are increasingly marginal to Guatemala future, but there really will be no important forward movement in Guatemalan society until that guerrilla war is brought to a close. all the issues that you just listed are impinged on by that guerrilla war, so an attempt to do something to shut down the guerrilla war was also in the mix of concerns that the United States had and still has.

Q: *Maybe the most orderly way to do this would be to take these subjects one at a time and to track through your experiences in the three and one-half years that you were in Guatemala subject by subject, and of course as we go there'll be inter-relationships. I'll let you choose--but you know we had drugs, the political problems, the upcoming election, the guerrilla war, the general relationship with Nicaragua...*

STROOCK: When I first got to the State Department everybody was busy with their own particular piece of the Central American pie, and nobody had truly concentrated on the slice of the pie that said, "Guatemala." The "Guatemala" piece in the puzzle was still to be solved, and I rapidly realized that no one was going to do it except myself. So while it was "studying in", I decided that I would try and keep things simple--in accordance with that management style that you mentioned--try to concentrate on what in Spanish came to known as "los Quatros D's," "The Four D's," They were drugs--of course not *for* drugs, but against drugs, democracy, development, and human rights. Human rights doesn't begin with "d" in English, but it does in Spanish, ("d..."). And drugs is ("drogas," and democracy is "democracia," and development is "desarrollo..."). So you can call them the "Four D's" in Spanish, and we did.

In my opening statement at the airport when I arrived and in my opening speech to the mission--which I called an "all hands on deck" speech, and in my opening conversations with President Cerezo, I concentrated on the "Four D's". I made them our keystones and I would constantly refer to them. It got to the point where people wanted to throw up when they heard me talk about

them. But they did become the focus of the mission, and we did, I think, make progress in all four areas.

Q: *Let's take one "D" at a time. You want to start with drugs?*

STROOCK: Well, drugs was the one that most directly affected the average citizen in the United States. There were two drug problems in Guatemala. The first was the actual cultivation of the poppy flower in the narrow high valleys of the Northern Altiplano, the ones in Guatemala that lead up northward into Mexico. They're very deep; they're very narrow; they're ideal for cultivating poppy. The small farmers take the poppy seed out to Mexico where it's chemically treated and becomes heroin. We found only two chemical installations, you couldn't even call them laboratories, that would turn the poppy into crude heroin in Guatemala itself. Mostly what happened was that the poppy plant was picked, placed on mules and taken on back dirt roads up to Mexico to be treated and turned into heroin there.

We were very involved trying to stop all this when I got there. We had our own air force of six helicopters and six thrush airplanes, all under private contractors reporting to the Drug Enforcement Agency, the DEA, to fumigate, poison and eradicate poppy seed. We used to make large claims about how many acres of poppy we had eradicated. I went along on a couple of these airplane spraying trips. I never went in the thrushes because they would dive down into those valleys, and I wasn't sure they were ever going to come out. Those thrush pilots were brave guys. They would go into every valley and spray. I did go twice in the helicopter gunships flying up above as protection and looked down. Negotiating these efforts was tricky. An American plane had been shot down over Nicaragua running contraband to the contras. They didn't want the same thing to happen in Guatemala, which was why the U.S. armed forces never were involved. It was a very inefficient way to operate, but nevertheless that's the way it had to be. We had to secure permission from the Guatemalan government to allow us to run these secret contract operations in their country. We had to base the plane's pilots on Guatemalan air force bases, and we needed the cooperation of the Guatemalan army. Well the Guatemalan army is a part of the problem, not part of the solution in Guatemala. While they were and are very constructive and necessary to us in the war on drugs, they also are one of the big threats to growing democracy. They are one of the great causes of the violations of human rights endemic in the country. Some of them were part of the drug organization. They have an enormous influence on the country's ability in every area because they are forty three thousand of them, they're disciplined, and they are the only agency in the country that really works. We can get into that later, but in many of these small, unstable societies it takes the military to make things happen--no other agency, public or private, has the necessary money or organization or manpower.

In any event they were the only people we had to work with. In the three and a half years we were there I desperately tried to move our drug enforcement dependency from the army to a civilian police force--the ("Guardia Civil"), the treasury agents. As I left we had succeeded in establishing some basic treasury organizations that were involved in seeking out those who would transport drugs and contraband into Guatemala, which was the second problem. We never succeeded in getting our program of spraying and fumigating and trying to kill poppy plants away from the necessity of cooperating with the Guatemalan army. We absolutely needed their

logistical bases. We couldn't operate without them. We needed their permission to fly over the country because we couldn't do without that. We needed frequently to call on them for repairs to our equipment. They could have shut us down overnight, and they frequently threatened to do just that.

Q: *Did they ever demand concessions in return for permission to operate?*

STROOCK: That was the whole fight. My frequent conversations with the various officers in the Guatemalan army almost always carried the implied threat of cooperate or your drug effort will suffer. When we cut off military aid in December of 1990, which is another story, the thought was that we had just blown the poppy interdiction program because the military would shut it down. They didn't because we were working with them through the back door of the Central Intelligence Agency, which is again yet another story. But in our relationships with all Guatemalan government officials, and with the army in particular, we had constantly to keep in mind that we were interdicting and fumigating poppies in San Marcos province, at their sufferance, and they could shut down that program at any time. The farmers whose poppy was being fumigated didn't like it at all. There was a tremendous uproar all the time claiming that we were destroying and causing peasants to lose their legitimate crops, none of which was ever proven and none of which was true. Nevertheless at least once a month we got a complaint about that. It was a very involved and dicey situation.

Q: *Was there any other aspect to the war on drugs in Guatemala other than eradicating poppy fields?*

STROOCK: Yes. The biggest part of our drug problem was that Guatemala increasingly became a way station for transmitting cocaine from South America into the North American market. The coca plant itself is principally grown in Peru. It is shipped into Colombia where it is made into cocaine. Then the Colombians want to bring it into the United States. They used to bring it up in boats through the Caribbean, but our naval interdiction efforts in the Caribbean got very efficient, so they started shipping through Guatemala. The whole time I was in Guatemala we had five United States Navy cruisers with radar and antenna and support, cruising off the coasts of Colombia attempting to track drug flights in airplanes and speedboats, leaving Colombia. They would come up to Guatemala and Mexico then transship and the cocaine would go up into the United States. Guatemala was an ideal place to do that because of the large farms, the large banana plantations, the large coffee fincas, the large sugar ingenios, and the large cattle ranches all had air strips. It was easy to drop into these air strips and transship from planes to either mules or human beings or trucks or other airplanes.

To patrol this interdiction effort we had a very large DEA presence in the embassy. We had a Guatemala City Office Chief, five DEA agents and two pilots. There was constantly the desire to expand the operation and to make the DEA bigger. We had something called "Operation Cadence," which had its own staff of people who were rotated in and out of Guatemala. The whole time we were there, I think we seized a total of maybe sixty tons of cocaine. Our biggest haul was one haul of about thirteen tons as I remember, which was towards the very end of my stay there. This caused a Colombian hit team to come into the country, so we heard, to try and kill me. This was why in my last month there, I made public appearances with a flak jacket on,

which was very uncomfortable and very damned unpleasant. We were successful, I think, in training the Guardia Civil--the Treasury--Police to become effective in this area. We did succeed in getting the extradition of five drug traffickers under extradition treaties. That was an enormous political effort to get that to happen. We did have pretty good information on drug trafficking, and drug interdiction across all of Latin America became the number one mission of the United States Southern Command after Noriega was taken out of Panama, and after General George Joulman became the commander in chief of Southern Command succeeding Max (Thurman). That was the mission that George seized on as being the most effective thing he could do. I had several meeting with him, several in Guatemala and two in Panama where we got to be friends. George was right because he said, of all the things we did, this was the one that would affect most on American society and therefore justified the American taxpayer dollars being spent. He was hopeful that we could make a serious dent in the drug transshipments.

I wonder if we ever did. I am convinced after three and a half years that we did not win the war on drugs. It's still going on, and I think we're losing. I think we need to do something else, but at least a quarter of my time as ambassador was spent dealing with the interdiction problem, with the cultivation problem and with the extradition problem.

We would try to stop the poppy from growing, we would try and interdict the flow of cocaine through the country, and we would try and find out the people who were involved with it and extradite them to the United States. Sometimes we weren't even so delicate or diplomatically nice as to extradite them. There was a Nicaraguan citizen, a known drug Kingpin, named Gadea, who came into the country. We knew he was coming and we got the Guardia Civil to nab him as he got off the plane, and we got them to put him on a special plane that was flown down by the United States Marshal for Florida where there was a warrant out for his arrest. All of this was done outside the extradition treaty, because he was an undesirable alien. This was legal except the Guatemalans, in their hurry, forgot to go through all the legal steps they had to do through the court. Where that guy is today, I don't know, but we got him out.

Q: *When you say, "Got him out," you mean you got him onto the airplane...*

STROOCK: Got him on the airplane and into the hands of the U.S. court in Florida.

Q: *So he was arrested in court?*

STROOCK: That's right. We legally extradited under a very complicated extradition treaty. it takes months to do. Some important figures, including Arnoldo Vargas, the mayor of Zacapa and a key figure in the old Cali cartel, a known murderer, a real thief had controlled (Zacapa) province for years. He had been involved in transshipping cocaine for years, and we proved it. We got him, we extradited him to the United States under the extradition treaties; and we got four others as well. Sue Patterson the Consul General, one of the most dynamic ladies I've ever met--she was not only attractive, but very bright and very hardworking; was crucial in getting those guys, and the Guatemalans were fascinated by having this very attractive, bright, petite American woman really pounding on their tables to get these extraditions accomplished. Again with the management theory we discussed, I would go with her when she wanted me to, and she

would want me to go when it got really sticky with the Army. Otherwise she did it alone and she deserves a lot of credit.

So we did make a difference in the war on drugs, but it did take up a lot of time, and we didn't make enough of a difference. We won some battles, but we never did win the damn war, and I don't know if the war is winnable.

Q: *Was the war on drugs linked in any way with the corruption problem in Guatemala?*

STROOCK: Yes. Unfortunately, half the history of small Latin American nations is one of corruption, and drugs brought in a tremendous amount of money that flooded through the country. The claim in Guatemala was that the guerrillas were using drug money. The second president that I had to deal with, Jorge Serrano, used to claim that all the time, but he wasn't always right. I'm sure that there was some drug smuggling going on with the guerrillas, but the biggest amount of the drug smuggling that was going on was with the rich new entrepreneurs and the army, and we never could find out where that was done because they were very clever, very well connected and very organized.

Q: *When you say, "going on with the army," do you mean the army was actually cooperating with the transshipping of drugs?*

STROOCK: No the army as an institution was actively cooperating in suppressing it, but individual army officers and soldiers were bought indeed. There's no question about it.

Q: *What were they actually being bribed to do?*

STROOCK: Yes, to look the other way or help as drugs were transshipped in all parts of the operation. Many of our pieces of our information led us to believe that lower ranking army officers--majors, lieutenants colonels--were involved. Cerezo turned a deaf ear to that, but Serrano, the second president was a strong, born-again evangelical Protestant--really hated that idea in his guts. He really moved heaven and earth to try and shut it down, but even *he* wasn't successful. We got our best cooperation from Serrano in this area of drug interdiction.

Q: *When you talk about "shut it down," are you talking about shutting down corruption or shutting down drugs or both?*

STROOCK: Shutting down drugs. Serrano himself was terribly corrupt, so he wasn't at all good at shutting down corruption, but he did want to try and shut down drug trafficking, and yet it didn't happen. The huge amount of money available through drugs was a big part of the large corruption problem in Guatemala. Many money laundering operations took place. We held classes trying to train the financial institutions in the country how to recognize and handle money-laundering, but we never really did a good job because *we* don't know how to handle it ourselves.

Q: *Did you speak out at any time about corruption?*

STROOCK: Oh Lord, it got to the point where I think they were tired of it. I started out by saying that Guatemalans made a business out of , hell an *art*, out of not paying taxes. I would say that they couldn't expect United States taxpayers to support activities in their own country that their own taxpayers refused to support. I would talk about corruptions in generalities because there are some things that as an ambassador that you just can't say. To remain effective, you couldn't say that you were convinced the president was corrupt. You just couldn't do that. I had to maintain a relationship with him. I really had to try and be his friend. But you could say that some of his friends were involved. The first big drug incident that I got involved in, shortly after I arrived there, illustrates this conundrum. The President, Cerezo, appointed one of his buddies, a former colonel by the name of Hugo Moran, as director of the port of Santo Thomas. Just before I arrived in Guatemala, Hugo Moran had been involved in a drug transshipment at La Aurora, the main airport of Guatemala. He and two of his cronies were involved in drug trafficking up to their eyeballs. The CIA, the intelligence station, and the DEA, the drug enforcement agency, had the proof. They even had pictures of these guys carrying the stuff out of the airport. To get Moran out of the town, Cerezo named him as the chairman of the Port of Santo Thomas, which is the country's leading port. Eighty percent of the country's imports and exports go through there. A lot of drugs are transshipped. This was just an open license to conduct illegal activities. Many of our officers believed that President Cerezo himself was involved because his brother definitely was.

Q: *It was like putting a fox in charge of the henhouse...*

STROOCK: Exactly! So I went to the president and spoke to him about it. I made a special trip down there to the palace for that purpose only. We would have breakfast once a month--and I would bring it up each time, but three months went by, and he hadn't done anything about it. At this same time, there was a flap over the visas that were being requested by Guatemalan congressmen. They were being held up because the congressmen refused to fill out certain forms. Sue Patterson, our Consul General, felt that while they were entitled almost automatically to visitor's visas to the United States on official visits, they were asking for official visas to do private business. She was trying to make a point, that congressmen should not expect special privileges from the United States Consul General--in direct contradiction to the way they operated in their country.

Q: *Guatemalan congressmen?*

STROOCK: Yes. Sue was holding up four or five visas. I went down to see the Interior Minister to ask that he cooperate with us in getting these Guatemalan congressmen to clear their paperwork so we could issue them visas. When I came out of his office after the interview, the press was waiting there for me. The American ambassador attracted press down there. On TV and radio and newspapers and everything else, they wanted to know why we were holding up these visas; *denying* these visas were the claims. I said that we weren't "denying" any visas. We were just requesting that everybody in Guatemala go through the same procedures. Congressmen were, in our view, no more entitled to special privileges than any other Guatemalan citizen, just as in our country. The press insisted, "Well you are *denying* visas," and I said, "No, since I've gotten here, we've only denied two visas." "And whose were those?" I said, "One of them is a mayor of a small town up in the Peten, who is known as an illegal alien smuggler, a `coyote,' and

we're not going to give him a visa. The other is Colonel Hugo Moran, who we believe to be involved in drug trafficking. As far as we're concerned Colonel Moran's activities have made him undesirable and we don't want him in our country." Well, that certainly created a storm. It's the only time in our two year relationship that President Cerezo really got very personally angry at me. He thought I put him down personally. And I told him, "No Mr. President I didn't put you down personally, I just got tired of waiting for you to act." (chuckles) I'm just picking out one incident out of maybe fifty, but there were fifty of them just like that.

Q: *Maybe its time to move to the second "D," democracy. That would have been heavily tied up in the upcoming election. . .*

STROOCK: Yes. Well, at the time the big concern was that the Christian Democrats, who had controlled the congress--they had fifty-two out of the hundred deputies--and who also controlled the Presidency had a candidate by the name of Alfonso Cabrera. He had been the foreign minister and State Secretary Shultz hated him because he lied to him. He was reputed to be heavily involved in drug trafficking. There was no question that Cabrera's older brother was a drug trafficker. He went to jail. There's no question that a large amount of drug money supported Cabrera's political ambitions. He flew around the country in a helicopter owned by a drug king named Escobar. He had known ties to both Cali and Medellin cartels. But I must say that *I* was never convinced that Cabrera himself was involved in drug trafficking. It's just that if he had become president, he had so many chits out to those who *were* involved in drug trafficking that it would have been impossible to control. Furthermore, the army did not like Cabrera. We had all kinds of information that had he become elected, they would have moved against him and overthrown the government.

Q: *Let me stop you for just a second. The president when you arrived was Vinicio Cerezo.*

STROOCK: Yes.

Q: *And how had he come to power?*

STROOCK: He was legitimately and democratically elected in 1985. The story of the Cerezo election has been covered many times before and we shouldn't take the time to go into it here, but he had the opportunity to be the George Washington and Abraham Lincoln-rolled-into-one in his country. But he blew his chances and suffered two coups, in which he succeeded in escaping narrowly with his life and his government. The last two years of his administration, when I was there, he didn't care really whether school kept or not. He was there to enrich himself, which he did. He was personally corrupt. He took money, to our certain knowledge, from education funds, and from road funds.

Q: *And he shipped the money off shore, didn't he?*

STROOCK: I haven't any clear idea what he did with it, I just know that it disappeared. He bought himself a yacht called "Odiseus" for one thing.

Q: *So you were talking about Cabrera and the...*

STROOCK: Anyhow Cerezo was the president. He was an extraordinarily likeable guy. If he walked in the room right now, I would be glad to see him. As a human being he was despicable, but as a personality he was lots of fun. He was a guy you could always have a good time with. He liked jokes. He liked girls--he really did like girls! He liked to drink.

But he was corrupt, and in the last two years of his administration he didn't care whether school kept or not. When the economy started to inflate, he didn't even try to control things. In any event, Cabrera had been his buddy who helped him get elected, and so he in turn now was committed politically to help Cabrera get elected. Cabrera was the candidate of the Christian Democrat Party. There was a strong central group, the National Central Union, headed by a guy who I knew very well. He has since been killed very tragically; murdered by political opponents, but it was covered up to look like a robbery. His name was Jorge Carpio. His brother, Roberto, was Vinicio's Vice President. That gives you an idea of how involved all these families are in politics.

Carpio owned the newspaper, *El Grafico*, and he had been the candidate against Cerezo in 1985 and had lost. He had built up a pretty important party that controlled a number of seats in the congress. It was the second largest party in the country, and he was a very viable candidate.

Then there was the extreme right wing that had nominated an engineer who had become an economist, by the name of Manuel Ayau. He had been the rector of Franciso Maraquin University. He had dual citizenship, American citizenship and Guatemalan citizenship. He was running as the candidate of the MLN, the extreme right wing party. As the campaign developed it became obvious that he was going no place, so he made a deal with the VCN. He came on board as Jorge Carpio's vice president. So Carpio and Ayau ran as one team and Cabrera was the major opposition. There were several smaller parties in the election that weren't given much of a chance, including the MAS, the Action Socialista, which, despite its name, was a conservative republican party, run by Jorge Serrano. He had been an associate of General Rios Montt.

Past histories will tell about the Rios Montt phenomenon. He seized power in 1983 and was forced out by the army 18 months later. In 1990, Rios Montt was running for the presidency on the FRG ticket. The constitution that the country operated on, and still operates on, was specifically designed to keep him from becoming president because of the events in 1983-84. But he claimed that he had the right to run for president. The truth of the matter is that there wasn't any question in my mind that had he been allowed to run, had the constitution not specifically prohibited him from running, he would have been overwhelmingly elected on the first ballot, in 1990, because it was known that he personally was not corrupt. He really shut down corruption in 1983 when he was president.

It was felt that the Cerezo regime was so corrupt, so lackadaisical, and the economy was inflating so fast, with no one paying attention to the store, that Rios Montt, despite all the evangelical Christian craziness that he had demonstrated in the two years that he had been the usurper president, still was the preferable candidate. The people believed that he would have brought order out of chaos. The Guatemalan people believe that to this day. He's got to be figured on when talking about the future of Guatemala. He is very definitely there, and very definitely

interested, and still an active man; he's in his early sixties. A dynamic guy. Unfortunately for him, the Supreme Court ruled, shortly before the elections, that he couldn't run. The voters were looking around for someone who was as close to him as possible and they settled on Jorge Serrano. Jorge Serrano is a very interesting personality, one of the most interesting people I ever met; very difficult man. He was born-again Evangelical Christian, whose main problem was that he would not listen. He was an engineer. He wanted to handle everything himself. He believed that he was a prophet of God and that he spoke directly to God. Phil Taylor, our DCM, very accurately said, "This guy's in transmit 99 percent of the time," and he was. When I interviewed him you could see that he wasn't really listening to what I had to say. He was merely waiting til I got done so he could say what he had to say, and while I was talking he was thinking about what he was going to say. He wasn't taking anything in. He surrounded himself with yes-men, but he ran a very, very good political campaign in 1990. In September of that year he had perhaps two percent of the vote in the polls, and they were pretty accurate polls. Then the Court of Constiutionality ruled that Rios Montt could not run. From that day on the people drifted off the Rios Montt bandwagon and got on Jorge Sorrano's. He got some money, and he went on television with some very clever ads with attractive jingles. He said the right things. He did the right things. He hired Roger Ailes from the United States as a political expert to come down and advise him. From two percent in early September of 1990 he got to 24 percent in the elections held in November. Jorge Carpio got to 26 percent, and the other parties didn't reach double digits. One of the brighter stars in the firmament of Guatemalan politics is a young former mayor of Guatemala City by the name of Alvaro Artu. He had a party called the PAN, and they came in third. The Democrat Christians, because of their corruption, came in a poor fourth, and Cabrera was out of it.

Guatemalan law requires that you can't just win the presidency with plurality, you have to win with a majority. So there was a run off between Serrano and Jorge Carpio. Carpio having had 26 percent of the vote, Serrano 24 percent of the vote. And the thought was that they might split that difference; no one really knew what was going to happen. But again, Serrano campaigned very well, and Jorge Carpio campaigned very badly. He proceeded to attack Alvaro Artu, saying that Artu had made a corrupt deal with Serrano to support him as Foreign Minister if Serrano won. It was true, but saying it publicly and nastily, somehow he didn't do that right. There's a right way and a wrong way, and he picked the wrong way. Carpio hardly improved his vote at all. He went from 26 to 28 percent of the total vote. He only picked up two percentage points. All the rest of them, unanimously, went for Serrano who was elected by a large plurality.

Q: *So it was 72 percent?*

STROOCK: Approximately. Then subsequently Alvaro Artu became the Foreign Minister in the new Serrano cabinet. So Jorge Carpio wasn't wrong in his accusations. Nevertheless, the whole campaign, which was beginning to heat up by the time I got there in October in 1989, got very warm all year long. The threat and counter-threat of "there's going to be a coup, the army's going to take over and not have elections, Cerezo is going to resign and turn things over to Cabrera, Rios Montt is going to mount a coup, the army is going to support Rios Montt"--I mean, pick your daily rumor, and it would sweep the capital city. Since most politics in small Central American countries are controlled in the capital, what happens in a small group in the capital is much more important than what happens inside the beltway in Washington. In Washington

inside the beltway, you can influence each other, but the huge mass of the country isn't that effected. In Guatemala, what happens inside their proverbial beltway does indeed affect how the country goes. The country is primitive enough, and the society is fractured enough, with half the population being Indian and not really *in* the political culture. What happens in the capital has tremendous influence.

Q: *What was the turn out like in terms of registered voters?*

STROOCK: It was about 65 percent in both cases.

Q: *Do you know what percentage of person who would be eligible to vote, had they registered, were registered?*

STROOCK: No. One of the problems in a Latin American country, particularly in one like Guatemala, which is so poor, is that they haven't had a reliable census ever. You are really guessing at how many people. I think there are more than ten million people living in that country, but I still see figures that say eight and a half to nine million. I think they're guessing at the population of Guatemala City. I believe it to be an excess of two million, but they're not quite officially showing it to be two million yet, so it's very difficult to tell. Of course the country has a huge rate of illiteracy, so people vote with their thumbprints when they can't spell. The Democrat Christians, have a well organized organization in the countryside, and they literally truck the Guatemalan Indians into town and march them up to the polls where they put their thumbprint where they are told. Nevertheless, the election was legal. It was clean. It was open. We had a lot of investigators, international and American observers, down there during the election, and all agreed on this.

Q: *Who was the head of the observer team, do you recall?*

STROOCK: Well, there were many different ones. The UN had one. We had one. President Carter was down there. So it was hard to say, but there were several of them. I guess the UN would have been the principle one. It was headed by a man by the name of Tomuchat. But I went around all the country on both election days, up and down the countryside, and I'm convinced that they were open, clean elections; that there was no fraud, either time.

Q: *Do you think voters were coerced?*

STROOCK: Well, I think that it was a cleaner election in that regard than you have for Sweetwater County Sheriff in Wyoming. It's the same kind of coercion as "Bring your friends into town on the truck and you all vote." In any event we did have a clean election, and I flatter myself that much of what we did in the embassy; the constant talking and prodding and visiting the army and saying, "you can't do that," the visiting with the various political figures and saying, "You have got to do this right." I saw Rios Montt twice. I became a very good friend of his vice presidential candidate, a man by the name of Harris Whitbick who again had dual U.S.-Guatemalan citizenship Several of the major figures in Guatemala society have dual citizenship. Harris had been in the United States Marine Corps, liked to play tennis and was a good friend. I would say, "Harris, as a leader in this culture there are things you really must do. You will lose

more than you will gain unless you run a clean election." I really spent about a quarter of my time from October of 1989-January of 1991 trying to promote a legitimate election.

Although we were accused of it, definitely we had no preferred candidate. That was the other thing: we were accused because I got early on to be a personal friend of Jorge Carpio. I thought he was a very educated, erudite, interesting man.

Marta and I got to be social friends of Jorge and his wife Marita. They would invite us to their home in Antigua, and we would have them over for small dinners--as personal friends--at the embassy. And because of that, it was assumed that, certainly Serrano assumed, that I was supporting Carpio. But we never did, and never could. We refused to take sides publicly or privately. I would tell Jorge privately, "Jorge, you're my good friend and I hope you always are my good friend, but you're gonna be my good friend whether you stay as editor of El Grafico or whether you're president of your country. That's the way it's gonna be." Also, I got to be very, very impressed with Alvaro Artu, and I made a point of meeting personally with all the candidates at any time that I could, refusing to have my picture taken with them publicly (which they all wanted), because I didn't want the United States to get involved in the decision of the election. But we were very heavily involved in the mechanics of the election.

One of the things we did was support the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which was run by a wonderful man by the name of Arturo Herbrugger who is today the Vice President of Guatemala. He's 81 years old. He's a distinguished jurist. He's one of the leading jurists in Central America, and he's one of the few uncorrupt members of the Latin American judiciary I've ever met. A wonderful man of whom I'm very fond. He ran the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, and we said, "Look, what do you need to run an honest election in terms of computer capability, in terms of FAX machines, in terms of communication, because if we can use computers, where communication is instantaneous, it will tremendously cut down the ability to manipulate the election." We must have spent well over 300,000 dollars of our AID funds with the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, on this program. It was one of the few programs where I would not insist on having matching funds because the Supreme Electoral Tribunal had no funds to match. As we get into development I'll talk about the matching funds concept. But this was just an outright grant of US AID money to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal to equip them, to have safe and secure transmission of results, instantaneous communication, and safe and secure computation results. Because of that the election was very well run in a country where elections had not been very well run previously. The AID mission that coordinated this was run first by Tony Cauterucci and then by Terry Brown. They both did an excellent job. I really think that was one place where the American taxpayer got a very good run for his less than half a million bucks.

Q: *Was democracy still a major issue after Serrano took office or was that really the end?*

STROOCK: No, no, no. It's always going to be a major issue. In fact Serrano fell off the wagon after I left. I left in November of 1992, and in May of 1993, Jorge Serrano tried to turn himself into a dictator. He tried to abolish the courts, abolish the congress, and muffle press. He tried that twice before during my stay there. He would convince himself that anyone who opposed his programs was in the pay of a drug lord, was a narco-trafficker, trying to destabilize his government and had bought off and bribed the TV and newspapers. He was a great believer in

the conspiracy theory and believed that just about everything was a conspiracy against him. The newspapers would attack him in cartoons, or when they would publish that his family had taken up buying polo ponies and playing polo, or that he had purchased a (finca) and was trying to throw some poor Indians off the (finca) land in Rio Dulce. All of this was true, but he took these as personal assaults and personal attacks on him--the equivalent of lese majeste--trying to destabilize his state.

I sent our defense attaché to see the Army Chief of Staff, Tromciso Orvega, who was his good friend, to say that this can never work. I went down to the police myself to say, "If you proceed to continue to terrorize the newspaper editors [which he was doing], and if you abolish the congress-- "If you do that," I said, "you will make my life a lot easier. I will become the world's greatest senior tennis player because there will be nothing for me to do except to go out on that tennis court I've got in back of the embassy and practice so that when I go back to Wyoming I'll be the senior's tennis champ. I can promise you that every single program and every single communication between you and the government of United States will be cut." I think, truly, that this was one of the key factors in delaying in his decision until after I left. A few times he really listened to me because I really got in his face. But not very often.

Q: *So you think you talked him out of turning himself into a dictator?*

STROOCK: I don't know that I myself was responsible. There were several other factors. The time wasn't right for other reasons, too. I think one of the reasons that he did make the attempt in May 1993 was that there was no American ambassador there. We had an extremely able deputy chief of mission. The DCM was John Keene, who couldn't be a more able man, a better officer, who some day surely will be an ambassador. He got an award for his handling of affairs during those difficult days, but he couldn't go down and pound on the table the way a Chief of Mission could. I used to pound it literally, pound my hand on the side of the chair of the visitation office of Serrano. He didn't like it: he really didn't like me. In private, he called me "Cowboy that Ambassador." I did not have the same nice, warm personal relationship with Serrano that I had with Cerezo. Serrano was a tougher character. I think Serrano started out wanting to do the right things, and we had great hopes for him the first six months. But he interpreted everything that was in the least bit critical as being destabilizing, and we were constantly being critical. Constructively critical, but--still--critical. And he didn't have the ability to laugh. I mean when Cerezo and I got done beating up on each other, we'd go play tennis. When Serrano and I got done talking, he would stomp off with the steam coming from around his collar. It was a totally different personality mix.

As I say, Serrano was an extremely complex character. There was so much that was good about him, and there was so much that was bad about him. The corruption was bad, but his abilities to engineer and organize were good. Cerezo was controlled by the army. The Defense Minister--Alejandro Gramajo--would come over to the palace and was able to move Cerezo around. The army never dared tell Serrano what to do. In fact, he told the army. He grabbed a hold of it, was its Commander in Chief and the infractions they committed while he was President, he knew about. He either approved of them or at least didn't object to them. Two totally different sets of personalities.

There was constant worry on our part about this guy who is an autocrat. He literally would tell me, "I spoke to the Lord," and I had an answer for that, but I never used it, I was always prepared to say, "Well, you know I speak to the Lord, too, and He tells me something different than what he tells you," but I wasn't sure that would do it. Instead, I said, "Well, I spoke to Bernie Aronson, and he isn't quite the Lord, but..." I tried that on him once. It's difficult to make him laugh, but he did on that one.

Q: *Should we move on to Development now?*

STROOCK: I suppose we'd better. You need to know, and those who deal with the history of this period need to know, that democracy is only skin-deep in Guatemala. It's not a real democracy, it's just a facade. It's a Potemkin village. They have the president, the courts, and congress, but the corruption, and the lack of support, and the fact that there is no social contract down there means that our concern about real democracy was truly justified, and our continuing concern to make sure that it take some kind of root is really justified. This was--and will continue to be--a big problem for our bilateral relationship.

Q: *Let's do move on to Development. Why don't you tell us what the issue was in your mind? What it was you thought you could do?*

STROOCK: Well, there were two ways to handle it. We had two programs. One was the AID programs to try and help them get on their feet with our U.S. taxpayer resources. The other was the trade program, the private effort, which was much more effective, but much more difficult to handle. When I got down there, the AID program the previous year, had spent almost 200 million dollars. The biggest problem was that the Guatemalan government had not been taking in any money from taxes. They were printing money and the inflation had grown to more than 20% annually.. The quetzal, which was their unit of monetary exchange, had been stable at one quetzal to the dollar exchange. When I got there it was 2.8 quetzals to the dollar, and it was heading north to three, of four, and then five quetzals to the dollar. Inflation of 26, 27, almost 30 percent. A very corrupt young man, Oscar Pineda, had become the Minister of Finance. The extremely able president of the national bank, Frederico Linavas, had resigned, and the new finance team had no grasp of what they were doing. They were in a arrears to the World Bank, the price of coffee was falling, coffee being their principal export, so the economy was in desperate shape. Because of cheating and corruption, much of our AID money had been misused. The year before I got there, we had given them so-called "Economic Support Funds, EST, which are direct injections of U.S. taxpayer dollars, into the Bank of Guatemala in the amount of 80 million dollars. The quid pro quo for the 80 million dollars was that instead of trying to control the currency, they would remove all currency controls, which they did. So the 80 million dollars did accomplish convertibility and opened up the economy, which was necessary. But instead of solving the country's economic problems for two or three years, it didn't even solve them for two or three months. The 80 million dollars were disbursed in August of '89. I got there in October of '89 and it was almost as if, except for the convertibility factor, this money had never been seen. So we immediately started to try and change the way the economy was handled. We had a brilliant economist from Georgia State University with AID mission by the name of Sam Skogsted. The Economic Section of the embassy, which later on became extremely strong under the very able leadership of one of the best economists, male or female, I ever met, Geri Chester,

wasn't all that strong before her arrival. It was the weakest of the agencies that we had down there. So I depended on Skogsted and his economic team from AID to help with the private sector.

We were trying to get the government to privatize many of the agencies which were so fat and bloated. They refused to privatize the telephone monopoly, (Guatel), because it made so much money for the government. They had already privatized the national airline, Aviatecu, the year before I got there, but they'd done it in an extremely dirty and crooked way. Interestingly enough the president and the lady who was his personal secretary, and who quite frankly lived with him, Claudia Arenas, were the largest stockholders. They also were on the board of directors. It was that kind of an operation.

We tried to set out an economic program that they could follow. We insisted that we wouldn't put up any more Economic Support Funds unless they did follow that economic program. AID had 50 million dollars of economic support funds allocated for Guatemala, in January or February of 1990. We didn't actually disburse any of it, because we were negotiating the treaty under which it would be spent, until September of 1990 in the middle of the presidential political campaign. Then we only released 20 million dollars of it, directly into Guatemala's account at the World Bank. Further, we made it a requirement that they would take certain actions set out in a Memorandum of Understanding that we negotiated in order to get the balance of 30 million dollars. They never took those steps so we kept the 30 million dollars they didn't earn and held it over for dealing with the next administration.

We were trying to get them to do what was necessary to curb inflation, to stop printing money, to privatize their government agencies, and to open up the economy so that at least the "trickle down theory" of economics that they believed in would work. The problem in Guatemala is that when they do run their economy and run it right, they don't allow the workers to get any of it. Their minimum wages are not enforced. The private sector says they're going to pay minimum wage, but they rarely do. The social security system doesn't work. The public health system doesn't work. I paint a very black picture because the picture is black. The economy is good for maybe 10 percent of the Guatemalan population. It's excellent for one percent. It's okay for maybe another ten percent, and then 79 to 80 percent of the people live in constant and abject misery. The benefits of an open economy aren't getting down to them because the economy isn't open below a certain social and economic status. We were constantly working on that. I think, along with the guerrilla war, this is the long most important range problem of Guatemala. The people who control the economy will not allow even the "trickle down" theory to work. There is no social justice in Guatemala today--that is the sad truth.

Q: *One of your major initiatives had to do with the matching funds, didn't it?*

STROOCK: Well this was in the area of AID, and that's another problem altogether. The part I'm talking about is the private economy...

Q: *So I've change the subject prematurely then?*

STROOCK: No, it's all right. Let's talk about it. The other component in developing a country is to try and develop the social system and, most importantly the educational system. We tried to promote contacts, scholarship programs that bring Guatemalan students to the United States, and Americans to Guatemala, Fulbright scholars and that kind of thing. The Peace Corps is great. We need to talk about the Peace Corps as a separate matter altogether. Remind me to talk about the Peace Corps because I think it's very important.

When I got down there, we had a program of a hundred and twenty million dollars in what they call DA, Direct Aid, for specific programs: bilingual education, immunization of children, nourishment of mothers, women's health care and road construction for farm to market roads. What I found we were doing, to my utter horror, was: when the program was approved in Washington, we would hire a contractor, and put up the money in advance, letting the contractor draw against it. Well you can imagine how much went into roads and how much went into education and how much went into health care and how much went into somebody's pocket. I found that in a sixteen million dollar program in health care, over a million dollars was unaccounted for. The AID inspector general just couldn't account for it. This was probably the most difficult decision for me as Ambassador. The sixteen million dollar program was one for immunization of children and in that society, children not immunized against the simplest germs, such as measles, mumps, chicken pox, anything. The disease just takes them off because they're not properly nourished. I had to decide whether or not I was going to shut that 16 million program down because the Guatemalan health department had stolen a million dollars of it. I got advice that I would be responsible for the deaths of many, many children. I decided that yes, I would, but unless somebody made a stand some place they'd likely run out and at least half of what was left of the sixteen million bucks. So I shut the program down. I had to fight the bureaucracy up and down to do it. It was amazing, when the government there saw that we weren't kidding--it took about 90 days to convince them that there was going to be no more money and that program was going down the tubes--the corrupt Minister of Health (and he really was corrupt), named Doctor Gellart Matas, began a real rain dance. He was a friend of the Ambassador of the Order Knights of Malta. Gellart Matas had the Ambassador set up a dinner to which I came, and there he made this plea to me. The Ambassador of the Knights of Malta, who was really my friend, said, "Pancho, I appreciate this dinner and I appreciate Dr. Matas being here, but the fact of the matter is that American taxpayer money was stolen and until it's replaced, the American taxpayer has no business supporting this program. If a lot of children die, it's not the fault of the American taxpayer, it's the fault of the people who stole their money. I think both you and the Minister had better understand that." And he backed off a mile, and Gellart Matas was finally convinced we were serious. We finally got three people thrown in jail. We got half the money back, finally, and we reinstated the program a year later.

Q: *Just for the record, what was the name of the ambassador of the Knights of Malta?*

STROOCK: Pancho Balzaretti, Francisco Balzaretti. He's still there. He's a wonderful friend and a good guy.

Q: *So you got three people put in jail...*

STROOCK: We got three people put away and got half the money back, we reinstated the program. But in the course of doing all of this, I called on some of my very firm memories of days in the Wyoming State Senate. I remembered how federal funds were being sent to Wyoming to be spent on road programs. The federal highways, the big four-lane highways, are built on a program that is 10 percent state money and 90 percent federal money. The state Highway Department hardly gives a damn about those highways. They send out an inspector occasionally to look at it, but it's the Federal Bureau of Roads that builds them and worries about them and essentially maintains them. The State Highway Department looks after them, but most of the money comes from the feds, so it is not their main focus.

The main focus is on any program where the State Highway Department spends all its money or at least pays 50 percent of the cost. I'm thinking of market roads, industrial development roads, and roads like that, where the state has to come up with at least 50 percent of the money. And there the state engineers are out there examining that the money is being properly spent, because now they've got real "skin" in the deal.

Human nature is the same world-wide, and if the Guatemalans had 50 percent of their own dough in the deal, then they're going to pay attention. I think this served as a screen as well. A lot of programs we had promoted in the past in Guatemala were our own great ideas, but they weren't what the Guatemalans really thought was so great. As long as we were going to give it to them, why not take it? But by the time I left, we had quit advancing money. We had only put up our AID money after the Guatemalans had put theirs up. And we did it on a 50 percent matching basis in every single program. The few exceptions were the specific ones already mentioned, and another one which funded the Human Rights Ombudsman's office so that it had agencies in all 23 provinces. Also, the Peace Corps volunteers--we put up a fund of 250 Thousand Dollars. The volunteers could come in and--up to a maximum of 5 thousand dollars--get a program going. But even those were matched because while the five thousand dollars bought the materials for the school house, it was the villagers who built the school. While the five thousand dollars bought the plastic pipe for the potable water system, it was the villagers who dug the ditches and put the pipe together and dug the well.

Q: *So they matched with their labor your funds.*

STROOCK: Yes, but I'm talking about actual fund matching because that was another argument we had. The Guatemalans said, "Well, we'll match it with rent space and with effort." I said, "No, that's been done in the past, and it doesn't work, it's not the same. Its got to be dollars." And I think whoever runs this program that we're talking about, will want to talk to Terry Brown our AID Mission Director and get his vision on it because Terry is the one who really carried it to fruition.

Q: *Do you think it worked?*

STROOCK: I know it worked. I know it worked. It made our aid much more efficient. You could see the efficiency growing in front of your eyes, you could see many more miles of road for our dollar, you could see the roads were better maintained, you could see that the schools were better built, you could see that the schools which we had built with a hundred percent of

our dough, weren't properly cared for. They were falling down and dirty and messy and looked generally neglected. Once those local people had half their dough in it, man, they looked spick and span and were great.

Q: *Was there less corruption? Less money...?*

STROOCK: I hope so. I don't know. Once you turn the money over to the people, you're at their mercy. WE certainly scared a lot of people with our actions on the health thing. I mean that reverberated around the country. I'd like to think so. I can tell you that I saw the change that we got more bang for our buck, but I didn't see whether or not we had curbed the corruption.

Q: *You said before that there was something you wanted to mention about the Peace Corps. Was it about that 250 thousand dollar fund or...*

STROOCK: Well, that's the part that leads me into the Peace Corps. I think the best thing that we do in terms of our people to people relationship, in terms of being good neighbors, is the Peace Corps. Certainly in Guatemala. The Peace Corps got out to small teeny rural villages that would never see an American. Guatemalans were used to seeing Americans who are diplomats and visit in big cars or helicopters, or ministers or preachers, who evangelize a certain belief. They see either diplomats or religious types or rich tourists who dress funny and travel in big tourist buses. But they don't see the real people of the United States who make up the head and heart of our country. The Peace Corps volunteers live in the villages just the way the villagers do and get to know them and have a little bit of money to promote a local project and make people's lives a little bit better. When the Peace Corps guy or gal leaves the villagers may forget the particular lesson of how to plant trees, or they may not plant anymore trees. They may not remember all the health instructions that the nurse gave, or the water system may break and they may not remember how to fix it. But as long as they live they'll remember that a young (or in some cases old), American came and lived with them and shared their lives, and did it for no other reason than to make the lives of those villagers better. And you're never going to get anti- Americanism in a generation who has been exposed to these kinds of Americans. That's the best thing we do overseas.

Q: *Management of what?*

STROOCK: Of the embassy, which was over-staffed. We reduced the staff of the embassy substantially. And I think that there are many more places in that embassy and many other embassies where the staff can be reduced in size. I don't think that we have in the past used proper business management in running embassies, but one place that we should not cut, one place where we get much more than we give is in the Peace Corps program.

Q: *Had we pretty well covered, given the scope of this short conversation this morning, have we pretty well covered developments?*

STROOCK: I would think so.

Q: *Okay. Should we move on to human rights? which begins with a "d" in Spanish?*

STROOCK: Yes, it does. Before I got there there had been the murder of twelve university students which had happened in August of 1989. There's a pretty well accepted statistic that well over 120,000 people have been murdered by both sides in the 32 year long guerrilla war. I am personally convinced that about 25 percent of those murders and atrocities were committed by the guerrillas and their supporters, and about 75 percent of those murders and atrocities were committed by the army and their supporters. There's an organization called the "Patrulleros Civiles," which the army has set up in each village. They are taking a lesson out of Mao Zedong's book; that he who controls the sea controls the fishing. The Patrulleros have been set up to make sure that guerrilla groups don't move in and out of these small villages. They have ended up in too many instances, tyrannizing and terrorizing these villages. By now they pretty much control them.

The army is the most important figure in the rural areas of the country--95 percent of it--for a very simple reason. If you are the mayor of a little village up in the boondocks, or down in the jungle, and you want a road, or you want a well, or you want potable water, or you want a community building built, you can write and petition and budget and go down to the capital, which is where everything has to be done. The government operates on an extremely centralized system--you can't even get an automobile license outside of one building in the capital. Well, as mayor, you can write and do all, but you'll never get what you need, because the money isn't there, and the ability isn't there. But if you go down the road to the local army barracks, and talk to the captain, or the lieutenant in charge, he'll send a group of troops out and they'll dig the well, or they'll build the school, or they'll build the road. That's where the army gets its strength and support. They are the only effective force of any kind, for good or evil, that represents government out in the country. And, of course, they take advantage of it. They steal and rob and commit atrocities, and anybody who speaks out against them is going to disappear.

There is no social contract as we understand it out in the back country. Furthermore, half the population of Guatemala is "indigena"--direct descents of the Mayan Indians the conquistadores encountered. They speak 23 separate different and distinct languages. Not dialects, distinct languages. So one tribe doesn't understand the other. They're separated by their language, they're not united. Perhaps half of them know how to speak Spanish, which is the official language of the country. So at least 25 percent of the population doesn't speak Spanish at all, just their native languages. They're people who don't read. They vote with their thumb; they sign contracts with their thumb print.

The land distribution system of the country is totally skewed. There are families trying to make a living on a plot of land no bigger than this conference table. As each family has more children the land will get divided further. There's no primogeniture in Guatemala. When someone dies, and he has a plot of land as big as this room, it gets divided up five ways if there are five living children, and there generally are at least that many. That's another problem that we haven't time to touch on in this conversation, but population control is absolutely essential to the future of Latin American countries, and of Guatemala in particular. If the economy grows at 3 percent annually, that would be marvelous. But the population grows at more than 3 percent, so you're working like hell to fall further and further behind on a per basis. The misery index just keeps going up

Q: *What did you as the Ambassador try to do about this human rights?*

STROOCK: When I first got to the Department, and read the cables, it became obvious to me that State was apologizing for the human rights atrocities that had been committed for years. We were so concerned that the Soviet Union would extend its influence in Latin America that we accepted the atrocities committed by the rich oligarchs who controlled the economy, and the army who controlled the rural countryside, and the corrupt governments who controlled the city streets. We accepted corruption and atrocities as the price we had to pay to make sure that the country didn't fall into the hands of the Soviet Union, or that the Soviet Union wasn't able to make a Cuban-type base for ballistic missiles aimed at us. It was a legitimate concern, and one which drove our policy in Latin America for years, including the first two months that I got to Guatemala.

But there was a sea change in November and December of 1989: an amalgam of Gorbachev, perestroika, glasnost, the fall of the Berlin wall, and the fracturing of Eastern Europe. We saw the disappearance of the Soviet Union. Now there was no reason to tolerate human rights violations by anybody, but certainly not by the army. There was no longer any communist threat for them to protect us against. If there ever had been a communist threat, there certainly wasn't one now. That whole perception that existed in Washington for so many years that we had to worry about leftist infiltration and takeover in Latin America diminished considerably. It wasn't gone by the time I left, and I dare say it isn't gone as we sit here and talk today. And yet, the reality is that, in fact, it is gone, and American policy in Latin America and Central America has to realize that it's gone. There is no excuse anymore for us to tolerate the human rights violations we thought we had to tolerate in the past, particularly in view of our own heritage of freedom and independence.

I went down there with the belief that we had been much too accepting of human rights violations in the past, that it was not in our national character, heritage or interest to continue to accept it. And yet, I couldn't be a do-gooder and ignore the fact that one had to work with what you had there, the agencies that were functioning. The fact that the economy was controlled by the few wealthy, you had to work with that. You couldn't destroy the economy because you didn't like that. Despite the fact that the army had contributed to 75 percent of the atrocities, you had to work with the army. You had to try and persuade all these people that things had to change.

So I tried with the Cerezo administration, particularly after the fall of the Berlin wall which was a dramatic event that was really noticed all over Latin America. Perestroika and the glasnost hadn't affected them as much, but the dramatic visuals that were carried all over the world by TV On the fall of the wall made a big impression. That's a new factor in our policy now; instant television communication and the fact that CNN is available in every little village in the world. I kept asking; let's find the people who murdered the students (it was undoubtedly the army), and make an example of them. Doing justice would raise the army's estimation in the rest of the world, I said. I tried that on Gramajo, the Defense Minister I don't know how many times. Senator Dodd and Senator Warner came down and spent the night, and we took Gramajo out to dinner. They each individually took it up with him, to no avail.

A month after I got there we had the case of a young nun, Sister Diana Ortiz. Something terrible had happened to her. When I finally saw her after she had been kidnaped for 48 hours, she had been seriously beaten. But her story just didn't hang together. What she said happened to her, just couldn't have happened to her. Nevertheless, something had happened to her, and we were trying to get the Guatemalan officials to cooperate with us. They refused.

It was frustrating as hell because I knew that the fact that an American nun was kidnaped, beaten and possibly, but not probably, raped and tortured was bound to appeal, and did in fact appeal to American television, American newspapers, and upset the Catholic church.

Many, many Catholic bishops and priests accepted her story at face value. Who wouldn't, if you didn't know that what she said happened to her, couldn't have happened to her. But something bad did happen to her, and today we still don't know what that was. As I sit here talking to you, I don't know what it was that actually happened. I just know that for whatever reasons, she lied to us, tried to implicate the embassy in the affair and refused to cooperate with our efforts in any way. That story hit the headlines and we were getting stonewalled by the Guatemalans. Every day you'd pick up the papers, read about another murder. There were street children being tortured. A street child was kicked to death. There are about 5,000--probably 10,000 now--children who live on the street every night in Guatemala City, abandoned by their families. Of course, they're not little boy scouts and girl scouts. They're 10 year old prostitutes, and 9 year old thieves--and that kind of thing. But you don't murder and torture them. There were pictures of three street boys who had been tortured. I'm convinced security forces, maybe not army, maybe the police, did it. Their tongues were cut out, their noses were cut off, their fingers were burned. I mean torturing children; it was truly terrible. Something I didn't think people of the United States could possibly condone. We tried to get the police to come forward as to what happened, and to investigate. Unfortunately, the courts were hand in glove with the police on this, so nothing happened. I got there in October. By February of 1990, I had my belly full. I'd spoken to the president, we had monthly breakfasts, so we'd had four monthly breakfasts in which we'd discussed all of these things. I'd made at least two special trips down to see the Ministry of the Interior. I don't know how many times I've gone by the Defense Ministry with the Defense Attaché, Colonel Cornell, to discuss them. We were getting nowhere. They knew that the American Ambassador was going to leave in three or four years. Their plan was to stiff him and pat him on the head. In time he would go away, and things would continue in their natural course.

I was scheduled to make a speech to the Rotary Club, which is the biggest gathering with businessmen in the country. I got ahold of the Public Affairs Officer, John Tracy; a marvelous Irishman, a great friend of mine and an excellent PAO. I said, "I want to make a speech. I want to make it as friendly as possible under the circumstances, but as firm as a rock about human rights." That's what it was. There was a phrase in there that said, "The United States cannot long have productive relations with a country that either promotes, or tolerates, human rights abuses of its own citizens because that is not in the tradition of the American people." Well, that created quite a sensation. The press asked Vinicio Cerezo, the President, about it, and he said, "Well, I know Tom. He's kind of a cowboy, and these are just his personal opinions, I'm sure they don't reflect the opinions of the United States government."

So, for the first time, I really pulled in whatever chips I had. I called Bernie Aronson in the State Department, and I said, "You guys have got to support me." I give Bernie a great deal of credit for a lot of things; but certainly on this one. He backed me up 100 percent.

He was mad at me, "Damn it, why didn't you send up the speech for me to read before you gave it?" "Bernie, I did." What we'd done, John and I, was to write the speech in Spanish. We'd sent it up in Spanish because it was going to be given in Spanish. What neither of us knew, and I didn't realize until quite a bit later, was that Bernie didn't speak Spanish. He saw it but he didn't read it, or have it translated. Because it was in Spanish he just skipped it. From then on out, of course, I cabled everything I was going to say in English as well as Spanish.

Regardless of the fact that he was upset about that, Bernie backed me up 100 percent. He said, "What we'll do is we'll bring you home. We'll recall you as a sign of our displeasure with the president's statement."

When I got back to Washington, I thought to myself; just being recalled and coming back, that's not dramatic enough. I need something dramatic. I need a letter signed by the President of the United States saying that Ambassador Stroock does indeed speak for this administration. To get a letter signed by the President through the fudge factory down at Foggy Bottom, is not going to happen in a week. I wanted to get back to Guatemala in a week while this thing was still hot.

Joe Sullivan, who was the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Central America was in favor of doing it. Bernie Aronson was in favor of doing it. You have to understand that Guatemala was not large on their radar screen--they had a few other problems. It was essentially turned over to me. "If you can get a letter, hurray."

The first thing I did was get ahold of Margaret Tutwiler who had worked on the Bush campaign as Jim Baker's secretary. She was now the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs. I got an appointment with her and asked Margaret to get me an appointment with Jim Baker so I could get my letter. Then I worked with the Guatemala desk officer, a brilliant girl by the name of Debbie McCarthy. She ran around the Legal Department and I got input from anybody she could. We worked up a one-page letter in Spanish--with a good English translation this time--for the President to sign. It said that indeed I did speak for the administration, and while the President had every kind of admiration and respect for President Cerezo, he really wanted him to know that human rights were an important component of our relations. I have a copy of the letter. I forget all the details but it was a good friendly, fair, but very firm letter.

I was trying to get up to see Jim, and Bernie said, "You'll never get to see Jim on this. He's flying around..." He had the Middle East, and Poland. I said, "Let me try." So I got ahold of Margaret, and we got ahold of Karen Davidson, Jim's scheduling secretary and the next thing you know Baker said, "Yes, I'd like to talk to Stroock. I want to talk to him about my ranch in Wyoming." Jim looked at and almost bought the Moose Willow, our place in Dubois, and he did buy a place 50-60 miles away. "I want to talk to him." So I had an appointment at 11:00 on the Thursday.

In the meantime I had also contacted Chase Untermeyer, and Nancy Wong on the staff in the White House. I wasn't getting anywhere to get in to see the President. Suddenly I remembered that General Brent Scowcroft, who was the head of the National Security Council was a good friend of Dick Cheney's. I had met him through Dick and we had gotten along well at subsequent meetings. So I called Kathy Enbody, Dick's secretary-- she has been his secretary for years--and got her to call Brent Scowcroft's secretary. Then I called Brent and said, "I really, really need to talk to you." So I had an appointment on Thursday with Baker, and Friday with Scowcroft. The deal with Scowcroft was that he would take me to see the President with this now famous letter. Saturday I would spend with my sister Sandra and then Sunday I was going to fly back to Guatemala.

Nobody in the State Department really thought that all this would hang together, but I did persuade the ARA staff to help. Thursday morning Bernie Aronson said, "If you're going to see Baker, I'd like to go with you." I said, "Of course." We showed up in Baker's office at 11:00, and were marched right in. Jim wanted to spend the whole time talking about his ranch near Boulder in Wyoming. He'd shot an elk 400 feet away at his neighbor's ranch, at the Skinners. Of course I love to talk about Wyoming too, and we exchanged fishing lies. Finally, we could tell it was getting to the end of the time and he said, "Oh, about this Guatemala thing, you've got a letter you want signed by the President?" I said, "Yes, Mr. Secretary, I sure do," and I explained to him why. He turned to Bernie and said, "Bernie, what do you think?" Well, by this time Bernie has realized that Jim and I go back a little ways. To be fair and to be truthful he was not as gung-ho as I was. He would have sent me back to Guatemala with or without the letter. But he said, "Yes, I've read it, it seems it's okay." "Okay, then let's do it," replied Baker. And I said, "Mr. Secretary, I have an appointment over at the White House to expedite this." And he said, "I'd rather you go through channels, but the letter is okay."

When we went out in the hall, I said to Bernie, "If we go through channels, I'm never going to get this letter signed in time. I'm going to take this letter over to Brent Scowcroft with me. Would you authorize it to be typed?" And he did, bless his heart. So I had the letter typed in final form, the official letter in English, and also the official translation in Spanish. Friday I waltzed it over to the White House at about 10:30 in the morning. I waited for about 50 minutes, and finally got in to see Brent Scowcroft, and of course, no chit-chat there, just me and Brent Scowcroft.

I told him my problem, and he read the letter and he said, "Bernie Aronson has signed off on it?" I said, "Yes," and I had the whole file, and I said, "I've talked to Jim Baker about it too." "Okay." He said, "You better hurry." So he picked up the phone, and spoke to the President. Immediately, he walked me from his office down two corridors into the Oval Office. You can hear that there is a chopper warming up on the White House south lawn. That's how close it was. The President was headed off at noon for some place--I think Camp David, I'm not sure. We spent two or three minutes chatting--how are you? how is Marta? and how are things going?

He was very flattering, "You're doing a wonderful job, and I hear there's a problem? You've got a letter for me to sign?" And I said, "Yes, Mr. President, here it is."

He said to Brent, "Is it okay if I sign this?" And Brent said, "Its been approved by everybody in the State Department." He looked at me and said, "This better not be wrong," and he put it up on

the door jamb as he heads out the door, signed George Bush, and handed it to me. Then he went out with his entourage, got in the helicopter and lifts off. Very impressive: Marines saluting--everything. I breathed a sigh of relief.

That's how I got the letter. Then I took that letter back to Guatemala over the weekend and arranged an appointment that Monday with the President at his official office in the palace.

The people in the embassy were really impressed with that letter. Until then, they didn't know whether I was for real or not. We had our country team meeting that morning. A lady that ran one of the missions in AID--ROCAP. It was the regional AID mission that did regional things, mostly in the environment. This gal was a real friend. Her name was Nadine Hogan, and she's a great politician, a good friend of the Coors family who has been active in Denver politics, Colorado politics and national politics for years.

She has great political instincts, so I asked her, "How do you think I ought to handle this thing?"

She said, "You show that to everybody on your Country Team. They're all wondering whether you're for real." So we called them all in, 19 or 20 people, and I showed the letter before I took it down to the palace to show the president.

I said, "I've got this letter and this is the way we're going to go. We've got Bernie Aronson and Jim Baker and the President behind us 100 percent." That letter, I think, was the pivotal point that changed the whole direction of the way the embassy moved on Human Rights. It changed the way the Guatemalan government perceived us. It also changed how the rest of Guatemalan society perceived us. Because previous to that, talking about human rights violations wasn't quite the right thing to do. After all, it meant that everybody knew you were bad mouthing the security forces, and the army, and the government; because they did most of it. It was considered maybe a little too pro-communist, and a little too far to the left to do that.

But once the American Ambassador came back with a letter from the President after that speech, it was very obvious where the United States stood; and where the United States stands is where most of Guatemalan society wants to be. From then on out I really did begin to notice great change in the way the Guatemalans approached human rights violations publicly, privately, and governmentally. The army assaults on human rights, the official assaults on human rights declined--markedly. There were other factors contributing, of course. One was the fact that when Cerezo came to office, one of the good things he did was to open up a dialogue with the guerrillas. The guerilla war is responsible for an awful lot of these human rights violations. When you put a claymore mine in a road, and someone walks on it, no matter whether the guerrilla placed the claymore mine or the army did, whose ever leg gets blown off, that's a human rights violation. That sort of thing diminished as the guerrillas and the army would talk to each other. The people began to believe that there could be a peaceful end to this guerrilla war. It hasn't happened yet--but they still have that belief. There wasn't the intensity of trying to mutilate each other in the guerrilla war. It got better--but it wasn't good.

There were still violations. The guerrillas still came in and burned up hospitals and kidnaped and threatened death to American missionaries. Perhaps the most famous case that involved an

American, was the Michael Devine case in June of 1990. An American named Michael Devine, who had been a Peace Corps volunteer, and who lived up in the little town of Popgun, had a restaurant, a camp ground, and a small ranch. He was accosted by five non-commissioned officers, directed by at least a captain and probably a colonel in the Guatemalan army, and accused of stealing, or trafficking in a Calil rifle that had been missing from the local army base. He hadn't been. He had a Galil rifle all right, but he had purchased it quite legally. He hadn't stolen it from the army base, and the army knew better than that.

But in the course of interrogating him, they killed him. The details as to whether or not he got mad and they killed him, or whether they beat him up and then killed him we aren't sure, but we had enough circumstantial evidence and eye witnesses to know that these guys forced him out of his pickup truck, and put him in their pickup truck. They took him into the Poptum army base, and later his decapitated body was found beside the road at the gate of his ranch. We know who did it. We know the vehicle it was done in.

So I went to the then new Defense Minister, a wishy-washy, sneaky type named General Bolanos, and tried to convince him if they would just bring the people who did this to justice, that they would reflect on themselves. It could turn it into something positive. Instead of causing great American distress, it would cause great American support. At that time we were giving them something more than $6 million in military aid each year. They were very worried that it had gone down from $12 million the year before. I said, "I can promise you it's going to go to nothing if you don't solve this, because the key thing here is that no American taxpayer is going to want any penny of his money spent in an army that murders an American citizen and then covers up the murder. That's just not acceptable behavior."

Again, it was still too soon--they hadn't really realized the sea change in our human rights policies caused by all the events I've described. They didn't really believe we would take action, so the army stonewalled us. They just flat wouldn't cooperate. They really did cover up. The captain in command of the murder squad was Hugo Contveras. He was known as Hugo, El Maldilo, Hugo the bad guy, the evil one. There was a Captain, from the secret service who was involved in covering up the crime. I forget the name of the colonel in the military district of Santa Elena, who gave the order to "controlas." In Spanish it means control, and it also has the state of the art meaning of, that's okay to kill him.

We had it cold. We had the reports both from the Military Defense Attaché and from the CIA station. They had gotten information out of the army. There were enough dissenting army officers who were telling us, and we were sure of what we had.

So when they stiffed us, I got absolutely furious, and again I have nothing but good things to say about my relationship with Bernie in this regard. I called him and said, "I think we ought to cut off the military aid. These guys think we're kidding." It had taken me from June until October to get to this point. We had several telephone calls and I even came back to Washington in November of 1990 for this. So the decision was made. We were now in the time period when the first election of 1990 had been held, and 26 percent of the vote went Jorge Carpio, and 24 percent of the vote went for Serrano, with all the rest splitting up the difference. So there was going to have to be run-off election in December or January.

We knew that Serrano now had an excellent chance of being president. We knew that he would not want the fact that we had cut off military aid to happen on his watch. He would want it to happen on the Cerezo watch because it was Cerezo's refusal to interfere with the army that caused the problem. Cerezo had been scared by two previous coup attempts. So it was decided that we would cut off military aid just as quickly as we could get it done, which turned out to be the first week of December 1990.

Q: I think we missed just the last half of the last sentence.

STROOCK: Well, the decision to cut off military aid in December, still while on the Cerezo watch, and still while Bolanos was Minister of Defense, caused a true sensation and much consternation. They didn't believe we were going to do it, even though I warned them it was coming several times. The official announcement came from Washington D.C. out of the Defense Department. I had had to talk to Dick Cheney about that, which was fun to do because he doesn't generally get mixed up in $6 million deals in Guatemala, but I did get through and talk to him. Dick has always been more than kind, and more than helpful, and more than generous with me.

So we cut off the military aid, and you know, that was a thunder clap. From then on out, we got verbal assurances that they were working on it. And we eventually got the five poor sons of bitches, the privates who did it, 30 years in jail. But we never were able to get the colonel in Santa Elena who I think was the intellectual author of it. Someday I'm going to write a book about the twists and turns of the legalities of how we finally got Captain Hugo Contravas before a court, and caught him in several lies. The court finally condemned him to 18 years, and he went to jail. But guess what? The first night he was in jail he escaped. Isn't that miraculous? In a military jail? And he still hasn't been caught. But the very fact that he was convicted, that we pushed it, and that we still have not returned to military aid for the Guatemalan army was pretty impressive.

When I talk about military aid you have to understand that there are all kinds of games played with military aid. We froze the official, authorized, up-front, everybody sees it, and its accounted for military aid. There was about $10 million worth of military aid in the pipeline from previous authorizations that had been agreed upon, trucks, boots, Quonset huts, medical supplies, ambulances, that kind of thing--that we stopped. So we really froze about $16 million worth of aid. Once the privates were in prison, then--as evidence of good faith--and as evidence that we wouldn't just beat them with a stick, we determined to release about half the military aid that was in the pipeline. Then, once Contravas was convicted--even though he "escaped"--we gave them some more military aid. We still had about $6 million frozen when Serrano came to me and said, "Look, I'm having terrible problems with the military. I'm going to appoint a new Defense Minister, I'm going to get rid of General Mendoza who says he is helping me, but really is not. I'm going to put in a general named Garcia Samayoa. When I do that I want you to turn loose the rest of the military aid to give Garcia Samayoa a good start in his job."

It seemed to me that that was the right thing to do. We had a country team meeting, the Defense Attaché urged me to do it, and his judgment was good, and so did the station chief. The political

officers thought it wouldn't hurt, it wouldn't help. He was of two minds about it. And the Public Affairs Officer, Jim Carroll by that time, said it would play very badly in the United States, but who gives a damn how it played in the United States. Could we get the army to move forward? So we released the rest of it.

All of the time we're dealing with the army on human rights violations. I'm just describing two or three of the most obvious cases, there were many more. We should take time to cover the Maria Unudia__ case. There were many others, perhaps one a week. All the while this was going on we still were fighting the drug war. We still needed the army to help us with it. So through secret funds the CIA has, we were indeed helping the army. So while publicly we're saying, you're bad boys and we're not going to give you this aid, around the back door we are helping them. It's a very difficult and ambivalent situation.

I pressed the whole time I was in Guatemala for someone to unscramble... This was a decision that was bigger than mine to make. I'm not the one to decide whether the United States government pays more attention to human rights violations, or to drug interdiction. But I was begging for someone up there to make that decision because we were sending totally mixed signals. Not publicly. Publicly--as far as the civilian population was concerned, as far as the government was concerned--we were squarely on the side of human rights and drug interdiction, and the two did not interfere with each other. But in the actual workings of the machinery of how these were accomplished, the people involved in it, we were giving terribly mixed signals and I think we still are.

Q: *That decision was never made then?*

STROOCK: That decision was never made. To my knowledge, it has not yet been made. It's a very difficult one to make. It's easy for me to sit here and say, this is the one we ought to do, but it's very difficult for our government to do that. If we make that decision, what decision do they make in the neighboring countries, and how does that affect our relationships with Peru, and Colombia, and Bolivia, and so on.

HARRIET C. BABBITT
Representative to the Organization of American States
Washington, DC (1993-1997)

A lawyer by profession, Ambassador Babbitt was born in West Virginia and raised there and in New York and Texas. After attending the Universities of Texas; Madrid, Spain; Arizona State; as well as Sweet Briar College and Mexico City College of the University of the Americas, she entered law practice in Arizona, the home state of her husband, Bruce Babbitt. She continued her law practice throughout her husband's political career until being named US Ambassador to the Organization of American States in 1993. Ambassador Babbitt was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

BABBITT: Shortly after I took office, there was an auto coup in Guatemala. So, I then quickly became charged with the responsibility of using that resolution to return Guatemala to its constitutional order, which I did.

Q: How did this work? We have an ambassador in Guatemala. This could be a government to government thing, and that would be the ambassador, I guess.

BABBITT: I'm sure our ambassador, whoever it was, was busy doing that on his end. What was useful on our side and what is useful about the OAS is the power of all of the countries of the hemisphere, coming together as a unit and saying, "This activity, this attempted out of coup goes against our agreed upon democratic commitment in the hemisphere, and we condemn it. The first thing I did was accept the Guatemalan OAS ambassador's invitation to come over. He didn't want to come to the State Department. He was pretty insistent. I agreed. We discussed this. At his mission office he kept trying to get me on the phone with his president, so his president could explain to me why that behavior was appropriate. Nothing the guy was doing was appropriate. The other countries in the hemisphere rallied around, and de Leon Carpio, a human rights advocate, came into power. It was amazing.

JOHN ALLEN CUSHING
Economic/Labor Officer
Guatemala (1994-1997)

Mr. Cushing was born in New York City and raised in New York and Hawaii. He graduated from Reed College and continued studies at a variety of institutions in the US and abroad. After service in the Peace Corps, he held a number of positions as English language instructor before joining the Foreign Service in 1988. Mr. Cushing served abroad, variously as Consular, Political, Economic or Public Affairs Officer, in the Dominican Republic, Korea, Benin, Papua New Guinea, and Trinidad & Tobago. In Washington, Mr. Cushing served as Korean Desk Officer. Mr. Cushing was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

CUSHING: I went to Guatemala. Guatemala was good. I was the labor attaché and there was a very chaotic situation there. I worked on labor rights. Every now and then the workers would occupy a farm or ranch and they would be shot up by the army or the police or something. There were abductions of labor activists, there were murders.

Q: Where was this?

CUSHING: Guatemala. After getting up really early to catch the plane I arrived totally exhausted on the first day and the ambassador said, "Oh, we have a delegation here from USTR so I want you to come to this lunch." I was totally exhausted but she said, "You must come to this lunch," so I started working the first day. The ambassador…

Q: Who was the ambassador?

CUSHING: Marilyn McAfee, a nice lady, very sharp. Marilyn McAfee had been in Guatemala many years before with USIA and she was now the ambassador and so she put me to work the very first day, which I thought, after two years of sitting in a Pullman doing nothing, was good.

I was extremely busy there. The assistant secretary of labor came down. I was in charge of labor rights. I was not the human rights officer but I was the refugee officer so I covered refugees returning from the insurgency who were being resettled in various places in Guatemala. There was a massacre of returned Guatemalan refugees by an army patrol. I got very involved in that and I worked with the UN High Commission for Refugees and also with MINUGUA, which is the United Nations Verification Mission to Guatemala. I had a lot of work with them. Every now and then a refugee would be killed in a camp and I would have to go and investigate that. There was a great deal of pressure from human rights groups, church groups, labor groups in the United States that had a knee jerk reaction that because of the 1954 coup, anything that had happened since then in Guatemala was the fault of the United States.

Q: This was the Arbenz coup.

CUSHING: The coup where Jacobo Arbenz was thrown out. That was the United Fruit Company coup, by John Foster and Allen Dulles.

Once I got a human rights group down there and I gave them what I thought was an objective assessment of the situation and one of them later wrote a letter to the assistant secretary of the American Republic Affairs complaining that I was unsympathetic to human rights concerns. I was obviously unqualified to be a Foreign Service officer and I should be fired immediately.

The other big thing down here was the Jennifer Harbury case. Jennifer Harbury claimed she had married Eduardo who was a guerrilla in the insurrection and that he had disappeared so she demanded since she was an American citizen and he was her husband, she demanded that we help find him. We went around and around and around with that.

There was also Dianna Ortiz who claimed to have been abducted and tortured by the Guatemalan military, including being thrown in a pit with decaying bodies and all this other stuff. There was never a dull moment down there.

I was there for three years. It's a beautiful country.

Q: You alluded to a number of things but what was the basic political situation at that time?

CUSHING: There was the democratically elected president, of Ramiro de Leon Carpio. He was under a great deal of pressure from the military. The public prosecutor's office was also kind of under the sway of the military so Myrna Mack, an anthropologist who was working on human rights cases, had been stabbed to death not too long before and labor activists were taken away and beaten and so forth.

There was another case where there was a woman who claimed she had been abducted and assaulted for her union activities but she turned out to be mentally ill. There was a labor rights group in the United States that was pushing her case and I found out that her stories were made up of whole cloth but I did not feel like telling everybody, "Look, she's mentally ill and she has made all this up and her husband is also mentally ill and they are both HIV positive. I have checked her story and it doesn't add up."

Among other things that happened, one night she claimed that her son had been kidnapped. Her son had disappeared so the legal attaché, who was an FBI agent, he with a firearm and I with nothing went out to the toughest neighborhood in Guatemala City and spent the entire night looking around, asking people if they had seen this boy. It was one of the most dangerous neighborhoods in the whole city. He turned up in the morning and claimed that he had been held and tied up and this, that and the other but eventually it turned out he just spent the night at a friend's house and had come back the next morning. So that whole story was a fabrication too.

This woman's claim to be persecuted was very thin but this labor rights group from the U.S. with union officials and so forth came down and they said, "Why are you not pursuing this more vigorously?" I already knew the entire background of it and that it was all made up but I said, "Well, I am not able to comment on that." "You don't care. You just don't care. I'm going to go back and tell everybody in my union the very poor service we are getting from the United States Embassy."

I said, "I'm sorry. That's all I can do."

This woman was eventually granted asylum in the United States but was such a difficult person that two or three different organizations asked her to leave. She was in these group houses for refugees and they would throw her out.

At any rate, Guatemala was a good post; interesting, a lot of work.

Q: You were there from when to when?

CUSHING: I was there from the summer of '94 to the summer of '97.

Q: Were there any significant developments in the political scene or was it sort of the same the whole time you were there?

CUSHING: There was a peace accord signed in '96 so the different guerrilla factions, which all combined probably numbered no more than 1,000 in different parts of the country, eventually did sign a peace treaty. What they did was they turned in their old weapons and kept their good weapons and became highway robbers. Instead of holding up people for contributions to the insurrection, they signed a peace treaty and kept their best weapons and they just became gangs that held up people for their own personal profit. That was the level of development there.

PRUDENCE BUSHNELL
Ambassador
Guatemala (1999-2002)

Ambassador Bushnell was born in Washington, DC into a Foreign Service family. She was raised in Washington and at Foreign Service posts abroad and received degrees from Russell Sage College and the University of Maryland. After working as a clerk at Embassies Teheran and Rabat, she became a Foreign Service Officer in 1981 and subsequently served in several posts before serving as Ambassador to Kenya 1996 – 1999. There she experienced the bombing of the Embassy by al Qaeda. In 1999 she was named Ambassador to Guatemala, where she served until 2002. During her career, the Ambassador served in several senior positions in the Department in Washington. Ambassador Bushnell was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: Well, tell me, how did you find you were treated by Western Hemisphere?

BUSHNELL: Very nicely, very courteously. They helped prepare me very well, though I have to say I was shocked to learn during the last days of consultations that I would have 24-hour security guards, because one of our ambassadors had been assassinated in 1968.

Q: John Gordon Mein.

BUSHNELL: Right.

Q: He was killed in August 28, 1968.

BUSHNELL: You have a good memory. Thirty years later, Guatemala was still a violent country and bodyguards were not unusual among the elites and diplomats. It was so different from my experience in Kenya --I had an advance car, an armed guard in my vehicle and a chase car with more armed guards.

What was not at all different from Nairobi was the chancery. It was, in fact, the exact duplicate in architecture of the one that had been blown up. It was also on a main street with little offset, and not on any list to be moved. You can just imagine the conversation with the heads of FBO and Diplomatic Security, who, by the way, refused to see me individually. I found that rather amusing – less so when they asked "Why are you always going to embassies with no offset?" The three of us negotiated an agreement because, once again, the list of chanceries to be replaced did not include the one I was going to. The Assistant Secretaries promised they would respond as best they could to suggestions to improve the security if I would refrain from sending the kinds of cables I sent from Nairobi.

The first day I went to work, the driver out of habit drove the car into the embassy's underground parking lot, again a duplicate to the one in Nairobi. Every cell in my body went into panic mode, I mean every cell. I told myself, "it's okay, it's okay; this is not Nairobi. You will not make an entrance by screaming down the corridors!" Eventually, of course I got used to it.

The arrangement we came to with Diplomatic Security and FBO was to purchase the apartment building next door and entice Guatemala City's Mayor to close the other streets around us. A costly but effective way of gaining security perimeters.

Q: Well now, when you went to Guatemala you were there from when to when?

BUSHNELL: I was there from 1999 to 2002.

Q: What was the state of relations between Guatemala and the United States?

BUSHNELL: For the most part, pretty good because President Clinton had apologized for the role the U.S. had played in orchestrating the 1954 coup d'etat that began 35 years of internal conflict. This was a country in which the "war against communism" was played out in horrible and vicious ways. The human rights abuses were outrageous. In 1996, Peace Accords were signed that essentially reformulated the social contract between the government and the people and among the people themselves. They articulated exceedingly ambitious changes that would not easily be implemented. As a result, they were only partially and superficially implemented. The Accords provided an absence of war, not yet peace and tranquility.

The U.S. government was very invested in the negotiation and the success of the Peace Accords, to the tune of about three-hundred-million dollars in AID programs. Coming from Africa, I was stunned. Three hundred million dollars for this little country when the best the entire continent of sub-Saharan Africa could manage was eight hundred million!

Most of our programs were focused in the Mayan highlands, where much of the conflict had taken place. We were investing in education, particularly for women and girls, health systems, the rule of law, the environment – a variety of areas. Our efforts were to facilitate implementation of the Peace Accords as fast and smoothly as possible. On the surface, the Guatemalan government was giving lip service to peace, to donors like the U.S. that were providing funding. In reality, social change was moving at a snail's pace, the Presidential Guard was almost literally holding the president as hostage, and corruption was rampant.

Conditions worsened under the tenure of President Portillo, who was voted into office at the end of '99, three months after my arrival. As an example, a "white budget" existed for military expenditures that could be audited, but the actual budget was something else again. The military was up to its neck in corruption, intimidation and cover up. The country was still awash with mistrust and hatred.

Q: OK. Well, we will stop at this point. You've just entered Guatemala City. You talked about this theater of Guatemala politics and implementing the Peace Accords.

Today is the 16th of September, 2005. Pru, just listening to that last thing. At some point we wanted to get into the undercurrents in the political life as you got to learn all sorts of things going on within that society. How does one who is parachuted in to a complex society, a cooking pt like Guatemala learn about what is going on and what to do?

BUSHNELL: First of all, I did my homework before arriving. Having served as ambassador and DAS I knew the kinds of reports and information to look for. I also crammed for my confirmation hearings, which I had about 10 days after leaving Kenya. I held a roundtable discussion of desk officers from the agencies around town invested in our policies on Guatemala in addition to individual consultations. What I discovered was a huge split in the interagency group between those who felt we should work closely with the Guatemalan military and those focused on implementing the Peace Accords and improving on human rights. I frankly agreed with them because the Guatemalan military still had a lot to account for.

I have to say that I really began to question the attitude of the U.S. military, which was very different from the attitude of it held toward sub-Saharan African countries. There I found.....

Q: In Africa?

BUSHNELL: In AF circles of the U.S. government, civilians and military were in complete agreement about what needed to be done to improve military performance and relations and with civilian governments. That was not at all the case of the interagency group focused on Guatemala. The U.S. military people I spoke to really wanted to embrace the Guatemalan military. They assured me, for example, that the Guatemala military was really "quite civilized" because they knew how to use forks and spoke English. I came away thinking that we're in big trouble if that's the basis on which we reach conclusions in Washington. While I was not familiar with the details of the Guatemalan conflict and its military, I was no stranger to the issues of conflict and the legacy that conflict and terror leave.

When we arrived in Guatemala, I intentionally got out of the capital and into the country side as soon as I could. I wanted first-hand knowledge; visiting AID and Peace Corps projects easily provided that. I think the first radio broadcast I did was from outside the capital.

Dick and I had a lot of interaction with Americans and Guatemalan employees of the mission so I picked things up that way. What probably helped most was the presidential campaign that began soon after my arrival. A lot of issues came to the surface.

Washington had given me two charges: To put pressure on the government to improve its human rights record – specifically, to get to the bottom of the murder of Bishop Gerardi, a human rights activist - and to persuade the government to disband the Estado Mayor, the Presidential Guard, which had a lock on the Presidency both literally and figuratively.

Q: Was there a commandant of the presidential guard? I mean, was he the man or was it a sort of a junta?

BUSHNELL: It was a junta more than a specific person.

Q: It wasn't a Noriega or something like that?

BUSHNELL: No, no. It was much more a band of brothers, elites in the military.

Q: Yeah. It sort of sounds a little bit the latter days of the Roman Empire, it was a praetorian guard.

BUSHNELL: Yes. They did everything from baking bread to keeping the President's calendar, providing his security and driving his car. They controlled everything, using sophisticated communications equipment.

Q: Before we get to dealing with these two things, a murder investigation and trying to do something about this elite group of military guys, what were your impressions, because particularly getting out into the field was so important when you got there. I mean, particularly talking to people like the Peace Corps and people who were out there working in the field. What were you getting from looking at the campesinos?

BUSHNELL: It doesn't take long to see the disparity of incomes. There are a few very, very wealthy families, some middle class and a mass of very poor people. Guatemala was second only to Haiti in statistics regarding poverty, maternal death, infant deaths, etc. It was second only to Columbia in gun ownership, violence, and kidnapping. And yet, perhaps this is apocryphal, I was told the country had the highest per capita rate of privately owned helicopters in the world. It did not take long to pick up a virulent strain of racism among some Guatemalan elites, nor the hard, cold mistrust of the Mayan people.

Q: I was wondering, what were you getting from some of our observers in the field, either the Peace Corps or, missionaries? What were they saying, because they were obviously dealing with the indigenous more than others?

BUSHNELL: There's a sizeable expat community, but most of the expats were in commerce, or hippies who had stayed. We had some, but not –

Q: I thought that area was flooded with evangelicals, because they were, you know, taking the Catholics to the cleaners.

BUSHNELL: But they weren't necessarily American evangelicals. Among Peace Corps and AID workers there was great concern about the pace of the peace process and about the continuing terror under which human rights advocates lived. There was also frustration about the lack of accountability for some of the abuses that had taken place during and after the conflict. Plus, an appallingly low rate of government investment in the country. Government services were practically non-existent, in large part because people didn't believe in paying taxes.

I had never seen a system that was set up to fail as effectively as the Guatemalan government. A president's term of office was limited to one four year term. Incumbents would fire everyone from the prior government to bring in a team that often didn't know their way around the building, much less government. They had very few revenues with which to work, a military that was not trusted and endemic corruption. Add to that, a profound mistrust of a huge Mayan population and a great division between the Ladino and Mayan people.

Q: Where was the officer corps coming from, because in lots of Latin America the officer corps is the place for the poor people to work their way up? Was this happening?

BUSHNELL: Regardless of their personal roots, the military was responsive to the elites. It a symbiotic relationship -- elites allowed the military to go keep the government and countryside under wraps and in return, the military ensured that reforms -- labor reform, tax reform, any kind of reform – were kept at bay so the elites could make the money they wanted.

Q: Where was the money coming from to feed the Oligarchs?

BUSHNELL: Guatemala is a resource rich country. There is no reason in the world for this country to be poor. That was part of what made me profoundly frustrated and angry. It has better tourist potential than Costa Rica. It has Mayan ruins; it has Spanish colonial ruins from the time it housed the capital. Guatemala has beaches; it has mountains; it has a wonderful climate and some areas of very fertile land. It is known for exotic fruits and vegetables and extraordinary coffee. It is also blessed with an incredibly hard-working people, both Mayan and Ladino, and a strong work ethic.

Q: You say here you have a very wealthy country.

BUSHNELL: A potentially wealthy country -- with a rate of illiteracy among Mayan women of something like 92 per cent and among Mayan men of something like 85 per cent. Children of the elites go to school surrounded by bodyguards while other children of Mayans tend the fields helping to eek out a living. In colonial society Mayans were required to wear the costume of their village. Each village had different patterns and colors to their hand woven fabric. This would identify them anytime they left.

Q: So it was an identifier, like the star of David or something like that, although prettier

BUSHNELL: A whole lot prettier. To this day you will find that lot of the women still keep their indigenous costumes. But as pretty and colorful as Guatemala appears on the surface, 36 years of internal conflict, along with a lot of guns and grinding poverty gave rise to high rates of crime , including kidnapping..

In the middle, between the Mayan people at one end of the spectrum and the oligarchs at the other, you had a middle class that was exceedingly conservative and fatalistic. A woman architect I once met told that when she and her husband entertained at dinner she never engaged in social conversation because it wasn't appropriate and, as a woman she didn't have anything to contribute. Given that cultural attitude, you can imagine what a lot of people thought of me as woman ambassador outspoken on human rights and reform issues! I raised hackles more than once. People wrote editorials to the *Wall Street Journal* about me a few times

Q: Wall Street Journal *being the conservative newspaper in the United States.*

BUSHNELL: One of the complaints was that I was promoting birth control.

Q: What you observed, because you parachuted into this society, was certainly not unfamiliar to American diplomacy. We've been involved there forever. Let's go from after World War II, when we started getting involved. What were we doing? Was this sort of a passive, let's keep them, long as they don't bother us we won't worry about it?

BUSHNELL: We were there, front and center, in the post World War II years. We had a base there during World War II; Guatemalans were allies. The first democratic elections after the war brought in Jacobo Arbenz-Guzman, who campaigned in part on a platform of land reform. Efforts to buy land from the United Fruit Company, which had enjoyed favored status, to put it mildly, led to concerns that Arbenz had communist proclivities. At the time, John Foster Dulles was Secretary of State while his brother, Allan, was head of CIA. At least one, perhaps both were on the Board of United Fruit.

These men helped orchestrate a coup against Arbenz, in 1954 with the active participation of our ambassador. This sowed the seeds for the horrendous conflict and loss of life that was to follow for decades.

Q: It stands as a black mark on American diplomacy. It's sort of a benchmark. It's been thrown in our face ever since.

BUSHNELL: As it should be. I personally think it is quite outrageous that a couple of guys on the board of a fruit company could decide that what's good for the fruit company is good for the United States government and that justifies the fabrication of reasons for the overthrow of a democratically elected head of state. Again, I come back to the oligarchs. We were hand in hand with the landed elites who wanted to continue to control the economy and the people and worked through military regimes to do so.

Q: It's extremely important to take a look at this issue. Here you are, again, this is the thing about American ambassadors, they arrive and often they arrive with a different view that somebody who's grown up learning to accept the situation.

BUSHNELL: By the time I arrived in Guatemala it was well known that we, the U.S., had created the coup. President Clinton had visited Guatemala about a year before I arrived. He both acknowledged and apologized. That act made it easy for me to publicly acknowledge that sometimes governments do horrible things. Given our investment, I could also add that we are now investing $300 million in the peace process as part of an effort to do right by the Guatemalan people.

On the day I presented credentials I was told to deliver a demarche that the Guatemalan government needed to address some issue of concern to us. I don't remember exactly which – it was either to disband the presidential guard or act on the human rights issues.

Q: Was disbanding the presidential guard part of the peace process?

BUSHNELL: Definitely was. So here I was in a formal ceremony before clicking TV cameras, smiling as I advised the President that I needed to talk to him about a serious issue. Every time I

see the photograph of the smiling new ambassador and attentive president, I am reminded about how much of diplomacy has to do with theatrics.

Q: Arriving on top of an election, everybody getting out, did you feel that you were going to have to sort of save your ammunition, to start all over again or were you able to talk to the candidates?

BUSHNELL: The U.S. ambassador in Guatemala is perceived to have so much power, I intentionally stayed away from the candidates except to make the requisite courtesy calls on both of them. One of them made the appointment to see me and had his photo taken outside the residence, underneath our government seal. Naturally, the press accused me of favoring him. I had been manipulated.

Q: Quickly have to go over and get the other guy?

BUSHNELL: You bet. Actually, I'd been trying to see him. But in the meantime, I tried to get as much movement out of the current government as I could. This was when I learned about the *fuerzas obscuras*, the dark forces, they were called. The foreign minister came to the Residence one evening, sat down in the library and told me all about the dark forces and why this government could not eliminate the presidential guard before they left power.

Q: Were the presidential guard the dark force?

BUSHNELL: He didn't say they were but the implication was that they were certainly a part. Nobody would ever identify the *fuerzas obscuras.* I found this frustrating given my familiarity with "dark forces" in Rwanda, Liberia, Burundi and other parts of Africa – to say nothing of having been blown up by al Qaeda. I didn't buy the fact that in such a small country as Guatemala, where networks are close and well connected, no one would know who these *fuerzas obscuras* were.

Q: Was this a handy way for them to avoid naming names?

BUSHNELL: Probably, but I recognized that they were legitimately concerned, with good reason.

Q: They didn't want to know.

BUSHNELL: I don't know. It was hard for me to understand Guatemalans. I've learned that I can only try to hear what people are saying and explore as much as I can. But to get into somebody else's head, especially in a society as complicated as the Guatemalan society, is too much of a reach. So I pretty much took things at face value.

Q: Were there any sort of crusading reporters who were trying to get into this or not?

BUSHNELL: Crusaders ended up dead. Bishop Gerardi, whose murder was a source of great concern to the U.S., was a crusader. One of my charges from Washington was to promote labor reform and I saw first hand what happened to reformers. A group of agricultural workers planned

a parade to highlight an issue – I forget which. Anyway, on the eve of the parade the organizers were hauled out of their homes, taken to the local radio station and with guns to their heads were told to announce that the parade had been called off. We spent two years trying to get the people who had done this held accountable. Everybody knew who they were; they did it casually. And yet people were terrified to testify against them because they were pretty sure they would end up dead. To convince anyone to testify against these hooligans meant arranging asylum for them and their families in the U.S.

When I first arrived I baulked at the idea of having nine bodyguards around me literally 24-hours a day. The RSO persuaded me to hold off making a decision for a few months and it didn't take me even that long to understand the wisdom of keeping them given my proclivity for activism.

Q: How did you find, when you arrived there, the staff of your embassy as a window to what was happening?

BUSHNELL: My predecessor had a different way of doing business so we had little contact with the political opposition party – which won the elections. My priorities during the first few months focused on getting the Country Team and other staff to set objectives we could achieve. When the Portillo government was voted into office with all of the right rhetoric, we set our goals pretty high. Over the course of the next two and a half years, we found ourselves lowering the bar further and further. By the time we left, we were struggling simply to maintain what little ground we had gained in the implementation of the Peace Accords, respect of human rights and rule of law, a change in the culture of corruption and impunity, and so on.,

Q: During the internal conflict, the Central Intelligence Agency was very much involved, no secret. How did you find it there?

BUSHNELL: It had been decimated. I don't know if you remember the congressional hearing during the eighties – about the same time Iran-Contra was the scandal of the day. The CIA took a licking. In the 90s, budget cuts forced the closing of stations all around the world, including Central America.

Q: You arrived in Guatemala during the waning days of the Clinton administration. How was the United States seen at that time in Guatemala?

BUSHNELL: The elites were certainly waiting with bated breath for the conservatives to come back into power in the United States. They figured that the issues I was promoting as ambassador – human rights, tax reform, labor reform, intellectual property rights and the like – would go away with the return of a Republican White House. One of the first demonstrations in front of the embassy against me was a "spontaneous uprising" of the street peddlers protesting my remarks about intellectual property rights.

Q: Was there a copyright infringement establishment?

BUSHNELL: Oh, yes. Another subject I was told to raise during the last days of the Clinton administration was labor reform. Specifically, the reforms the Guatemalans had signed in 1952

but never ratified. I was instructed to tell the government and Parliament that we would cut Guatemala from the General System of Tariff Preferences if they didn't legislate intellectual property right reforms, which they eventually did. I was also instructed to warn them that Guatemala would be removed them from the Caribbean Basin Initiative if they did not ratify labor reforms. When I delivered these messages the attitude I got was "Yeah, yeah, yeah. Come back after your elections." I advised them that they shouldn't be so cocky, that should the Republicans win, the Republicans may want to tip their hat to labor, no reason why the Bush Administration would want to gratuitously insult the American labor community and what better way than to continue to insist that labor reform and basic labor reform, signed in 1952, be ratified. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened.

But let me talk about Guatemalan elections first. The candidate who won, Alfonso Portillo, was a populist and a horror in the eyes of the elites. His political party was run by Efrain Rios-Montt, a military dictator who had seized power in the 80s and went on to sponsor the most bloody and most repressive years of the internal conflict. He supplemented the military with civilian militias, giving them guns and saying, "Okay, go kill people in the villages over there." He had Mayans kill other Mayans and implemented a deliberate strategy to accomplish three things: engage in conflict in the countryside; keep the mayhem away from the Guatemala City; and punish the people fighting the military -- punish them, their families, their children, their fields, and their villages. People were baffled that Mayans would vote for the very man who created such horrors. But they did.

The elites decided that the sky had fallen, that hell had frozen over, that nothing worse could ever happen and that the American ambassador would, of course, have nothing to do with him. I didn't have that option, nor would I have chosen it initially because, as I said, Portillo was mouthing all of the right things about human rights, tax structures, reforming the presidential guard, implementing the Peace Accords – everything the U.S. government wanted to hear. I was lambasted in the press for dealing with the new government.

Portillo didn't speak a word of English, which was good for my Spanish, and was clueless about putting a government together. He had been a university professor in Mexico and made no bones about the fact that he left Mexico before he was brought to justice for killing. What a guy. Actually, he was more of a little popinjay with a big ego.

He lived near the Residence and would frequently come for breakfast. Over the period of two and a half years, my end of the conversations deteriorated. At the beginning of his administration I would start with something like "So, Mr. President, wonderful that you're saying all these good things. Certainly hope that you will implement them." This morphed into "Mr. President, it's now been six months, eight months, nine months, twelve months, two years since you have been talking about reforms but you still haven't implemented them. Things are getting serious."

I initially thought part of the reason he couldn't get anything done was an ignorance of basic management. I invited Portillo and his vice president for breakfast one day and asked each of them to answer the two things in writing. 1) Three things I want to be sure to implement during my term of office. And 2) I would like to be known in history as…." Once they wrote their

answers down I asked them to exchange papers. At one point I thought to myself, "I can't believe that I'm doing this.'

Q: Sounds like one of your management sessions.

BUSHNELL: It was, but it sure didn't accomplish anything of particular good. As time went on, conditions in the country degenerated further. One of my last private conversations with Portillo ended with the following. "Mr. President, we know for a fact that your personal secretary is accepting money from drug dealers." Portillo responded: "So that must mean you think that the money ends up with me." I shrugged and replied "Mr. President, what can I say?"

Q: He would accept this and still come for breakfast?

BUSHNELL: Yes, he would. I think that women can say things that would get other men in big trouble. Women colleagues have noted that, as well. Trust at some level is easier to establish, men do not feel as threatened by women, and a particular tone of voice can allow us to say the kinds of things, like "Mr. President, stealing isn't going to do you any good. You don't want to end up in history as one of the greatest thieves in the country, do you?" "No?" "Well, then, you just have to stop."

Q: My definition would be nagging.

BUSHNELL: That's what men always say when women give negative feedback. Think of it this way: the U.S. ambassador is advising a head of state to stop stealing while continuing her ability to influence. When *National Geographic* did a video called, "Inside an Embassy." Portillo was asked to say a few words on camera. Know what he said? "Relations between our two countries have never been as good and this ambassador, she's really good. You know, she pulls my ear now and then and tells me to shape up."

Q: Let's talk about the Jesse Helms connection. Senator from North Carolina, very right wing but very interested, either himself or some people on his staff, in Central America. How did that play in your business?

BUSHNELL: I found that there was an equal degree of skepticism on both the Democrat and Republican front as to whether Portillo was going to fulfill his promises. The few people in the Congress interested in Central America agreed on the need for good leadership and it didn't look as though Portillo would deliver. I've never played partisan politics overseas and I found Helms staffers personally supportive of my efforts. I know that some Guatemalan business elites wrote to Helms requesting my recall because of the pressure I was putting on issues of labor rights, intellectual property rights and other reforms, but I never got a bit of flak from Senator Helms or any of his staff.

Q: Did you get any congressional delegations while you were there?

BUSHNELL: We got a couple. They were always bipartisan and supportive of what I was doing. There's never any disconnect about our policy toward Guatemala, except within the interagency

over the degree to which we should embrace the Guatemalan military. We had a sizable military component in the embassy left over from the conflict days – I think we had over 20 people.

Q: That's a good number.

BUSHNELL: It is considering that our policy was to exert pressure on the Guatemalan military to be respectful of civilian rule and to hold accountable people who had abused human rights or were continuing to do so. I was unwilling to support efforts to cozy up but never any issues with the Southern Command generals at the four star level.

Q: Who was located by this point in

BUSHNELL: Miami. My issues were with the rank and file at post. While they never confronted me directly about it, some of the military reps in the embassy were furious because I put one of the exercises on hold. The entire military contingent boycotted my farewell events. They were also outraged that I did not personally greet the Southern Command four star at the airport when he visited. The decision was an intentional one -- I wanted to be clear that, although I did not have the money, staff or toys he did, it was the ambassador who represented the President of the United States. I was gracious but I felt no need to be at the steps of the airplane. Some people disagreed with me.

Q: Did you raise this issue at all with the four star, when he came?

BUSHNELL: You mean the number of people we had at post?

Q: Well no, just, well, two things, then. One, the size of the military contingent compared to what we were doing. And the other one, the reason you didn't greet him at the airport

BUSHNELL: No, I saw no need to do that. And I never felt any tension from the senior commanders on that issue. The tension was coming from the colonels and the lieutenant colonels. I always got along famously with the senior people, both on protocol and policy.

Q: Well, was there any effort to sort of reduce the size of the staff, because, if you're trying to, well, as I said, you have to keep them busy and what do they do?

BUSHNELL: I raised the issue and finally got a policy review in Washington after I had left. I'm frankly not sure what they did. When I leave a posting, I close the door.

Q: Some of these exercises were going into, particularly into Central America, were National Guard engineer units going in and building a road or doing something like that and it's good training for the National Guard. This is before we got so involved in Iraq and other places. Was this a pattern? Was that going on or not?

BUSHNELL: I had absolutely no problem with these kinds of exercises. Civil affairs kinds of exercises were fine. During one of them they sent a helicopter into the jungle to lift out, intact, an ancient Mayan stele, a carved stone. No stele had ever been retrieved intact. It ended up at the

museum in Guatemala City, and gave the U.S. – military as well as the embassy – wonderful publicity. So there were creative things that we were doing. But the issue of how strongly we should embrace the military was a source of tension.

Q: Well did you feel that the, was the tension because, the colonels wanted to have something, they're sent there to work with the military. What were they supposed to be doing?

BUSHNELL: I never told them they couldn't do their work, I simply wanted them to support the policies we had agreed upon in both letter and spirit. Understand that the Guatemalan military was involved in drug trafficking, alien smuggling, illicit trade, harassment and killing of human rights and reform leaders – to say nothing of the hold they exerted on the head of state. They wanted nothing more than tacit or explicit support from the U.S. That was not something I would be a party to.

When Pete Pace took over Southern Command and came for a courtesy call, I invited the Chief of Staff of the Guatemalan military for a private conversation at the Residence. He went on and on about how the two of them were "brothers who understand one another because we know what it is to shed blood. We have seen blood. Civilians never do." I had to interrupt because this particular civilian had seen blood. I wasn't going to sit there in my own residence and watch silently the attempted seduction of an American general under the guise of the special link culture warriors share.

On another occasion I intervened when our Defense Attaché was going to attend the promotion ceremony of a colonel we knew was a drug runner. I had to order him not to attend that particular ceremony.

Q: I suppose that you were running into a different culture that had been around since the time of William Walker, I guess of Nicaragua or something, back in the 1850's or so. I mean a very close relationship. Also my understanding is that, a lot of these Central American posts, were good places to send colonels before retirement. It was a cushy job and you were breaking rice bowls if you tried to do something about that.

BUSNELL: I went to Guatemala with the intention to help promote the changes Guatemalans had spelled out in the Peace Accords. And in that respect I was "good for Guatemala" because I know how to promote change and turn ideas into reality. But what I learned was that the Peace Accords were only words on paper. People who benefited from the system that had created the domestic conflict meant to stay in charge. Some of the elites and some of the military were using one another.

In terms of the change the U.S. government was seeking I was the right person at the right time. I took my job very seriously, I pushed on a lot of issues and achieved significant successes while maintaining a good relationship with the government, so that we got the votes we wanted in international issues a like the Human Rights Commission votes against Cuba. But, in terms of my position vis-à-vis people who wanted to maintain their lock on power, I was the wrong person. In their view, very much the wrong person. As a result it was a very tough post for me.

Q: Did you feel the tension that you're talking about between you and the military, the American military, did that play over into the Central American hands in your political-economic section?

BUSHNELL: No, I deliberately had a DCM and political counselors with significant Central American experience.

Q*: But did they see things the way you did?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, absolutely. As I think I said before, I had a series of goal-setting session with the Country Team to agree on our interagency focus. Our military reps never said a word in these discussions. Their beef was with me and their push-back was very subtle. I don't want to make too much of it because we accomplished things as a team that I'm very proud of.

We had an investment of $300 million in the peace process from the AID side, and if you look, if you combined all of the investments of all of the agencies at post it would have been considerably more. One of the objectives we set as a Country Team was to address corruption. When I convened people from AID, DEA, INS, as it was called then, and other law enforcement agencies to chart the links between corrupt people in the Guatemalan government, we were able to identify particular individuals. We went back to Washington and received authorization to revoke their visas. This took some time because we had to follow the letter of American law, but what we accomplished was the revocation of visas of some of the members of the *fuerzas obscuras*, the "dark forces" that the president and others had talked about. After September 11, 2001 drug running and alien smuggling became an important national security issue for us and we did something about it.

Q: But we're also talking about people on your team, had money to hand out. Could we do anything on that, to make sure the money didn't go to the wrong people?

BUSHNELL: AID, which had the bulk of it, had very strong controls. We withheld other monies. As an example, we had representatives of ICITAP, which is the part of the Justice Department that runs police programs. They wanted to set up a forensic lab for the Guatemalan police. Unfortunately, the Guatemalans prosecutors and the police were in a bitter feud over the issue of evidence control. As a result, lots of evidence was lost. The justice system was horrible to begin with and it was not helped by the turf wars between the prosecutor and the police. So I said that until prosecutors and police could come to agreement, no one would get the money. Alien smuggling was another big issue that got a lot of our attention, although it did not directly connect to any particular funding program.

Q: Who were the aliens they were smuggling?

BUSHNELL: Everybody.

Q: It wasn't limited to Guatemalans?

BUSHNELL: Oh, no. We dealt with boatloads of Chinese and mixed groups including Iranians, Egyptians, and even an Australian -- people from all over the world.

Q: How can you alien smuggle to the United States out of Guatemala?

BUSHNELL: Because once they got into Mexico it was a free ride. The U.S. government had made the shores of Mexico a no-go zone. So the smugglers chose the shores of Guatemala

Q: And there was nothing we could do about that?

BUSHNELL: We could yak and yak and yak into the ears of Guatemalan officials. But one of the military, one of the admirals, was complicit. We also turned the screws of airport controls. I focused my efforts on those aspects of corruption that would have greatest impact on the national security of the United States. We knew there was no al Qaeda or militant Islamist cell in Guatemala, but we also knew there were porous borders that enabled people to pass through Guatemala into the United States.

I also tried, as I did in Kenya, to organize a group of the key donor countries. We called ourselves the *Grupo de Dialogo* and were quite successful in getting attention in the press to issues of corruption and other Peace Accord issues. Unfortunately, the multilateral banks, like the World Bank and Inter American Fund consider it their job to give out money, so we only had a minimal impact in using funding as a lever of influence.

As we speak, the man who was Vice President of Guatemala at the time I was there is now in jail. Former President Portillo slipped over the border back to Mexico with the posse behind him…literally. So much for the gang I dealt with.

Q: A new gang has taken over.

BUSHNELL: Well, actually, the people who have taken over are, for the most part, pretty law abiding and decent.

Q: You said there were a couple of things you were proud of. One was corruption.. What were others?

BUSHNELL: We got legislation for intellectual property rights. We got labor reforms on the books. We successfully pressed for the trial of the man who killed Bishop Gerardi. We even got members of the government, private sector and media to talk with one another about mutual issues of concern. I purchased many Spanish translated copies of the book Getting to Yes. I don't know if you have heard of it?

Q: What was it called?

BUSHNELL: Getting to Yes. It is a Harvard negotiating technique about how to get satisfaction on each side of a negotiation. I handed out copies to everyone I came in contact with to see if people from various sectors could build some bridges. I would invite people to the Residence for discussions and used my background as a facilitator to promote a dialogue. I also hosted a lot of

musical events at the Residence to bring people who would normally never speak to one another together to enjoy an evening in one another's company.

Q: What type of music, by the way?

BUSHNELL: Actually, all kinds. We had American off-Broadway groups, opera and there were a number of local jazz musicians. Guatemalans discovered the musical talents of people within their midst, which was great. Our Public Affairs people had an American producer to work with young Guatemalans to do West Side Story. *W*e were told Guatemalans don't sing and dance, but of course they do.

Q: Romeo and Juliet, there it is.

BUSHNELL: This again was an effort to promote bridges. It was such a success that we did another, Once Upon an Island, with a similar theme. One of the lead players ended up going to the United States on a scholarship.

Another Country Team project about which I was very proud was bringing to public attention the deaths of children in certain areas of Guatemala from malnutrition. This was a great example of globalization. The price of coffee in the world market had plummeted, in large part because of a glut of Vietnamese coffee, which USAID had helped them develop. Although Guatemalan coffee was far superior to most other, it had not yet become a niche market and so was highly susceptible to global economic forces. When prices fell, coffee growers stopped harvesting. The coffee pickers, who lived a marginal existence in the best of times, received no wages with which to buy staples and children began to die. We brought this to Washington's attention and began working with various sectors of Guatemala. It was a struggle – AID/Washington did not consider death by malnutrition an emergency and the Guatemalan government couldn't have cared. I got on my high horse with both governments, while our public affairs and AID people created a campaign to bring information to the media and public. I think we saved some lives.

Q: You mentioned the problem being that Guatemala produced gourmet type coffee. Now by the time we're talking coffee has become a big business and gourmet, Starbucks and other outfits in the United States, chains were pushing fancy coffee. Was that having any impact in Guatemala?

BUSNELL: As the niche market developed in the U.S., Guatemala benefited.

Q: One of the things we haven't touched on, I'm looking at my map of Central America and Guatemala has got interesting neighbors. It's got Mexico, which is about half of it. It's got Belize off to one side, Honduras and El Salvador. Maybe take each one separately. What about relations with Mexico? Where's Chiapas? Is that in that area?

BUSHNELL: Yes, Chiapas borders on Guatemala.

Q: And there'd been a simmering revolt, I guess there still is, in Mexico from Chiapas over basically peasants, natives, Indians or whatever. Did that spill over? Was that a tonal factor?

BUSHNELL: Relations with Mexico had the kinds of tensions neighbors often experience, especially if one is bigger and more advanced. On the whole, they were very good, however. Mexico had a terrific ambassador.

Q: It was a colossus to the north.

BUSHNELL: Exactly. It was a friendly tension - unlike the relationship with Belize. At one time in history, Belize had belonged to Guatemala and a border dispute simmered for years. It had been settled by the time I left. El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua also had land and maritime border issues but although there were periodic spikes in tension, relations remained on an even keel.

Q: What about the other countries' embassies there and all? Some of the initiatives you're talking about, anti-corruption feeling, malnourished children and other efforts, did you end up as the leader or were they involved?

BUSHNELL: The Nordics were very involved in the Peace Accords. The Swedish and Norwegian ambassadors were very active. So was the Spanish ambassador. The U.S. ambassador was irresistible to the media however. This had less to do with the incumbent than the fact of representing the United States. For an activist like myself, that had a real downside.

Q: Well it's interesting when one looks at diplomatic corps and all. If the American ambassador in most countries wants to be active he can move ahead. But you sense that, European countries and Latin American countries have a tendency to be observers. Did you find this?

BUSHNELL: A lot depends on the personalities of the ambassadors. I have worked with a Japanese ambassador who was very forward leaning and have known a couple of Japanese ambassadors who tended toward great reticence. As to Europeans, most have to work through the European Union, which is very cumbersome. My experience is that the way any ambassador implements instructions from government is highly individualized.

Q: Did the Guatemalan community, which is so apparent right here in the Washington area play any role, or do these sort of immigrants keep their heads down or not?

BUSHNELL: They played a role during elections through absentee ballots and, of course, the remittances they sent home had a huge economic impact.

Q: What was the impact of September 11th, 2001?

BUSHNELL: Guatemalans perceived the U.S. to be invulnerable and, like so many others around the world, were shocked. The embassy was flooded with flowers. One young man bearing a bouquet asked the Protocol Assistant to let me know that he had recently participated in a demonstration against me. That was professional, he said; these flowers are personal. I thought it was very cute.

Q: Is there anything else we should cover about this particular time?

BUSHNELL: I left Guatemala with mixed feelings. I thought that the mission team could point to significant achievements but I was personally exhausted from the efforts. I had never been so vilified on the one hand and yet satisfied about what we accomplished. Even one-time critics in the media admitted I had made a positive difference. As to Guatemala as a whole, I felt that the level of mistrust and violence would shackle it for years. Yet, I was also struck by the sense of optimism among so many Mayan people who had and continue to suffer the most. Most of all, I left with a sense of having survived one tough assignment.

Q: I've been talking to many people who've been ambassadors. There are sort of can-do ambassadors -- Tom Pickering, Deane Hinton -- and, there are others who sort of move around. I would have thought this assignment would have raised your profile. You have any feel that anybody was keeping book on you?

BUSHNELL: The promotion panel was – I was promoted to Career Minister. On the other I hand, no "home" bureau anymore and no encouragement from the central system, i.e. the DG's office to seek a further assignment.

Q: Not in the old boys' network or the equivalent, gals' network.

BUSHNELL: At the most senior levels the gals' network doesn't exist and the old boys' network is at its most competitive. Plus, State Department culture in Washington is a very political culture. The kind of leadership that makes an activist ambassador effective is neither welcomed nor rewarded. In Washington, senior career people are expected to be implementers and managers of policy, not leaders of people or policy. We still have an old-fashioned system in which the most important work is done by the most senior level people. Everyone else is expected to feed the next level up. It's a huge expenditure of time for possibly minimal results. But there you are.

Q: You left Guatemala when?

BUSHNELL: In 2002.

End of reader