

## **COTE D'IVOIRE / IVORY COAST**

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**PARK D. MASSEY**  
**Consul**  
**Abidjan (1957-1958)**

*Park D. Massey was born in New York in 1920. He graduated from Haverford College with a B.A. and Harvard University with an M.P.A. He also served in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946 overseas. After entering the Foreign Service in 1947, Mr. Massey was posted in Mexico City, Genoa, Abidjan, and Germany. While in USAID, he was posted in Nicaragua, Panama, Bolivia, Chile, Haiti, and Uruguay.*

*Q: Well, it's interesting that you should have gotten to know Mike Harris whose name comes up frequently in this project. He died a few years ago. Then you served for three years in a non-labor capacity and then?*

MASSEY: From then I was transferred after a brief period in Washington for training to Abidjan, Ivory Coast, as the American Consul where I opened the first American Consulate in the Ivory Coast and was responsible for the Ivory Coast and what was then Upper Volta, now Burkina Faso. Theoretically because that was still a French colony I was accredited to France and my boss was the American Ambassador in Paris. To the best of my knowledge, he was totally unaware of my existence and I did nothing whatsoever to change that situation.

*Q: You reported directly to Washington without going through Paris?*

MASSEY: I reported directly to Washington with a copy to Dakar and a copy to Paris but without having to go through them and without them having any control over the content of my reporting. In other words, I was a small, independent mission. Three people.

*Q: This would have been in the early 1960s?*

MASSEY: No, this was the late 1950s, 1957 to 1958 approximately.

**DONALD R. NORLAND**  
**Consul**  
**Abidjan (1958-1960)**

*Ambassador Donald R. Norland was born in Laurens, Iowa in 1924. He joined the Foreign Service in 1952. His career included positions in Morocco, the Ivory Coast, France (NATO), the Netherlands, and Guinea, and ambassadorships to Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, and Chad. Ambassador Norland was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.*

*Q: Then you got a very interesting assignment. You went to Abidjan, where you served from '58 to '61.*

NORLAND: Actually, I left in December of '60.

*Q: How did this assignment come about?*

NORLAND: [laughter] I tell you, it was an example of the Department personnel system. I was working on the Moroccan Desk and was walking down the hall one day, when I met Charlie Lemmo, an admin officer in AFEX (Executive Bureau). Charlie said that our consul in Abidjan was being PNGed, and they were looking around for someone to send out. Would I be

interested? And I said of course I'd be interested. I was tired of Washington; I'd been here almost three years.

And so, on quite short notice, I was made consul in Ivory Coast, Abidjan. In historical perspective it may be useful to note that I was only the second consul. My predecessor had only been there for a year and a half (he came in April '57 I believe), and until then we'd had no representation. We were still living under the most elementary conditions--a two-bedroom house for my family. I had two sons then, and a daughter was born there in March of 1959. According to local historians, she was the second white child born in Abidjan. The French would send their wives to France or upcountry to missionary hospitals; they wouldn't think of having children born in Abidjan. We were having good luck with a local French doctor, and didn't see any reason not to stay, although there were no anesthetics or what you'd call modern hospital equipment. It was pioneering in many respects.

*Q: In the first place, how did the consul get PNGed (persona non grata)? And then what was the situation there when you arrived?*

NORLAND: He got PNGed because he had not shown sufficient respect for the French. He got picked up, apparently, and influenced...this is now hearsay, because I've never been able to get the full facts, but people in Ivory Coast told me that he allowed the Xerox copying machine in the consulate general to be used for anti-French leaflets. Another one told me, on good authority, that he carried a pistol. In several other ways he had reportedly insulted the French, so blatantly that the man who was in charge of that country then, and is still president today, Houphouet-Boigny, supported the French. Houphouet was friendly with the French, and did not do anything to stop my predecessor from being ousted. He couldn't probably have done much.

*Q: Had you picked up anything while you were on the Desk, or before you went out, about the man's attitude? Did you think this was probably a problem?*

NORLAND: Yes, there was definitely something there. The Department didn't fight it. That's usually the first sign that there's something going on. And my predecessor didn't fight it. And his wife reportedly did not like Abidjan. They were bridge players. And there was one person who was continuity and a source of some of those reports. The CIA officer was Bill Dunbar. You may have heard of him; he was later a historian of the CIA on Africa. Bill came to Dakar to meet us and to escort us back to Abidjan; he told us that my predecessor had done a lot of funny things. Bill was not one to make stories up.

*Q: So we're really talking about a personality problem and not any real state to state...Well, when you went out there, you were basically our representative to the Ivory Coast. This was before independence.*

NORLAND: This was two years before independence.

*Q: Was anybody saying, "Okay, Don, this is what we want out of the Ivory Coast, and these are our interests there," or anything like that?*

NORLAND: There was so little knowledge about the country that I don't think we could have fashioned a letter of instruction. What we did have (and this is something which I'm prepared to document, because it really is a ridiculous episode) we had a consul general in Dakar, and the consul general thought that it could never happen that the rest of those countries in French West Africa would become independent.

Q: *Who was the consul general?*

NORLAND: Don Dumont. And Don Dumont was so sure that the situation that existed then was going to prevail that he could not believe that there was even a need for another person to be assigned to Abidjan.

Q: *Was he what you might call a French hand?*

NORLAND: Yes, he was. And his wife was French.

Q: *Oh, yes. This so often was the case for a long time. Dakar was sort of our French outpost down there, and we sent the equivalent to the American colonial officers out there.*

NORLAND: That's right. And he actually was so convinced of this...And it was easy to do if you've been to Dakar. You know there are those big, beautiful buildings. The French had made of Dakar a real bureaucratic headquarters, a center from which they governed all the rest of West Africa. And they did it by having residents general in the other eight countries, but all reporting was sent through Dakar, where they had a person of the stature of a minister. Louis Joxe, for example, was one of the great governors general in Dakar. Don Dumont got in that circuit and was convinced that we should not only agree with the French to do things their way, but we should actively oppose independence in these countries. And when I got to Abidjan, it didn't take me long to realize that Houphouet-Boigny was not only a person of considerable stature in his own right, he had been, remember, the number-three man in a post-war French government.

Q: *Oh, yes.*

NORLAND: A minister of state (ministre d'etat) and minister of health; he was an African doctor. A person of considerable stature within the RDA (Rassemblement Démocratique Africain), which was his political party in all of French West Africa. But his Ivory Coast section of it, which was called the PDCI (Parti Démocratique de la Cote d'Ivoire), was his instrument, and, in addition to all of his independent political power, he was engaged in a serious personal conflict with Leopold Senghor, who was the man to become president of Senegal. He didn't like Senghor, and the feeling was reciprocated.

Q: *Too intellectual.*

NORLAND: Senghor was intellectual. He had a French wife. He was writing poetry for French audiences. He was an agrégé in the French educational system. And he became a member of the Académie de France, which is to say, a veritable Frenchman.

When I got to Abidjan I could see there were going to be problems.

*Q: In the first place, sort of a wiring diagram, to whom did you report?*

NORLAND: That was a problem. I reported to Dakar, but I began to send copies of my messages directly to Paris; we were still a colony under France. The first of our visitors, in January '59, was Cecil Lyon, the U.S. minister to France. Very shortly thereafter we had Ambassador Amory Houghton. So we understood that we were reporting through France.

*Q: So you were very definitely part of the French...*

NORLAND: That's right. Here, I'm quoting from a letter that Dumont wrote me in 1959.

*Q: By the way, if you would like, we can include that at the end. But, anyway, please quote.*

NORLAND: "Let me suggest, in the future, you send a personal note direct whenever you find yourself in the kind of a fix that seems serious to you and calls for prompt action. One other comment I would like to make concerns your distribution of copies of communications to sundry individuals and organizations in the Department. I think you ought to think twice before sending copies of your communications to the four winds.

"That is to say, if the substance is a matter requiring action on the part of the consulate general, you should leave it to the discretion of this office to see that the Department or the embassy in Paris is informed."

Dumont was upset at this. I couldn't prevent it if I had tried. I could not have prevented this surge of independent thinking and emerging independence.

At the time Houphouet was actually resisting independence. He said, "We're not ready for it yet. In order to run a railroad, you need engineers," was one of his similes, "and we do not yet have those engineers." So he was not an extremist; but he wanted recognition as the leader of the Ivory Coast, and he was starting to do things that were quite different from what they wanted done in Dakar.

Furthermore, he had resources. His country was in the tropical forest belt. They had hardwoods, coffee, cocoa, pineapple. They had a base that made their GDP dwarf that of Senegal, which only had peanuts, really, and a few other things.

So it was a matter of psychology in our not being able to adapt to this new reality. And, furthermore, if Abidjan should get ideas about independence, then what about all those other countries? And then what would happen to Dakar? Don Dumont could not bring himself to consider that Dakar, like Vienna, was going to become this massive head with almost no body or shoulders. He could not conceive of that, and vented his feelings. And this letter...I had it out for other reasons, which I'll tell you about, but it took a tremendous adjustment on his part.

Maybe I ought to finish this one story. He got so mad at me that he refused to write an efficiency report on me.

Q: *My God.*

NORLAND: It's hard to imagine. But in those days, it was not so unusual. At least two inspectors were sent out. Bob Ware was one of them. They came to Abidjan, went to Dakar, went to other posts, to try to figure out what it was that Don Dumont was so upset about.

I'm happy to tell you that, in each case, the inspectors came down on my side and said, "All you're doing is reflecting what you are confronted with here. You're reporting reality. Houphouet is running things here. He's not subordinate to Dakar, and you shouldn't be, either." Although I was careful always to send Dakar copies, that wasn't enough.

The upshot of this, and this becomes a key factor in my career, is that in the summer of 1960, Africa got involved in the 1960 presidential campaign. John Kennedy had made quite a hit by stressing our failure to support Algerian independence and he decided to pay attention to Africa in general. So he sent Averell Harriman around the circuit. That's another story. And the Department, in response, sent Loy Henderson around in a private plane, with eight different section heads from the Department, including the head of FBO, the head of MED, AF personnel, etc.

Q: *Well, this is a very famous trip.*

NORLAND: A famous trip, indeed.

Q: *A trip to go around to look to opening up Africa.*

NORLAND: Exactly, and to try to counter the Democratic Party calls for more attention to Africa.

Anyway, when Loy Henderson arrived in Abidjan, we got along well. John Stutesman was his assistant. Vaughan Ferguson was with him, and I'd known Fergie earlier when he was in Tangier. Henderson told me and others he was very satisfied with his visit to Abidjan. And he took me to Ouagadougou, to look over the situation there and to make decisions about whether we should have an embassy there and elsewhere. On the plane I was sitting across from him and he said, "Well done, thank you very much. Tell me, what's your status?"

I said that I was an FSO-6.

Q: *FSO Six.*

NORLAND: And that I hadn't had an efficiency report in 18 months. You should have seen him react. "Why not? Whose responsibility was this? Why has this not been a matter of record? What is going on here?" I told him of its Dakar-Abidjan dispute. He sat down and dictated a two-

paragraph telegram, which is somewhere in the Department. About three months later, I was promoted. So Don Dumont helped me get promoted.

We came to Upper Volta, as it was then known, and I can remember him saying at the time, as he did again after we visited Niamey, and again in Cotonou and Togo, "Should we have an Embassy here?" After every visit, he would ask his staff and me (since I was accredited to those other three countries) whether we should have an embassy resident? And we would have these discussions; it was nip and tuck. I really was not strongly in favor of having an embassy in each one of these countries. I felt we could do it by traveling and reporting out of these places. As a matter of fact, Brandon Grove, who came to Abidjan as vice consul in 1959, went to Upper Volta, and he did a great report. And it convinced me that we could cover this country if desired. Why did we want to get people involved. I can remember Henderson saying, after he heard all these arguments, "We'll have a resident ambassador in each country." And that was the beginning of a process we're now reviewing.

*Q: Well, it's a political decision, not an administrative one, really.*

NORLAND: That's right.

*Q: And, in a way, fair enough.*

NORLAND: Anyway, you can begin to see the feeling about this little post, Abidjan, where we had little experience or interest. In Dakar, we'd had a representative for decades, important people had been assigned there.

*Q: Well, also, it was extremely important during World War II. In the first place, where would it go? And then de Gaulle tried to capture it and didn't succeed and all that. Later, it became an extremely important transshipment point, all across Africa, for the war in North Africa.*

NORLAND: Absolutely. So it became a real battle.

*Q: We haven't talked about how you reported on these other countries, and then your relations with Houphouet-Boigny. We really haven't gotten into any of the politics of the thing.*

NORLAND: To illustrate the situation, I might note that as soon as I got to Abidjan, the decision was made to include Upper Volta within our jurisdiction. Even Dakar recognized that they couldn't travel there as easily as we could. We even had a railroad from Abidjan to Ouagadougou; it's still there.

Then Houphouet, showing his independence and his ability to organize, and wanting to move gradually and intelligently to independence, created an organization called the Conseil de l'Entente, which translates into the Council of Understanding, consisting of Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger, and Dahomey (Benin). And they signed a protocol that provided essentially that Ivory Coast would help its poorer neighbors. I made three or four trips on business to each of these countries, and so I was accredited to all four.

In May of 1960, Houphouet told me one day, "I can't resist any longer. We're going for independence." Consider this in the context of West Africa at the time. Senghor had decided he was going to go for independence; Mali was out of control under Modibo Keita. Houphouet couldn't resist any longer.

When I communicated this to the Department, they had nothing better to do than to say, "You will be accredited to all four."

When an independence date was set, the French decided to send two ministers and an airplane down to Abidjan to pick up Houphouet and take him to the other three countries to celebrate independence. I asked for and was given authority to go on the same plane. The British also sent a representative. We were the only two non-French foreigners.

On the last day of July 1960, we took the plane to Cotonou, which is the [de facto] capital of Benin, then known as Dahomey, and we went through independence ceremonies for Dahomey on August 1, 1960. A day later, we took the plane to Niamey; on the 3rd of August 1960. I presented letters recognizing the independence of Niger. We flew on to Upper Volta and presented letters recognizing the independence of Upper Volta on August 5. Back to Abidjan, on the 7th of August 1960, I presented the letters recognizing the independence of Ivory Coast. The text of those letters is in the Digest of International Law.

So I had the unusual experience of traveling around in a French plane, with French ministers, Houphouet, representatives of different organizations, to confirm this advance of countries to independence.

*Q: I would have thought that the consul general in Dakar would have grabbed this.*

NORLAND: He was so upset that I don't think he could have enjoyed it. Maybe that's one of the reasons they didn't send someone from the States. A year later, Robert Kennedy attended the first anniversary of Ivory Coast's independence.

*Q: It's all very interesting. It was great for you, but it was sort of a begrudging or a non-event.*

NORLAND: In that sense, it reflected the true dimensions of our interests. Because what did we have? We actually had some interest in Ivory Coast. American missionaries made it possible to travel around. Houphouet told me once, that it was the American missionaries of the CMA (Christian and Missionary Alliance) who enabled him to read in his own language, which was Baule. They were the first to put the Baule language in Western script. That made a big impression on him. Of course, as you know, he converted to Catholicism and is a major figure in the church. He built the largest basilica in the world.

*Q: Today is January 13, 1993. This is a continuing interview with Ambassador Don Norland. Don, we left off more or less where you, as a relatively junior officer, had just made this very interesting trip recognizing these various governments. We might backtrack just a bit, but on this, you were mentioning how little regard anyone was paying to these at this time. This was what, in 1959?*

NORLAND: In 1960 independence came to these four countries.

Q: *And so this was still under the Eisenhower administration.*

NORLAND: That's correct.

Q: *Because really the new wind came in with the Kennedy administration. What was your impression about that time, and anything you were getting from other people, but basically your judgment about the viability of countries such as...*

NORLAND: Well, we're talking about all of West and Equatorial Africa. Those were the countries of interest to me at the time, and they were all ex-French colonies.

I might just take a second to recall that the subject of West Africa became an issue in the 1960 elections. It was triggered in part by a long history that Jack Kennedy had of making some public declaration on Third World issues. In 1957, for example, he made a speech on the Senate floor suggesting that the United States was on the wrong track in the Algerian-French war. It was diplomatic but clear.

Incidentally, Bill Porter was then director of the Office of North African Affairs. It turns out that Bill had been briefing Jack Kennedy. Both were from Massachusetts. I'm sorry that Bill died and was not able to give us an insight on those contacts.

To make a long story short, Kennedy saw that there was some advantage to publicly question these colonial arrangements. (Remember, this was 1957. You'd think we would have learned something twelve years after World War II.) And this had its effect in 1960 when he sent Averell Harriman around to West Africa to try to accelerate American interests in that part of the world. And Harriman came to Liberia, where I went from Abidjan to meet him. He spent three days, I believe, in Abidjan, and then went on to Brazzaville. And my memento of this is this book which he gave me at the time, which is a reminder to me of the date.

Q: *It's called Peace with Russia, and it says, "For Don Norland, with admiration for the fine job you are doing. My warm regards to you and Mrs. Norland. Averell Harriman, Abidjan, August 1960." That book was published when?*

NORLAND: In 1959.

Q: *Harriman was certainly a man who was focused pretty much on the European relationship-- ambassador to Russia, ambassador to Great Britain, troubleshooter and all. Did you go around with him at all?*

NORLAND: Yes, I served as his interpreter.

Q: *Could you give me a feel for how he reacted, because this was way out of his field, wasn't it?*

NORLAND: I think that's the reason he was chosen. He could not be accused of being a soft-headed liberal subject to emotional concerns who might take an other-than-serious and objective policy assessment.

He went around, and, in talking with Houphouet-Boigny surprisingly found a comparable statesman. Houphouet acted the statesman role. He had an active private correspondence with Charles de Gaulle, and occasionally would read me excerpts from Charles de Gaulle's letters. There was never any suggestion in Houphouet's behavior that he was a supplicant or considered himself at a lower level than de Gaulle. It wasn't "I'm writing to the great man;" it was "I have found someone with whom I can correspond on equal terms." One of the most interesting correspondence that I hope we will be able to read one day will be the private correspondence of de Gaulle and Houphouet.

So when Harriman came, he found this man who had been a minister in the French government--Houphouet had been the number-three in the French government--i.e. a minister of state. He had also been associated with the Communists at one time in order to advance the objectives of his RDA Party to obtain things he wanted, e.g., the abolition of forced labor. People don't realize that there was forced labor in the colonies.

Q: *Yes, the couve or whatever.*

NORLAND: Corvée. Houphouet succeeded in making himself a player in French politics.

So when Harriman came, they were talking a very high level of diplomatic discourse. It had to do with the Soviet Union, which, incidentally, Houphouet detested. Way back then, no one will ever find any chink in his anti-Soviet armor. He had made that alliance in French politics for very practical reasons; there was nothing ideological. He was a strong Catholic, as we later discovered when he built his basilica. So it was a very compatible meeting.

As a matter of fact (I didn't bring it because it's a big book), I have pictures of a great soirée that Houphouet organized on 24-hour notice to honor Averell Harriman. It was a soirée dansant, outdoors, beautifully done. In Africa you can tell when someone is trying to truly honor a visitor. They go all out, the dancers, the best of the food, waiters. This was the Houphouet's reception for Harriman.

Harriman left with great appreciation for Houphouet's statesmanlike qualities. I'm confident he used that expression. I have a letter, as a matter of fact, from Martin Herz in my files that says that he heard Harriman speak in New York at the Council of Foreign Relations in the fall of 1960, and he referred to Houphouet's standing as a statesman and as someone who had an understanding of the world.

Q: *Well no, I'd like to pursue this a bit. When you look at this, and, again, I speak as objectively as one can, because I'm not an African hand, I'm wondering whether somebody like Houphouet-Boigny and a few of these other leaders gave sort of an erroneous impression of what we would be dealing with--our AID programs and our relations and all this. You had these highly educated, very sophisticated, and very effective leaders, a few of them, and yet did they fully*

*reflect what their country was, the potential? Or were they just sort of a veneer on the top, and down below you had real African nations, with all the cultural and everything else problems that we were going to come up against?*

NORLAND: Well, Houphouet never dissimulated as far as the status of his country was concerned. And, as a matter of fact, one of the most important comments I could make on that question is to say that Houphouet was a reluctant figure in bringing Ivory Coast to independence as early as he did. He was forced into it by other events, most especially the referendum in Guinea in September of 1958, where, of all the African countries, Guinea decided to refuse de Gaulle's offer of a French Community of which they would be part. It would have been autonomy. But he [Sékou Touré] said, "No, we want independence." Houphouet always considered Sékou as a young brother (un jeune frère).

Houphouet was able to resist the appeal of independence because of his standing and because of his rationale, which I often heard privately. He didn't say it publicly too often. His rationale was: We are not ready. His example (I believe it's in books) that he used to refer to is: "If you are going to have a railroad, and you want an engineer, you've got to have a trained engineer. You can't run a railroad with untrained people, and you can't run a government with untrained people."

He was notorious, considered so by even his Ivory Coast colleagues, his fellow government ministers, for the degree to which he was willing to allow the French civil servants to remain in positions of authority in his own government. That reflected his view that the country was not yet ready for independence.

When it came, he asked many of those civil servants to stay on in their positions. And they remained. It's only gradually that he worked Ivorians in...even among his immediate staff. Two come to mind, for example. One was from Algeria, virtually French in his training and his capacities. The other from Martinique, also very much a French-trained civil servant. The names are Belkiri and Nairay. Those two are there even today. I recently talked with our ambassador to the Ivory Coast, and asked him to greet Gouverneur Nairay and Monsieur Belkiri.

That shows Houphouet's desire for efficiency in administration and in the economy. He encouraged the French colons (the French colonizers), the French farmers, to remain. He encouraged French businessmen. He made deals with them. There was an element (this will not be published, I'm sure) but there was an element of continuity there that reflected Houphouet's honest appreciation (to get back to your question) of the Ivory Coast's ability to be a fully independent state and play the game that had to be played in the modern world, particularly the world economy. So Houphouet was trying to ease this transition. He recognized the weaknesses in his society. And that's one of the reasons that he put a lot of emphasis on building universities, of sending people to France, bringing French universities to Africa. I think he's probably considered successful in doing that.

What was less successful, and this is where I think your question leads to a whole other domain: he left French in positions of responsibility for the economy, and they tended to exploit the

country without much consideration for the long-term effect that it would have. For example, they cut ninety percent of the tropical hardwoods; only something like ten percent remains.

*Q: That's considered one of the great ecological country disasters.*

NORLAND: No question about it. Despite his anxiety to achieve this status as a responsible, respectable nation, Houphouet didn't want independence just for the prestige or for the position in the United Nations. He scoffed at that--he wanted to be a modern nation in every sense of the word, for which education was key. For that he needed economic development, so he encouraged all-out production of cocoa and coffee and pineapple, which were his three principal agricultural commodities, and he encouraged it to the point that there was overproduction. And if you look at the history of the 1980s, it's clear it produced well beyond the capacity of the world market to absorb these products.

*Q: We'd better quickly go back to the period we're talking about and concentrate on that.*

NORLAND: Right.

*Q: At the time, I take it that you, as with everyone else, were very impressed by Houphouet-Boigny. Or did you have reservations?*

NORLAND: First of all, there was the personal angle. I was very fortunate to get along with him well, to the point that he would allow me to come and see him early in the morning, when he was sure that the French high commissioner would not monitor our meetings; the French high commissioner discouraged my seeing Houphouet on a bilateral basis before independence. Even after independence, the French mentality was to keep what they thought was an Ivorian money machine. They thought it was a productive country with great possibilities.

*Q: This was the jewel of their colonial crown.*

NORLAND: This was one of the jewels. It was an economically viable country, and the French treated it as such. It had resources; agricultural and, not so much mineral, but fishing.

So Houphouet was willing to deal very honestly. I could give you examples.

But at the same time, I saw that he was so concerned about his relationship with France that he was losing contact with his own people. He had his political party, the PDCI, and I attended several conferences where he would take the podium for hours. He was the master, he was the teacher, the professor, treating his own people as students, disciples and expecting them to follow.

He was not harsh in dealing with those who didn't agree. But there was a lot of quiet unrest, of intellectual effervescence. A friend of mine, who I believe, committed suicide, then minister of education, Ernest Boka, lived near me, so I used to see him quite often. He was most ill-at-ease with this paternalistic (I think that's the word that I would emphasize) attitude of Houphouet-Boigny.

*Q: And this was very definitely during this period when you were there.*

NORLAND: Fifty-nine and sixty. Right.

So, to answer your question as to how I viewed Houphouet, I saw him as being so eager to move forward on his agenda for modernization that he was not able to bring his people along in a way that would ensure success and long-term stability.

I was wrong. He's lasted until today.

But it was not a healthy situation. Perhaps symbolic of his was his treatment of who would be his successor. For a long time it was a man named Philippe Yace. Meanwhile, he had oscillated--it was Konan Bedie, minister Denise. He'd go back and forth on who he was going to consider his successor if he should pass from the scene. He never wanted to take the issue seriously. And he didn't consult on the subject. He was somewhat imperious, a government dictated from the top.

*Q: How about the other countries to which you had representation? How did you view these at the time?*

NORLAND: I can tell you that I was struck by the fact (I have it in my own correspondence, and in reports at the time) that they were not economically viable.

*Q: These countries were which?*

NORLAND: Upper Volta, it was then called; Niger; and what was known as Dahomey. Now it's Benin. There was not the infrastructure. Their local legislative bodies were not representative. There was little trained manpower. And not many French were interested or willing or ordered to go to these countries, compared to Ivory Coast where the numbers were large. I think there were seventy-five thousand French of a population of five million. Now it's up to eleven million by the way. But the other countries were not promising.

For example, in Upper Volta, the leading tribe, the leading ethnic group, are the Mossi. They had a traditional leader, the Moro Naba [great lord] (you can hear the Mossi in that word moro), who was someone that I was told I should definitely call on. I called him the Moro Naba, a person with little education, if any, who was living in a completely traditional tribal atmosphere. He could be used to bring along his followers and to get them to support the government, but the government was largely an outgrowth of French colonialism. The president was Maurice Yaméogo, who happened to be in the position of responsibility in the RDA, which Houphouet controlled. But he had a high school education and was not a person able to bring the country along. He didn't last more than about two years.

In Niger, there was a very nice fellow, Hamani Diori, who had the education, and he had a couple of people around him who were very good. Niger is a huge country, adjacent to Chad. Again, divided ethnically. There were those near Nigeria, where the bulk of the population lived, against the nomads in the north. And now, after many years of passive resistance, the nomads,

known as Tuareg, are in virtually open revolt against the capital, Niamey. It's an artificial state. It's huge; almost a third the size of the United States. It doesn't show up there, on your map, because Africa itself is large. And what is it that could link that country together and make it viable? Indeed, very little.

The same with Benin, a country that has three distinct tribal and political groupings: the north, the middle, and the south. When independence came, a man from the north became president. And he was so insecure, because the people from the south were actually more numerous and he was worried about his fate. He didn't last long.

*Q: In those days, I take it, we were just trying to basically touch base. Did you really think that we were going to be putting embassies in those places at the time?*

NORLAND: There is a tie-in to the Harriman visit. When Eisenhower and Herter heard about this visit of Harriman's, they said, "Oh, my God, we can't let this go unanswered, so we're going to send a team of people to Africa and really take our own assessment." Have you heard of this trip before?

*Q: I've heard of this trip. I'd like your impression of how it hit, because it's a very famous trip.*

NORLAND: The Loy Henderson trip.

*Q: This was the Henderson trip, of going around, sort of a caravan.*

NORLAND: It was a flying staff meeting. He brought along something like seven office heads, including head of FBO; head of MED; Vaughan Ferguson was head of West African Affairs; head of Personnel. And they came in, in a four-engined plane, to Abidjan. I had made several tours to the other three countries, so I knew roughly what it was all about. They were assessing (the answer to your question) what should be done. They didn't want to appear to be negligent in the face of the Harriman trip and Kennedy's subtle emphasis on the United States assuming its rightful position in encouraging countries to become independent. And that's a very important point; that was the background here.

So Henderson came out, and we had talks. I'm sure we met with Houphouet, although there was only a courtesy call. It was mostly in-house, and we were talking about what we could do to advance U.S. national interests, to improve the status of the embassy, etc.

On this plane en route to Upper Volta, as it was known in those days, I was sitting in a compartment with Henderson, John Stutesman, and, I think, Vaughan Ferguson, and Henderson turned to me and said, "Well, should we have independent embassies in these places?" My first reaction was: no. I thought we were doing a credible job, and I thought that it could be done with a resident chargé and a floating ambassador.

And there were other reasons for this, by the way. Let me just mention one. Houphouet himself recognized the non-viability of these other three countries, so he created an institution called the Conseil de l'Entente which, as you can tell, says very little; it says a Council of Understanding.

What it did that was of importance was to say that every country was going to pool a certain percentage of its GNP, and from that pool, allocations would be made of what amounted to foreign assistance.

*Q: Which basically was that the Ivory Coast would be helping these other three countries.*

NORLAND: Exactly. And that was to do two things: strengthen Houphouet's role; and protect him from the criticism that Houphouet was going off on his own and not paying any attention to his African brothers, who were less favored by nature. So it was building a backfire of protection.

But the Conseil de l'Entente was operating. The other chiefs of state had their separate villas in Abidjan, where they would often meet. I could meet with them there; I didn't have to run around. Which was not easy, by the way, taking those old DC-3s, and trying to get hotel rooms, where the telephones didn't work.

I didn't see that we had anything really to gain in this part of the world by having independent representation. I'm sure I'm on record as having said this. As I say, maybe my reasons were a little bit self-serving at the time, but I had reasons for saying that we could do it if we wanted to.

And so we went on, and Henderson reflected and consulted others. Vaughan Ferguson, I remember, said, "I think we have to have separate embassies." They were making assessments based not just on local conditions in West Africa, but on conditions in West Africa, but on conditions in Washington.

*Q: And the United Nations.*

NORLAND: And the spirit of the continent.

*Q: Were internal American black politics, the black voter, mentioned at all?*

NORLAND: Yes.

*Q: Mentioned on the plane?*

NORLAND: Yes. Not only the American vote, but the United Nations' appeal, and the atmosphere of the times, which was decolonization. It was liberation; it was something bigger than West Africa, of course.

Anyway, to finish the story, we also went to Togo. But after we got out of Ouagadougou, Henderson said, "Well, what do you think now?" I'd showed him where I thought we should have the embassies. I had been there earlier to identify land that was available for either purchase where we could build embassies or office space we could rent, where we could get to work and start operating. But I remember leaving Upper Volta, and he went around again and said, "What do you think?"

And I said, "Well, my view hasn't changed."

At the end, he said simply: "We will open embassies here." I'm sure he made that declaration. And from then on, it was set. I think he made the decision after Upper Volta. You couldn't, then, say, "Well, we won't have an embassy in Niger," or Dahomey.

It was un-Henderson-like, in my opinion. I think he was, himself, reflecting the feelings in Washington and his rather close relationships in the Eisenhower administration. He was not an ordinary FSO. And I think he felt that he would be doing Eisenhower and the Republican Party a great service by showing this sensitivity.

That's the Henderson trip.

Q: *Sure.*

NORLAND: I think I started to read from the Dumont letter last time, telling me to keep my aspirations limited here.

Q: *He was the consul general in Dakar.*

NORLAND: He was the consul general in Dakar.

Out of, I guess it was Ouagadougou, Henderson turned to me and said, "Gee, you've done a lot of work here. You're obviously well regarded. You can get appointments, and the people treat you well. When were you last promoted?"

And I said, "Sir, I haven't had an efficiency report for over a year and a half."

"Why, that's not possible," he said.

I said, "Well, it's just that we've had this little argument with consul general, Dakar, and this is his way of taking revenge."

He sat down and dictated to John Stutesman a telegram to Washington, outlining the situation and saying that I'd done a good job and I hadn't had a report.

I was promoted in about three months. It's one of the few times I've heard of what amounted to a field promotion. So I was very grateful to Mr. Henderson. And it settled, once and for all, the argument that I'd had with consul general, Dakar, I can tell you that.

So it was an interesting trip.

And then, of course, he went on to do virtually the same thing in Equatorial Africa.

Q: *Well, you couldn't say West Africa gets this; Equatorial Africa gets something different.*

NORLAND: That's right.

*Q: At the time, both before and during this trip, were there concerns about great tribal unrest, the boundaries getting shoved around and all? How did you feel?*

NORLAND: Not the boundaries. There were some difficulties with neighbors, but they were mostly psychological. The differences between Ivory Coast and Ghana were remarkable. First of all, Nkrumah had taken a quite different tack. He said, "Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all else shall be granted unto you." And Houphouet said, "That's not right." He told me and he told others, "You have to have an economic base." And then there was the famous bet. Have you heard of the wager?"

*Q: No.*

NORLAND: Houphouet and Nkrumah apparently communicated, and at one point they bet which country would be farthest along twenty-five years hence. This is in a book that I have seen recently, reference to this wager. Whether it's apocryphal or not, I can't say, but I believe it's true.

Nkrumah took the road of revolutionary rhetoric, and this misguided idea of focusing first on African unity. That's probably the notion that caused Nkrumah to stumble and fall.

Houphouet was quite the opposite: build with the resources you have; earn your position as a truly independent and responsible and prosperous nation in the world before you aspire to do all these other things. He ridiculed Nkrumah.

That set up tensions between the two countries, but the border between the two was almost impenetrable. People could go back and forth by water but we couldn't drive directly across. The one time I drove into Ghana, we had to go as far north as Kumasi. Now, I'm told, there are bridges across the rivers. It was difficult. So tribal groupings could go back and forth without paying attention. And there are linguistic and ethnic ties among the various tribes on the coast.

*Q: One of the debates that academics play with a lot in the United States is that these country boundaries were artificial ones imposed by the colonial rule, that somehow the white imperialist did a terrible disservice to these African countries, and, because of this, they don't really come up with other boundaries. Again, I'm trying to go back to the time. Was it an article of faith, sort of, with you and the men on the plane and others, that, boy, we better keep these boundaries, because if we mess around with the boundaries to make them more equitable tribalwise, all hell will break loose? Or did you just feel that the boundaries were there and they were accepted by the people?*

NORLAND: There had already developed a cultural veneer, applied externally, I must say, that made some sense out of those boundaries. In the case of Ivory Coast, for example, on the one hand you had Ghana, where the leadership was English speaking. Nkrumah had been trained in this country and in Britain. Houphouet was essentially Francophone. And that had already made a significant difference. It had been sixty years that the French educational system had been the dominant force, if not the only educational system of any consequence, in Ivory Coast. And I

think the same thing could be said of the English in Ghana. Instruction in the indigenous schools, wherever they might have been, except for Koranic schools in some places in the north, was in English. Liberia had become Anglophone at this time. So there were differences in language.

There was a lot of talk about linking the French-speaking countries of West Africa into a larger unit. That reflected the view of Dakar, not just the American, but especially the French. There was a feeling that these countries were not big enough to be viable economically; they had to be linked to larger units.

But Houphouet's point continued to dominate; namely, we have to have something to link up. What good does it do to link up vacant or unproductive spaces? We don't have infrastructure; we don't have railroads. There was a railroad to Ouagadougou, but the airlines were not very useful and the roads were poor. So what good does it do to talk about either regional organizations or aspire to control the territory next door? The borders were virtually meaningless in West Africa. That was not the same in other parts of Africa, but in West Africa I don't think it was a problem.

*Q: So it wasn't an issue.*

NORLAND: Border disagreements emerged, e.g. between Mali and Burkina Faso. And Houphouet succeeded in preventing a war from occurring between these two, in about 1983-84. But that came later.

*Q: How long were you in the Ivory Coast?*

NORLAND: I was in the Ivory Coast until late 1960. I came in '58, and I left in '60.

*Q: Well, how did you feel at the time? When you left, did you say, "This is for me; I want to be an Africanist?" What was the mood? Was this considered a place not to go, or something like that?*

NORLAND: Things were not easy in Abidjan the first year and a half. We were living under very difficult conditions. My wife had a baby there. As noted earlier, I'm told it was the second white child born in Abidjan. The French would send their wives back to France, of course, and sometimes upcountry to missionary hospitals. But we lived in a house that had two air conditioners. It was across the street from a military encampment with open sewers. The atmosphere was really Third World, I can assure you. I remember telling Joe Satterthwaite that we really had to start to think about living somewhere else. And, of course, he was under the influence of Dumont, who said, "Don't bother to build anything in Abidjan. It's just going to remain a little consulate." But Joe Satterthwaite personally intervened with FBO.

*Q: What was his position at that time?*

NORLAND: His position was assistant secretary for Africa. I think he was the first full-time incumbent, because for a long time, it was in NEA, and the "A" stood for Africa. Joe Satterthwaite came out and saw the conditions and problems in trying to represent the United States. And he said, "I'll do what I can." And he authorized me to make a deal for what's called a lease-purchase arrangement. We paid a certain amount per month, a fairly exalted rent. I think it

was only a couple of thousand dollars a month; in those days, that was a lot. And that sum would be applied to the purchase of a new residence. We started the building, and actually lived in the residence which much-expanded with a swimming pool and so forth, is now the residence of the American ambassador to the Ivory Coast.

But living conditions the first few months were such that we were worried about medical problems. Fortunately, we had what we thought were two good French doctors, who gained the confidence of my wife, so she stayed there to have our baby.

Living in the new conditions was difficult because of the climate. It's a hot climate, with high humidity, but it didn't bother me personally too much. And I saw that Ivory Coast did have the potential, if it could utilize the resources, to become a modern nation-state. I thought that was interesting. I saw that the others really were not as promising.

I realized that I was something of a pioneer, being accredited to four countries at once, and to go around, for administrative reasons, to identify properties. I was there to greet the first AID mission in 1960 before I left. It was headed by an officer named Bill Masocco and included Pierre Sales. I can still remember them coming over and saying, "Here we are; we're going to help people." There was all of this sense of expectation. There was this phrase at the time: rising expectations, remember?

Q: *Oh, yes.*

NORLAND: It was an interesting time. I was ready for additional African assignments if they had come along. But I was also ready for a change. I left Abidjan on orders to go to The Netherlands, which I thought would be an excellent antidote. It turned out that somebody else heard about the Netherlands assignment before I did, so I went to NATO Paris instead. That too was a good antidote to Ivory Coast. And yet (I'm reflecting now on the overall experience), when it came to assessing what one was called upon to do, in terms of responsibility, in terms of administrative challenges and the potential for pioneering in a new area, Africa had many more challenges.

**BRANDON H. GROVE, JR.**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Abidjan (1959-1961)**

*Ambassador Grove was born in 1929 in Chicago and graduated from Bard College and Princeton. He entered the Foreign Service in 1959. He served in numerous posts including Abidjan, East and West Berlin and Jerusalem and served as ambassador to Zaire. He was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 1994.*

GROVE: Our first Foreign Service assignments were announced to us toward the end of the State Department's A-100 orientation course for new officers in a suspenseful reading of a list

one never forgets. When my name came up, our genial course chairman said, "Abidjan." I had never heard of Abidjan. The American Consulate had been open for a year and a half in French West Africa's Ivory Coast. My reaction was not unusual; few Americans, and I was no exception despite my *auditeur libre* indoctrination in Paris, knew much about Africa and several of my colleagues were as uninformed as I about their African posts. Abidjan seemed just what I wanted. The consul in Abidjan was Donald R. Norland, our foreign service secretary was Marion Markle. Marion was a pioneer in every sense of the word. She did the work of at least three people, struggling with cumbersome "one-time" encryption pads into the late hours of the night, usually cheerfully. She was thrilled to be in Abidjan. I don't know what we would have done without her; she deserves much of the credit for our work.

The CIA placed an agent and his secretary at the consulate as part of its plan to establish a presence rapidly in African countries about to shed colonial rule. This was my first experience with intelligence operatives, or "spooks," as some liked to call them. Quite evident in their behavior, including to our African employees, was a pattern of detachment from other government work at the post, separate agendas and contacts, and special, isolating physical requirements for their "base" within our office--despite the affable personalities of these two people, soon to become four. They did little to dispel the aura of difference and surreptitiousness surrounding their work, relishing the wink of an eye at someone like me if I seemed curious. The ground rules for relations between the State Department and intelligence agencies were not well defined in 1959. Often Norland and I did not know what our colleagues were up to, having to depend on their good will to provide us scraps of information beyond the reporting we were authorized to read, much of which was not particularly novel or necessary to know.

Abidjan was a constituent post of Dakar, then headed by Consul General Donald Dumont, one of the few African hands of the State Department in those times. Dumont, in turn, was responsible to our ambassador in Paris, Amory Houghton, following the colonial administrative pattern. None of the French African colonies had yet become independent when I arrived in the Ivory Coast, which achieved its independence in August, 1960 while I was there.

Before I left Washington, the "country desk officer" in the State Department, who managed our relationships with all of West Africa, briefed me; he had never been to Abidjan and therefore could not tell me much about the city. Our pre-war coverage of Africa had been spotty, in part because our interests were largely commercial and managed by businessmen, and also in deference to British, Belgian and French spheres of influence.

In the late summer of 1959, I flew to Abidjan via Paris and Senegal. In both places, I spent a couple of days being briefed by foreign service officers knowledgeable about the area. In Paris, our embassy followed African affairs closely, particularly because of de Gaulle's attention to France's colonies and their impending independence. As a courtesy, I called on an African expert at the Quai d'Orsay, the foreign ministry, where I was escorted down the hall by a formally clad usher wearing white gloves. In Dakar I met people with whom I would be working in the future, especially in the consular and administrative areas.

No "post report" describing local conditions existed, nor were there yet people in Washington who had served in Abidjan, since it was such a recent addition to the foreign service family.

People from Dakar had traveled there before the post was opened, but I did not have access to them while in Washington. I was not well prepared; at first, I did not know for certain whether many of the streets were paved. I was told my personal belongings in Washington would take a long time to ship. They say in the Foreign Service that if you are sitting on a beach and a large wooden crate with your name on it washes up, your household effects have arrived. It would be an exciting place to begin a marriage.

Three months after reaching Abidjan, I returned to London where my fiancée Mary lived, and we were married in a solemn Russian Orthodox ceremony. Filled with a sense of adventure, we set up our household in a small villa outside Treichville, overlooking the lagoon above the Port-Bouet road to the airport. An overgrown garden surrounding our home had big, old trees. The local railroad ran in back, we had a chicken coop and snakes, some poisonous. There was one air-conditioner for the bedroom--all the Foreign Service would provide. This meant the rest of the house was hot and steamy, with pink lizards running along the walls and across the ceilings. Mary and I once rode the train from Ouagadougou to Bobo Dioulasso and discovered, to our dismay, that the lavatory at the end of our carriage had a chimpanzee chained to the shower pipe.

Treichville itself was an overcrowded African subdivision of Abidjan in which the small mud houses along dirt roads were covered by corrugated tin roofs, and young children clad only in little shirts ran everywhere taking their flies along. Lebanese merchants sold nearly anything, but mostly, it seemed, bicycle tires; women selling *manioc*, or cassava, sat on solid wooden stools their men had carved. Men of all ages made morning rounds balancing on their heads huge jugs of *bangu*, a milky, frothy, potent palm wine, offering the same tin cup to anyone who would buy. In the evening, Treichville was lit by kerosene lamps and music was everywhere, blaring from radios or resonating from the drummers and singers of the street. From our home, on nights that were still, we could hear these muffled sounds as we sat on our terrace at the end of the day enjoying a drink and watching the sun set before us, reflecting its fading light in the lagoon and against an always cloud-filled sky.

We had battles with the consulate general in Dakar over money for such necessities as curtains, furniture, and replacement of inadequate kitchen equipment. Our CIA representatives, and eventually those from our aid mission, had no such problems. It was the standard argument one has with the State Department's budget people whenever something new is started, frustrating at first, but one soon learns how to make the best case. This experience served me well when I opened our embassy in East Berlin fifteen years later, in 1974.

Beyond the wet heat and frequent rains (Abidjan, along the coast, is said to have two seasons that repeat themselves--the big rainy, and little rainy), there were hardships we could not avoid: isolation in a setting of foreign languages and remoteness--mail from abroad was slow and usually came in diplomatic pouches in an era before jet planes served West Africa; inadequate medical facilities in a place where road accidents, malaria and other tropical diseases were commonplace; and a mere handful of other Americans with whom to socialize. At the consulate, only Pat and Don Norland had small children. Their daughter Patricia was born in Abidjan, and it was my pleasant duty to record her birth and US citizenship. All three Norland children are now in the Foreign Service. Learning at least pidgin French was obligatory for our small staff. The satisfactions of life for us in West Africa lay outside any replication of American communities,

common at larger posts, and were found instead in the excitement of being uprooted and culturally transplanted into unfamiliar and exotic surroundings.

Why were we Americans there? Sub-Saharan Africa, although of only peripheral importance during the Cold War for its strategic resources and the need to counter Soviet and Chinese influences, was of increasing interest to African-Americans and foreign policy experts. Many of its colonies were to become independent in 1960, fundamentally changing the roles of the metropolises of Paris, London and Brussels from which the colonies were governed. This transition would proceed as smoothly as we witnessed it in Abidjan in 1960, or as turbulently and destructively as it occurred in the Belgian Congo from 1961-65, where I would much later serve as ambassador. Such redefining change could no longer be ignored by our political leaders, as President Eisenhower belatedly recognized.

The State Department was burdened by the paucity of its staff of a handful of African experts, lacking experience and depth in much of the region. Our consulates and embassies reflected US interest in being on the scene and wielding what influence we could in a wave of sweeping change, a sort of toe-dipping on our part into new and often unpredictable waters. Our interests were also commercial and humanitarian, favoring democratic processes and economic development assistance. We wanted to make friends of the new African leaders, and understand their ambitions and political roots. It was never our objective, nor would it have been possible, to supplant in influence, cultural affinity or presence the French, British and Belgian governments who were aligned with us against the Soviet Union.

Our consulate, reached by a small and clunky elevator, was located in the only high-rise building near the main square, close to the Hotel du Parc, formerly the Bardon. The square below was filled by vendors of African wood carvings by day and, at night, by the chirping of thousands of bats hanging from the trees. We were assisted by two invaluable local employees, one of whom was a Ghanaian, Mr. Adams, who worked on consular matters, and the other a Lebanese, Mr. Merheb, who concentrated on administrative concerns. Both spoke fluent English and French, so our visitors had no problems communicating with them. Mr. Adams, in his sixties, could be refreshingly direct. At certain times during the day when I was not available, he would tell callers on the phone, "Mr. Grove is in the toilet." No "away from his desk" for him.

My tour in the Ivory Coast was everything I hoped it would be. Abidjan in 1959-61 was a quite modern, even handsome city. It had only one bridge across the lagoons, the four-lane Felix Houphouet-Boigny Bridge, named after its president. We found the town itself enjoyable for its African culture and stubbornly French veneer, good restaurants, and fresh food available in the markets, either locally produced or flown in from Paris. The small French Institute for Black Africa museum of culture and art was superb, and we went there often. I found the Ivorians along the coast were more sullen than those living inland, such as the Senoufo, who seemed particularly open and friendly, but we enjoyed them all.

The French and ourselves were the foreign powers represented. Of great importance to us was our proximity to the musty and unscrubbed PTT, the Post and Telegraph Office, which reeked of urine and served as our communications link to the rest of the world. We sent coded and clear messages to Dakar and Washington through the local telegraph system. My responsibilities were

primarily the things Norland did not want to do himself. This was chiefly consular, administrative and commercial work, although I got involved in nearly everything else as well. Tall, blond, serious and a powerhouse tennis player, Norland was a fine boss: generous, open, ready to teach a newcomer. He was well along the road to becoming one of our leading Africanists. We worked well as a team, and I was off to a fortunate start.

In Abidjan we became accredited to four colonial entities, then called the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger and Dahomey. These four countries belonged to a customs union known as the *Conseil de l'Entente*. They were still part of French West Africa, but had their own nearly autonomous governments, and were combined by the State Department into one consular district which Abidjan served. The French had agreed to this arrangement, pleased, no doubt, by the low-key nature of our involvement. When these countries achieved their independence in August of 1960, we in Abidjan became the US diplomatic establishment for the four capitals: Abidjan (Ivory Coast); Ouagadougou (Upper Volta, now Burkina); Niamey (Dahomey, now Benin); and Cotonou in land-locked Niger, not to be confused with Nigeria to its south. These are the lines colonizers drew.

On the day of independence, Norland climbed on a chair outside our door. He changed our tin shields, replacing the consular one with "Embassy of the United States of America" which we had received in the diplomatic pouch. From the chair, he announced to us that he had become chargé d'affaires, and I third secretary. We drank champagne. We were now accredited to all four countries, with no representation in the other three, leaving coverage to our circuit riding efforts. Norland would retain his status as chargé, pending the appointment of a permanent US ambassador.

The process of independence in French West Africa in those distant days proceeded smoothly. We were soon joined by a German diplomat, the young Claus von Amsberg, a man of movie star good looks and manners, who would soon meet and marry Princess Beatrix of the Netherlands, now its queen. Adam Watson, then the British consul general and later ambassador in Dakar, had even broader territory to cover. He was at his amusing best describing to Mary and me his attendance at the Togolese celebration, and his temptation to join dancers in the streets of Lomé singing, "Isn't it grand! Isn't it grand! In-de-pen-dent Togoland!" In the Belgian Congo, however, a different scenario was playing itself out during five years of violence and attempts at secession in Elisabethville (now Lubumbashi) and Stanleyville (now Kisangani). The Marxist Lumumba was murdered, and Joseph Désiré Mobutu came to power with US government support.

The prominent African who would become president of the Ivory Coast, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, was a short, lithe man, with very dark skin and a high forehead, who liked double breasted suits. He spoke in a quiet voice, was formal and protocol-conscious in his courtesy, and impatient in his ambitions. At receptions he moved in a stately way through the crowd, smiling broadly with his beautiful, flirtatious and much taller wife Marie Thérèse on his arm, his eyes blinking and forehead glistening under camera lights. By 1961, Marie Thérèse was running a chic Parisian dress shop in Abidjan.

Norland found Houphouët perceptive, wise, and a shrewd appraiser of political forces who, while punctilious in his dealings with French officials, was not wholly controlled by them. Houphouët

stood in favorable contrast to the three other leaders of the *Conseil de l'Entente* customs union he had created, and differed strikingly from such maverick, Marxist-influenced neighbors as Kwame N'Krumah in Ghana and Sékou Touré in Guinea, although he had a fondness for Sékou Touré, whom he called "my little brother." In governing the Ivory Coast he was a politician to his fingertips, managing to keep the question of a successor churning in the pot for decades. Under the banner of "*Fraternité*," his authority and mediating skills with African statesmen, including the perennial Mobutu of Zaire, eventually made him the dean of surviving, pro-Western and like-minded leaders to whom stability, unchallenged authority, and acquisition of wealth were life's main goals. Unlike Mobutu, however, Houphouët worked hard to develop the Ivory Coast's economic potential, and did so with minimal corruption.

In Abidjan, my training in the Navy helped me refit our Jeep with a tow rope, pulley, ice chest, and other essentials for driving in thinly populated areas. Once we had settled into married life, Mary and I often went on trips lasting ten to fourteen days, visiting American missionaries, who were surprisingly numerous and usually lived well, taking along my consular hand press seal to notarize documents, register births, and so on. During these trips, I also called on the local French authorities, who invariably were hospitable. There was, nevertheless, a certain tension between the French and ourselves in Abidjan. They were wary to the point of paranoia of what might appear to be US efforts to undermine French interests in their former colonies, an unfounded concern. The two French high commissioners with whom I served were prickly, rather vain and pompous former colonial functionaries who found it difficult to accept the new situation in West Africa. We had good reason to believe that French intelligence followed our activities closely.

On returning to Abidjan from circuit riding, I submitted reports to the State Department on economic and political conditions as I had found them. The Ivory Coast then, as today, was a country of elephants and other game, cocoa, coffee, oil and mahogany. Sadly, its forests have now been depleted in characteristic, exploitative disregard for the environment in Africa. I had a large map of the Ivory Coast, on which I carefully noted where one could find cold beer: there were not many places that offered ice and beer. This map became a prized possession, much sought after by visitors.

Yamoussoukro, where Houphouët-Boigny was born, was then a small town on a laterite road, a place of crocodiles. Now it accommodates Houphouët's monument to himself, the second largest cathedral in the world. Reached by a super-highway, it is the nominal capital of the Ivory Coast. The up-country Africa beyond the rain forests we drove through in the late 1950s was little altered from the way it had been for centuries. It was largely untouched by modernity and startlingly beautiful. I sometimes yearn for that unbordered countryside. We became interested in African wood carvings and began to collect them. Often they are works of elegant simplicity and great power.

We could usually find, even in the remotest village, a veteran of military service who spoke French. This enabled us to talk a bit about village life and concerns, and begin to understand and reach out to Africans. In general, the French did better by their colonies than most colonial powers in Africa. Africans automatically acquired French citizenship and were able to vote in French elections. Ironically, Houphouët, who believed in animism, had been a minister of health

in Paris. The French paid attention to education and the schools were quite good. Much of the training was provided by the Catholic Church with French priests and nuns as teachers and role models.

After independence, our official visitors grew at a rapid pace. First came an economic assistance planning team and soon a permanent cadre of aid experts joined our embassy. Then we were visited by a Foreign Service inspection team, headed by Cecil Lyon. "Soapy" Williams, former governor of Michigan and the Kennedy administration's assistant secretary for Africa, came for a look. We had our first congressional delegation, or "CODEL," headed by Senator Frank Church and including a young and assertive Edward M. Kennedy, then and briefly a Washington lawyer, and Senator Wayne Morse. Kennedy was along as the brother of the president-elect, demonstrating the New Frontier's interest in Africa. All of these visitors and delegations required briefings and support from our fledgling embassy. There was also an increase in private travelers. Anthropologists, journalists, and tourists arrived in growing numbers. We invited some of them to our homes to learn about their African experiences. Many had devoted their lives to Africa and were invaluable sources of information. All of them were welcome.

Don Norland had easy access to the Ivory Coast government. His political reporting on four countries was well regarded in Washington. Most government officials, including the junior ones, were competent and politically sophisticated. The French had done a good job of building up and training the civil service. Even in the early 1960s, there was a question of who might succeed Houphouet. It turned out to be premature, as Houphouet remained in office until his death in December, 1993. I enjoyed agricultural commodity reporting, particularly on the coffee crops, and became versed in coffee production. One of my principal sources was a Greek coffee trader, Basil Kokkinakis, whose projections of coffee crops were reliable. I gained his confidence and to my great satisfaction he gave me his personal assessments of coffee forecasts.

In the summer of 1960, the nature and extent of our representation in West Africa became a matter of concern in Washington. Ambassador Loy Henderson, who was deputy under secretary for administration, led a team which included Dr. DeVault, director of the Department's medical operations; Joseph John Jova from personnel; and John Stutesman, Henderson's special assistant. Henderson's visit was the Eisenhower administration's response to Democratic candidate John F. Kennedy's decision to send Averell Harriman to West and Central Africa to highlight Eisenhower's neglect of Africa. Harriman came in August of 1960; Henderson a few weeks later.

In Abidjan, Houphouet-Boigny, in a reference to Cold War struggles in which his ties were to the West, told Harriman: "When I send our students to Moscow, they come back capitalists. When I send them to Paris, they return Marxists!" Our African policies, such as they were, had become an issue in the domestic and foreign affairs strategies of Kennedy's political campaign. Henderson's team had its own plane and visited several countries of former French West Africa. They had three basic concerns: the nature of the relationships the US should have with these countries; staffing requirements to establish and maintain such relationships; and levels of economic assistance appropriate in light of needs and the US government's limited objectives and resources.

These questions were of course inter-related, and the answers were not the same for all countries. Henderson's team made impressive efforts to understand the rapidly changing scene in West Africa. They had learned before leaving, for example, of a post which occasionally had its only other officer, an FSO-8 of the most junior rank, serving as chargé to four newly independent countries during absences of the principal officer. I was not surprised Washington did not favor this arrangement, although it was hardly of my making! Henderson's visit made a difference. After he returned to Washington, efforts began to staff up the new embassies, and quickly to over-staff them. We all began to receive better administrative support from the State Department. More air conditioners arrived, and we in the Foreign Service began to catch up with the living standards of people from other agencies such as AID and CIA. Robert McKinnon was assigned to open our embassy in Upper Volta. Tragically, he died of illness shortly after his arrival. I helped him in his pioneering efforts as best I could. By the time I left Abidjan in the summer of 1961, the four countries we had covered from there had at least the beginnings of a US presence.

Robert Borden Reams was assigned in November, 1960 as our first ambassador to the four countries. We became the support post for the other three, adding to our workload. By early 1961, our presence in West Africa was much more visible than when I first arrived in Abidjan, and I began to wonder whether we weren't trying to do too much too fast.

*Q: Who was your ambassador?*

GROVE: Robert Borden Reams was a portly, balding man who was rather short and had a British colonel's moustache. Quiet spoken, he was the very image of a diplomat. His appearance was a bit formal and his style somewhat reserved, perhaps, but those who came to know him discovered a man with a zest for exploring the world around him, a raucous sense of humor and fondness for drink, and a compassionate heart. Golf was his abiding interest, and travel came next. He and his two daughters, Marianna and Kathy, and young son Peter, now also in the Foreign Service, were with him and his wife Dottie in Abidjan. He was what my generation would have called traditional and seasoned, and there was much to learn from him and admire. He would soon clash, however, with the activism and youthful outlook of Kennedy's New Frontier.

Independence came to the Ivory Coast rather suddenly in August, 1960; the initial celebrations were hastily improvised and modest. Flags went up and down, and there were parades. But an elaborate and formal celebration was postponed for a year, which became a significant factor in my life as I was to return there with Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy when they attended the official event. The year's delay until 1962 provided these governments time to organize things properly.

One of the first tasks we worked on for Ambassador Reams was a trip to our other three countries to allow him to present his credentials in each. Norland left shortly after Reams' arrival and Rupert Lloyd, a seasoned black Foreign Service officer, had become the deputy chief of mission. Reams was a great adventurer. He decided he would visit the three new capitals by overland travel, and that our wives would join us. He loved the Jeep I had fixed up, and the beer and Aquavit in the ice chest. Dottie and Mary enjoyed the relative luxury of the embassy's official Chevrolet. They, too, were thrilled to be in Africa.

As we set off, Ambassador Reams and I followed behind the Chevrolet's dust in the Jeep, which I drove. We went overland from Abidjan to Ouagadougou and Niamey, and then Reams flew to Cotonou, while I drove ahead. It was a long trip, but Reams wanted to see the African countryside, and indeed he did. We looked for lions and found them occasionally, sometimes nearer than we liked. Stopping our little caravan early one afternoon on a remote track road in Niger, we foolishly decided to get out and walk toward a nearby lake through tall grass, which I later learned was called lion grass. Reams wanted to look at birds. We were unarmed. The lake was pleasant enough, but on the way back we found fresh, wet tracks crossing our path in the mud. The consulate's driver, Pierre, recognized them as those of a lion who had passed between us and our vehicles and was nearby. There was nothing to do but keep walking in silence despite feelings of panic. Once we reached our cars, Pierre was so overwrought he relieved himself on the spot. Reams broke out the Aquavit as we set off smartly.

Pierre, driver of the Chevrolet, was a jovial, gentle young African, who was immediately caught up in the spirit of our adventure. One day, as we were entering a modest-sized village, the Chevrolet developed mechanical problems and stopped. A garage and filling station were nearby. Pierre was slight of build and seemed even more so when standing next to Reams or me. So Pierre steered the Chevrolet while Reams and I pushed it to the garage down the main street, Dottie and Mary following behind us with greater dignity. The incredulous villagers must have thought Pierre was a high official from Abidjan who was so important that he had two foreigners, one of them of evident distinction, pushing him and his car to the garage.

The presentation of credentials to the new governments by the first American ambassador was an historic event. We wanted it done with dignity and style, and we were proud to be the pioneering Americans in this role. All was not entirely serious, however, and there were some unexpected moments. The most formal ceremony, for example, took place in Dahomey, now known as Benin. Its president, Hubert Maga, was a portly man to say the least. A stickler for protocol, he required ambassadors to wear formal attire, despite the heat. Maga wore his top hat and cut-away, an intimidating sight. We ascended a long and grand stairway to the hall where the ceremony would take place. While Maga preceded us as we walked up, Reams and I noticed he was wearing bright green socks with his striped pants. With due regard for the gravity of our mission, we remained impassive.

The credentials presentations were well covered by the African press and AFP, the French news agency. The Africans gave us lots of space, particularly because we were one of only a few other nations, aside from France, represented in these four countries. Reams held a press conference after each ceremony. This could be a problem, because his French was not particularly good. Sometimes I would have to interpret, which sometimes was also a problem. Reams would read a polite and formal prepared statement. We were cautious about discussing economic assistance levels, a matter of obvious interest to the Africans, and the focus of suspicious concern by the French who did not wish to be supplanted by anyone. This issue, moreover, had not yet been fully addressed by our own government.

There was no effort by Houphouet to play the US off against France. He understood French sensitivities and realized he needed the French more than us. The Ivory Coast kept the French

CFA franc (cours de franc africain) as its basic currency after independence. The French held positions of responsibility in their former colonies, even in the newly independent governments. Key political and technical advisers often were French. We Americans were welcomed by the new governments, but there would have been no advantage to them in pitting us against the French. They concentrated instead on gaining as much as possible from both.

*Q: Do you have any comments on Soviet and Chinese Diplomats in West Africa?*

GROVE: Toward the end of my Abidjan assignment, I visited a colleague, George Lambrakis, serving in neighboring Conakry, Guinea, to acquire a feeling for the Soviet presence there. Its Marxist president, Sékou Touré, had chosen not to remain in a relationship with France, the former colonizer, and Guinea had become fully independent. Already, evidence of repression, mismanagement and economic stagnation was everywhere.

Seizing the opportunity to establish their presence, the Soviets, East Europeans and Chinese opened embassies in Conakry, directly introducing Cold War tensions into West Africa. They would also be in Mozambique, Ethiopia, Somalia and Angola. At the heart of the continent, the Soviets were making trouble in the former Belgian Congo through their influence on Patrice Lumumba and his supporters. Every president from Eisenhower through Reagan was to become concerned about the Belgian Congo in the context of the Cold War. In West Africa, however, the Soviet threat was of a much lower order. (The Belgian Congo, which later became Zaire, should not be confused with the small neighboring country of the Republic of the Congo, a French colony established in 1891 which gained its independence in 1960, and whose wealth lies in its off-shore oil deposits.)

George was able to take me along to an official reception, and there I found unexpected distinctions among these communist "allies." The Chinese mingled, if a bit stiffly, with Africans. The Russians kept themselves conspicuously apart in their own circle, showing little interest or rapport with the many Africans present, the Chinese, or anyone other than the obsequious representatives of their East European satellites. This was a common social pattern, I learned, probably a reflection of insecurity on the part of Soviet diplomats (but less so their technicians) functioning outside areas of high priority and ideological definition, and of rivalry and competition for influence between the Soviets and Chinese. Marx, after all, had said little about the non-western, non-industrialized colonial world.

More than twenty years later, as ambassador to Zaire, I had the same impressions of Russians inherently ill at ease and of sophisticated Chinese diplomats more friendly toward Africans. By then a more self-assured, less regimented East European community existed. At the time I served in Zaire, from 1984-87, the African Institute in Moscow, a policy and research organization, was directed by Anatoly Gromyko, the foreign minister's son whom I knew from East Berlin. This was not a man to bring depth of understanding or cultural sensitivity to the complexities of sub-Saharan Africa, or to the requirements for successful Soviet policies in a diverse region whose people passionately wanted their freedom.

The Russians never really understood Black Africa.

**GERALD MICHAEL BACHE**  
**Commercial Attaché**  
**Abidjan (1961-1965)**

*Mr. Bache was born in 1927 in Bronxville, New York and graduated from Yale and Harvard Law School. He entered the Foreign Service in 1951. He served in numerous posts including Pusan, Munich, Abidjan, Stockholm and Bonn. He was interviewed by Theresa Tull in 2004.*

BACHE: Yes, I went to Abidjan, Ivory Coast, West Africa, in the summer of 1961. I remember, when I got the assignment, I had never heard of Abidjan and I thought they had made a mistake and were talking about Abadan in Saudi Arabia. But, in fact, they meant Abidjan, Ivory Coast. I served under Ambassadors Borden Reams and James Wine.

My job there was as commercial attache, the first American commercial attache after Ivory Coast got its independence from France in 1960. I found that my principal job was to help American businessmen to get around the French stranglehold on trade with their former colony. I was helping American businessmen who either wanted to export to Ivory Coast, or more often, wanted to invest there. I felt it was my job to get to know the right people, so that when an American businessman came to Abidjan, I could introduce him or direct him to someone who could be helpful to him, either in government or in business.

When I arrived in Abidjan, I had just come back from three years in Wall Street, so the Chamber of Commerce of Ivory Coast invited me to give a few lectures in French on the workings of the U.S. stock exchanges. That was fun to do, but also a way to meet some of these people and get to know them, so I could call on them for help when I needed it in introducing American businessmen to their local counterparts.

Naturally, it took some time for me to get to know the right people and some of the French businessmen in Abidjan were resentful of my efforts. Thus, after my first 18 months there, I realized that I had only just begun to carry out effectively the duties of an American commercial attache in a former French colony that was newly independent. That is why I volunteered for a second 18-month tour of duty in Abidjan, because I really did not feel I was earning my pay until I got to know who was who and what was going on. Also, I really enjoyed the job very much.

An example of how I got to know who was who and what was going on in the commercial world happened on a pineapple plantation. Pineapples were one of Ivory Coast's major exports. When I met the French manager of the plantation, he was complaining that he wanted to buy an Italian machine for processing pineapples that was better and substantially cheaper than the available French machine. He mentioned that the French machine cost about \$150,000 and the Italian about \$100,000. When the plantation manager applied for the required import license, however, the Ivoirian official in charge of licenses notified the French manufacturer's association (the 'Patronat'), which, in turn, prevailed upon the French manufacturer to offer the machine at

\$99,990. The result was that the plantation manager was forced to buy the inferior French machine, although he would have much preferred the Italian one. This episode helped me to understand how the French government maintained its stranglehold on trade with its former colonies and was very useful in later discussions with American businessmen seeking to export to, and invest in, the Ivory Coast. Such insights do not come in the first days of a tour of duty.

My musical activities continued there. I did not bring my good 19<sup>th</sup> century European cello, because I was afraid that the tropical heat and humidity would damage it. Instead, I got one of my friends in Germany from the Munich days, who had been president of our orchestra society and was also an importer of cocoa and coffee from Ivory Coast, to buy me a cheap cello in Germany and ship it to Abidjan. The USAID planning officer in Abidjan was a flutist and there was a Frenchman, who worked in the Ivory Coast Ministry of Agriculture, who played the viola. There were others and, in this way, we formed a chamber music group and we performed at the U.S. Cultural Center (USIS) and the French Cultural Center. Once again, I found that music is an international language, which helped me to get to know people other than the government officials, with whom I had to deal officially, and thus get to know the culture of the country where I was stationed.

In Abidjan, we had three small children at that point, at kindergarten and first grade level. When they arrived, they did not know any French. We enrolled them at a daytime school, run by the Catholic Church, called Externat St. Paul, where the language of instruction was French. Fortunately, one of the priests there was from Canada and spoke both French and English. When our children really needed help, they could go to the Canadian father and make their needs known.

*Q: You mentioned children and we didn't even mention the fact that you had gotten married. Tell us a little something about your wife and family.*

BACHE: Yes. You will recall that, after returning from Korea and before going to Germany, I took nine months' leave without pay to complete my third academic year at Harvard Law School. There was a long weekend in January between the fall and spring semesters. I was married on January 28, 1954 to Eleanor Krout, who had been a classmate of mine at Scarsdale High School. Eleanor's father was a professor of American history at Columbia University, who later became Dean of the Graduate School, then Provost of the University. Eleanor and I had been friends ever since high school and, during the autumn after I came back from Korea, I persuaded her to marry me.

Our first child, Marion, was born in a military hospital in Munich, in May of 1955. She, unfortunately, is severely mentally retarded and, even now, lives in a group home. After Munich, when I was working in Wall Street and we were living in northern New Jersey, we enrolled her in a special school for the mentally retarded, but when we moved to Abidjan, we had to keep her at home. When we returned to Washington, we again found a special school for her, as we did when we got to Stockholm.

Our second child, Stephen, was born in September 1957, also in a military hospital in Munich. Our third child, Nicholas, was born in October 1958 in New Jersey. Thus, we had three small

children during most of the time - from 1958 until 1961 - when we were living in Westfield, New Jersey.

Later on, when we were living in Abidjan, we decided that we had better sell our house in Westfield. Therefore, while on home leave from Abidjan, we had some work done on the house to get it fixed up and ready to sell. Some of the construction workmen who came to the house were African-American. When the workmen came to the house, the children immediately started speaking French to them. They had seen in Abidjan that, whenever you saw someone who was black, you had to speak French, so they did.

Our fourth child, Vivian, was born in Washington, DC in April of 1965, after we had returned from Africa. That completed our family of two boys and two girls.

*Q: How did they like the Foreign Service life?*

BACHE: I think they enjoyed it; I know they enjoyed it. I always felt that any disruption of their education - from having to move from one place to another and one school to another and one set of friends to another - was more than offset by the experience, the tolerance of other cultures and the breadth of view that comes from that kind of a life. I have felt that way and they have said that they also felt that way.

*Q: You have a publication in your hand. I think we ought to hear about that.*

BACHE: When I left Abidjan, I had a two-year tour of duty in the U.S. Department of Commerce; the first of those two years was spent in the Africa Division of the Bureau of International Commerce. For some years, the Commerce Department had been issuing a series of publications called "... a Market for U.S. Products." During my time at Commerce, I wrote an 84-page booklet entitled "Ivory Coast: A Market for U.S. Products." The material in the booklet was based on my observations during my three years in Ivory Coast, plus my readings in French.

At that time, there was absolutely nothing on Ivory Coast written in English. This was in the mid-1960s and, as I mentioned above, there were a number of American businessmen interested in investing there, because Ivory Coast was one of the few African countries with a reasonably prosperous economy. Therefore, when my booklet was published, many English-speaking businessmen from around the world went to the U.S. Department of Commerce, wishing to buy copies of the booklet. The Ivory Coast Embassy in Washington also wished to buy hundreds of copies, but the Commerce Department didn't have hundreds of copies, so they did a second printing. As a result, I feel that I earned some money for U.S. taxpayers.

**JAMES W. WINE**  
**Ambassador**  
**Ivory Coast (1962-1967)**

*Ambassador James W. Wine joined the Foreign Service in 1961*

*after serving in World War II and then practicing law. His posts included ambassadorships to Luxembourg and the Ivory Coast. Ambassador Wine was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.*

*Q: You were not in Luxembourg too long and then you went to the Ivory Coast. How did this come about? You went to Luxembourg in April of 1961 and you left in October of 1962.*

WINE: I can only tell you what I've been told. The President of the Ivory Coast, Houphouet-Boigny, was the first African chief of state to have a state visit during the Kennedy Administration. Black Africa is, among other things, a personality cult. Houphouet-Boigny and John Kennedy got on personally very well. At this point I'm reciting what I've been told from the White House. On his departure he asked Mr. Kennedy, "When you send your ambassador down there, would you send somebody whom you know personally, because then I'll feel as if this linkage of friendship is being maintained."

It was explained to me that that was the trigger mechanism. Among those who were around at the time of the selection process, that was why I left early and in response to the request from Houphouet-Boigny. That was the President's response.

*Q: How did you feel about this? Here you were in Luxembourg with your wife and four children and had established a good relationship in the country. Now all of a sudden you were going to a whole different place in Africa.*

WINE: I was called on the phone from the White House and asked about it. I said, "I'm going to have to think about this a little bit. I don't even know where the place is."

They said, "Well, send us a cable tomorrow."

That day I did learn that Abidjan was probably the most modern city. I talked with friends on the phone in Paris who knew the Ivory Coast quite well. They told me about it. I was also interested in education. I understood that President Kennedy and Houphouet-Boigny had talked about the establishment of the university in Abidjan and that they were very much interested in having people in key places in Africa. This was a Presidential policy decision. Then there was a pause and he said, "Hell, you're an adventurer. You certainly shouldn't have any objection to going down there."

I sent a cable the next day accepting.

*Q: You were talking about the peripheral negotiations. How did the real one go when you went to your wife and told her? I speak as a retired Foreign Service officer who knows one's diplomacy begins absolutely at home. [Laughter]*

WINE: No question about that. There was a long session that evening. We got out the maps and all of the printed material I could find. I had them send me a post report, of course. I had all the information I could get. Yes, it was a family decision. I certainly didn't make it in a vacuum. We

were quite young, just in our mid-forties, and we thought it would be an opportunity for a real experience and knowing the background of the reason for the selection, that polished somebody's ego a little bit, I guess, along with it and that was the family ego, not just mine. There was no reluctance on the part of the family, and so there was an affirmative decision collegially made. [Laughter]

*Q: What was our perception of the Ivory Coast in relation to American interests there? We're talking about 1962.*

WINE: Politically it was perceived as being, and was in fact, a showpiece made by the French. It was known that Houphouet-Boigny and De Gaulle were close friends. Houphouet-Boigny served in the Fourth Republic, as a matter of fact, as a minister. President Kennedy had no use whatever for De Gaulle, and I'm not suggesting any kind of unusual motive but it was thought that it might be a good idea to meet him on an even playing field in select countries that had more significance than Upper Volta or wherever. The French had paid an awful lot of money to develop Ivory Coast.

The second thing was that we were very much concerned about air space in West Africa at that time, keeping it exclusively American or certainly within the Western Alliance and precluding the Soviets from getting landing rights anywhere along the West Coast of Africa because it was such a close jump from there over to South America. One of our principal chores was that we selected Pan American Airlines and negotiated landing rights up and down the coast of West Africa, building into it certain rights carefully and which we successfully did.

We then paired Pan Am with assisting in the establishment of Air Afrique. That was part of the agreement. With the exception of Guinea, which had jumped the tracks and gone Soviet on us, but other than that we were able to protect the entire West Coast of Africa from the standpoint of air rights and precluding the Soviets from obtaining landing rights down there. That was a national security consideration.

I think it was believed by many with a long, long view that the continent of Africa might open up and become the bread basket of the world. I think also that there was an aspect of the whole civil rights issue involved dealing with blacks in Africa. Those were some of the kinds of things that went into the decision-making process. We had some first-rate folks in West Africa.

*Q: Could we do a little compare and contrast? Luxembourg obviously has over time been treated as far as ambassadorial appointments has not always been treated well because we've sent too many people who throw parties or hunt. I assume this has had a reflection on our embassy and the staff there. There's no point in showing too much initiative if you're going to have somebody who is mainly going to be involved with the social list. Now you're in Africa at the time of greatest interest. The Kennedy Administration was interested in Africa, new countries were emerging, the Foreign Service was having a wonderful time. It was the first time that the professionals were able to get in there and really deal with things. How did you find the American staff in the Ivory Coast?*

WINE: I had a splendid staff. It's with a great deal of pleasure to me personally to know that two members of that staff, young men, have since become ambassadors. One was Bob Oakley who is now Ambassador to Pakistan. It was a large embassy because we had regional security, defense attachés, an airplane, regional agriculture, any number of different things. They are regional because of our location and the total communications situation was such that Abidjan would be a natural for that. As a consequence, we also had a very large Peace Corps.

*Q: How did you find the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM)--helpful or not?*

WINE: The man who was the incumbent, a nice chap, felt that he should have been appointed ambassador. This is not without precedent in the State Department. He never demonstrated this to me, but there was a deep resentment that he wasn't. There were communications that went back and forth and a successor was sent in the very near future. He was first rate. He and his family were just first rate. The entire staff was the cream of the crop.

*Q: I think this does reflect where priorities go and where enthusiasm and real interest is. As ambassador there, what did you consider your prime tasks?*

WINE: My first task was to look at the larger picture which had to do with the landing rights issue. We had a rather large AID program which I had to monitor very carefully. It got out of hand two or three times.

*Q: How did that happen?*

WINE: I'll give you one example. They had asked for help in their internal communications. When the AID communications group came, they found out that they wanted to develop a rather high-tech communications for the presidency, in the broad sense, so as to develop a network of communications for security purposes. This was an adjunct to the principal program but this was done rather quietly and without my knowledge in the beginning. Then I learned that AID was sending back messages that did not go through my hands or my designated person having to do with intercepts that these communications fellows had made concerning the communications that were going on within the government itself and the system we had established. I blew the roof off and I sent them all home and I dismissed the program.

The more successful ones had to do with assisting in their fishing industry, in their infrastructure, some roadways, airstrips, agriculture, etc. which were geared toward the inner-strengthening of the country's economy.

*Q: One of the charges levied against the entire AID process which is not exclusively the United States but there was a tendency to build up the cities to attract people to African cities with the full cooperation of the local governments but destroying the agricultural base and agricultural life of those countries. Was this a problem in the Ivory Coast?*

WINE: No, the opposite was true. Houphouet-Boigny had a very different view. He wanted to maintain the integrity of the villages and concentrated on expanding those throughout the country. He discouraged any migration into Abidjan. He designated centers for cotton and

certain other kinds of agricultural products in one area as well as other kinds of things in another area, and he worked diligently at tribal integration so as to avoid the classic problems in Africa of tribal collisions from time to time. He had a marvelous program that did just that. He's never had one ounce of trouble among the tribes. He saw his country in its totality without a focal point in the sense that you suggested it.

The French, on the other hand, saw it quite to the contrary. They wanted to build up Abidjan so I had to struggle with the French constantly on that.

*Q: How did you deal with the French there? You were saying that the use of the Ivory Coast was a subtle ploy to bypass the De Gaulle-Kennedy antipathy.*

WINE: We maintained a discreet distance. I had to respect the fact that there were still a number of French conseillers in the government as they went through a transition preparing the seats for the ministers, etc. I knew they were there, and I knew this was what Houphouet-Boigny wanted because he had people in there with experience. So I respected that.

On the other hand, I met them head on when the occasion demanded. An example of that was when I had the French ambassador call on me to tell me that the Peace Corps out in the country was teaching English and other subjects as well, and that education in the Ivory Coast was exclusively a French proposition. I called his attention to the fact that we had an agreement with the government of the Ivory Coast what the Peace Corps could do, and among other things it was to teach. As long as they were there, they were going to teach. It was just that simple.

I'd get complaints maybe twice a month from the field saying the French were up there harassing them. I'd go over to the French Embassy and raise hell with the French ambassador telling him I wanted that stuff cut out. [Laughter] "If you want to kick them out, you go down and see the President and tell him to kick us out. Short of that, live with us."

There were two ambassadors from France, the second of which was a personal friend of De Gaulle's [Laughter].

*Q: He had learned his lesson.*

WINE: Monsieur Le Trompet. He and I had some tangles, there's no question about that. The French positioned themselves such that the entire diplomatic corps was alienated as far as the French were concerned, particularly the diplomatic representatives, with the exception of one DCM. He was a first-rate chap. He saw things as they really were. He used to come over to my house, and I'd have my chief of station come over and have lunch at the pool. We'd swim and I'd invite him over and we'd just have a sandwich and talk. We learned a whole lot more from him than he learned from us. Nevertheless, we had an ally who was a genuine representative of his country and not out trying to win brownie points from De Gaulle every other damn day.

*Q: Do I suspect that Houphouet-Boigny was sitting back and being both amused and taking advantage of the fact that he had two personal friends of these leaders playing in his yard?*

WINE: A typical political ploy. There is no question in my mind about it. I think he was very genuine. I think his viewpoint towards France was very different than his viewpoint towards the United States, generally speaking. On the other hand, he saw this and knew this was there. I would never go down and crowd his doorstep. The French ambassador did many times because word had gotten back to me from the chief of protocol at the palace about what had happened. I had several sources where I kept up with what was going on here and there, all quite legitimate. He'd go down and whimper and cry around. Not once did I ever complain to the President about the French.

*Q: Houphouet-Boigny is really a remarkable man among world leaders. How did you view him at the time? You've given us some aspects. In dealing with him personally, how did you find him? Why do you feel he developed into such a remarkable person?*

WINE: His education was medical. He had a medical degree. He was quite sophisticated. As I said, he served in the Fourth Republic. Politically, he was the head for many years, before independence of the various countries, in the RDA, which was the political party of all the French colonies. So he was politically very savvy about the whole of West Africa and its relationship with Europe as well. He was also a very clever man. He protected his flanks. He's a quiet man and moved with great strength when he wanted to, but he usually achieved this in an indirect way as opposed to getting out on the stump and preaching a sermon about it. This is one of the ways he brought the tribal groups into community, for example. He had a very clear perspective in his own mind of the significance of the Ivory Coast and West Africa and Africa in general. We talked at length about that many times. He didn't think that an Organization of African States was of much value. He thought that was mostly a lot of baloney and that they'd never, despite the fact they meet once a year, with great visibility. They passed a lot of resolutions that they would not honor in a year or two and still acted their own ways. He didn't put much stock in that. I think he was a man that had a world vision. He was a man of deep compassion and I think he knew the limitations of his rule, of his government. He kept extraordinarily well informed about world matters and political matters in the United States and Europe.

*Q: This was the height of the racial problems in the United States, the Freedom Riders, Martin Luther King, etc. As a very sophisticated world leader, how did he view the agony the United States was going through as well as the blatant segregation and animalism?*

WINE: I had a long talk with him after the Martin Luther King's "March on Washington." He, of course, had seen the television clips of Bull Connor's episode.

*Q: We're talking about the Alabama police repression of black protesters.*

WINE: That's right, using the water hoses and the dogs, etc. These were not just quick meetings of five-minute visitations. I knew what his signals were when it was time to go, but we talked at great length, most times at his insistence. He would say something like, "I've seen examples of man's inhumanity to man. It happens in this country."

I have been in ceremonies way up-country where his police, when the crowd would come out to view the ceremony and they wouldn't move back, would take big sticks and whack them.

"I acknowledge these kinds of things. I have an appreciation for the history and the lack of evolving the black persona. It will probably be a philosophical attitude and will probably be a long struggle."

He was very much impressed with the Martin Luther King leadership. His feeling was that there was a wealth of understanding, good will, and compassion in this country, and that given time, that problem would be not necessarily solved but alleviated in many ways. He was not hostile toward us or openly critical toward the United States, never in my presence. I think he'd seen it all, really, himself. That pretty well explains his views.

*Q: Were you ever asked by Washington to sound out his views on something in order to pass back professional advice on how to deal with African affairs?*

WINE: Yes, on numerous occasions. I would have to refer to the files, but I was instructed on numerous occasions to visit with him and to put certain questions to him. Even if I put it to him, he would be the kind of fellow who would say, "I would not presume to tell the American Government. It would just be his attitude. But he was very helpful to us in many ways at our request using other African chiefs of state at a time when the Red Chinese were moving with great strength down on the other side of the continent, Tanzania building railroads, etc. There were times when there were other matters that were based in Africa but involving outside powers, not the least of which was Sekou Toure in Guinea which we tried to do some things about, but I don't think he openly succeeded in doing anything before Toure died. Then there were questions involving several countries in the region.

*Q: How did you find the African Bureau in the Department of State? Mennen Williams was leading it and I've gotten two reflections on this. One was that those dealing in difficult states such as Guinea, Ghana, etc., there was a little too much overly-positive thinking about some of these leaders who really were not friendly to American interests or probably to their own country. I'm thinking of Sekou Toure and Nkrumah.*

*On the other hand, he brought a great deal of enthusiasm toward Africa and played a very important role in the Administration in developing interests in Africa. You were in one of the "good" countries, probably the best which has remained the best as far as the bright side of African development. How did you find the Mennen Williams direction?*

WINE: I'm trying to think who his deputy was who went on to the Ford Foundation, a very able man and who knew what he was doing and moved professionally. The "hail fellow" back-slapping type of American was not appreciated positively in the Ivory Coast.

*Q: Soapy Williams would fall into this category.*

WINE: I guess so. Of course, not speaking the language made it difficult for him. I don't think he visited but one time and that was to buy African art. He bought a truckload of African art. I had

the feeling that, outside of his deputy, he was very ineffective. I really don't have an opinion. I have impressions but I don't have an opinion about something with respect to the other countries. I know what went on.

*Q: It didn't particularly intrude where you were.*

WINE: No. Nobody intruded. [Laughter] I must say in one instance where the president called me down and said, "When am I going to get my grant for the university?" I said, "Well, I'll get right on that and find out."

I knew about this before I left Washington. I knew about it from the White House, not the State Department. I came back to the embassy and sent a cable to make the inquiry. I got a response back from somebody which said, "According to paragraph 501, subsection C, the Ivory Coast as well as all other former French colonies, the matters of education are exclusively in the French province. Therefore, we have no program."

I thought, "I'm forced to call a chit."

So I wrote President Kennedy and told him the story. Nobody is going to put me in this kind of position. I still have the original letter. He wrote up in the corner, "Jim Wine is right about this. See to it they get the support that they ask for." I got it.

*Q: This is where the politically appointed ambassador who knows the President can do something.*

WINE: Yes, because I was a lost ball in the high weeds. I was being batted around with a number of paragraphs. I wouldn't have gotten [anything] out of it save coming home and doing battle and maybe not even then.

*Q: A thesis that often comes up is that America's interests abroad are essentially driven by economics. How much would this pertain to our interests in the Ivory Coast at the time you were there?*

WINE: I wouldn't say "driven by." It certainly was one of the driving forces but it was not by any means predominant. I think we all recognized there was a building of a vast amount of volume of trade between the third world and the United States. I think that was being encouraged. The AID programs that we were involved in were obviously essentially economic but they went beyond that. Some of them were instructional.

*Q: There were not commercial interests in the United States that you felt great pressure to do certain things with the Ivory Coast?*

WINE: No.

*Q: I'm asking about American commercial interests in the Ivory Coast.*

WINE: No, it was cultivating the relationship, establishing some specifics within the broad policy of Africa and more particularly the west coast of Africa.

**ROBERT B. OAKLEY**  
**Economic Officer/Political Counselor**  
**Abidjan (1963-1965)**

*Ambassador Robert B. Oakley was born in 1931 in Texas. He graduated from Princeton University in 1952 and served in the US Navy until 1955. Oakley joined the Foreign Service in 1957 and served overseas in Sudan, the Ivory Coast, Vietnam, France, Lebanon, and as Ambassador to Zaire, Somalia and Pakistan. In Washington DC, Oakley served in the Office of UN Political Affairs, the Bureau of East Asian Affairs, as the Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism and for the National Security Council. Oakley was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kenney and Thomas Stern in 1992.*

*Q: You left the IO in 1963 and were assigned to the Ivory Coast. How did that assignment come about?*

OAKLEY: It was the system that sent me to the Ivory Coast. I did not ask for the assignment. Joe Sisco had asked me to stay with him for a third year which I was happy to do. Then it was time for me to move on and personnel knew that I was a French language officer. An opening became available as Economic officer in Abidjan and off I went. My wife, two children - ages 1 and 2 - and I all moved to the Ivory Coast.

The 1963-65 period was a fascinating one in the Ivory Coast because it found itself right in the middle of the Cold War. It was surrounded by Socialists close to the west and China: Sekou Toure in Guinea, Modibu Keita in Mali and Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana - all left-leaning leaders, very actively supported by both the Chinese and the Soviets. These neighbors plus their communist backers were engaged in subverting the Ivory Coast government through propaganda and other activities because that country was perceived as the Western capitalistic bastion in West Africa. James Wine from Kentucky was our ambassador in Abidjan. He was a political appointee who had been a Kennedy campaign worker - he was a tremendous help to Kennedy in building bridges to the Protestant vote; he was close to Averell Harriman. Phyllis and I made a lot of good friends in the Ivory Coast and enjoyed our social life there immensely. The beach was great! Professionally, it changed my expectations. This assignment enabled me to clearly notice and begin to understand the inter-relationship between political and economic affairs. It was clear that economic development had a major direct impact on political growth.

The U.S. faced a critical decision soon after I arrived in Ivory Coast. The international coffee cartel was strong; it held to a rigid quota system. The U.S. was the world's largest consumer of coffee and Brazil was the major producer, but the Ivory Coast was increasing its coffee

production. In 1964, the Ivory Coast had a bumper crop, the world's second or third producer, just as prices were reaching a peak level. President Houphouet-Boigny had been a coffee grower himself and had risen the political ladder based on his success as a coffee grower and his ability as an organizer of other coffee planters. He started his political career as an opponent of the French, although in later years, he became France's best friend in Africa. He was in the forefront before 1960 of the drive to gain autonomy but not independence for the Ivory Coast. When he became a leader of his country, Houphouet never forgot his roots and the support that the small coffee grower had always given him. These people owned only ten acres or less, but there were hundreds of thousands of them, making them a powerful political force. The Ivory Coast government therefore always set a very high producer price for coffee and cocoa, bringing cash to the countryside, further empowering that sector politically.

The crisis in 1963-64 arose when the Ivory Coast production greatly exceeded its quota as set by the International Coffee Producers Association. This presented the government with a major dilemma: high production and prices and a low sales quota. If it would have to purchase all that coffee and cocoa for local storage, unable to sell it in world markets, the government's budget deficit would fall out of sight. That would have a devastating effect on the economy. The Department of State in Washington did not see any answer to the Ivory Coast's dilemma despite our cables and reports.

I became greatly concerned by the consequences of this confluence of events and the Ambassador came to see the problem, as well. He understood the importance of maintaining a stable Ivory Coast in light of the ambitions of its neighbors. He and I worked on a letter that he sent to his friend, Harriman, then the Under Secretary for Political Affairs. Harriman took the letter to the White House and was able to arrange for a one-time loan waiver of the Ivory Coast coffee import quota, allowing it to sell that extra coffee. That one action made a major difference in the Ivory Coast's long-term economic and political future; it was able to export its coffee and dollars came flowing into its economy; it was a real boon because, as I said, prices were at their peak at this time. The cash went into the countryside and not into the bank accounts of a few rich, well placed people - bureaucrats and businessmen - as so often happens. Tens of thousands of people came from Guinea, Mali and Ghana to seek work in the Ivory Coast, either on plantations or on the docks where imports were coming in, or on the roads that were being built, or as labor on the coffee and cocoa farms. The proceeds from exports plus economic assistance from France and the U.S. gave the Ivory Coast an opportunity to engage in serious economic development. That made the 1963-65 period an illustration of a single U.S. decision having a major long lasting effect on the future of another country. It became a key decision for the political configuration of West Africa of the strength between West and East, as well. As the Ivory Coast became economically stronger, the pressures from its neighbors collapsed. Their citizens, having worked in the Ivory Coast, understood the advantages of a free market economy compared to the system that their leaders were trying to sell to them. Within ten years, the Communist leaders of Mali, Guinea and Ghana were all overthrown, and the idea of socialism totally discredited. The loss of Soviet influence was equally evident.

I should also note that the presence of a well-connected political ambassador was very useful in this series of events. Although Wine had not been one of the major players in the campaign, he did have important political contacts in Washington who helped him to carry the day. I don't

think that a professional ambassador, good as he may have been, could have managed to have the coffee quota issue raised in the White House because all he would have had to depend on would have been the regular communication channels of the Department. We in Abidjan had tried those channels which were entirely unresponsive. It took Wine's personal letter to Harriman to get the appropriate and necessary Washington action. The State bureaucracy never did fully understand the political import of providing relief to the Ivory Coast in the context of its rivalry with its three communist neighbors. Furthermore, the bureaucracy did not know how to obtain a quota increase which required a Presidential waiver.

I should note that while Wine was working his personal channels, the U.S. assistance agency was working on establishing an Ivory Coast Development Bank. That was a very welcome step by the Ivory Coast because it saw it as a very useful institution to encourage foreign investment which would accelerate its economic development. But we, in establishing this bank, paid very little attention to the average Ivory Coast citizen, nor did the Ivory Coast government try to do that, even the representatives of its own business community. Sekou Toure in Guinea insisted that the investments all be indigenous - not foreign. By taking this "politically correct" line, I think he destroyed Guinea's economy. Houphouet went in the opposite direction pushing for maximum economic development in the shortest possible time relying upon foreign investment. But in doing so, he paid scant attention to the development of his own people and did not try to engage them further in economic development. That led Ambassador Wine and me to the conclusion that the new bank should have a loan capacity for local small business people; it was to provide capital resources as well as human resources - accountants, etc. - to assist in the establishment and development of the small business sector of the Ivory Coast. I can't say that my AID assistance colleagues were very happy with this concept; they insisted that they had already reached agreement of the bank with the Ivory Coast government. We pointed out to them that they had forgotten to talk to the Embassy about their program before talking to the host government. Finally, Wine had to tell the assistance agency that if it insisted in pursuing its program without our modification, he would have to appear before Congress and express his serious reservations. That changed the program quickly and a small business component was added to the development bank. A few years later, I read that the Ivory Coast was pointing to this new program for the small business man as a model that all of Africa should emulate. Once again, this was an illustration of the power a political appointee can have to push through the ideas of the staff if he or she is willing to use leverage and take a few risks. Wine was not a special ambassador, but he did have a good deal of common sense and was willing to stick his neck out.

The French felt that the Ivory Coast was their province; that caused many tensions between us. We took a more liberal approach, particularly in economic development which by its very nature was bound to make the new country more and more independent of France. So we always had a struggle with the French. It was just one more area of continuing French-U.S. tensions that have always existed and are still with us today. I had many contacts with French representatives in Abidjan, but clearly we were going in different directions. I remember that we had serious differences on how to handle the Congo. By now, Tshombe had become Prime Minister. The Ivory Coast was instrumental in providing him support. Tshombe came to a meeting of the West African countries which was being held in Abidjan, thanks to the efforts of the Belgian ambassador. That ambassador had a reputation which had preceded him to Abidjan. He came

from a very wealthy, aristocratic Belgian family. He was a great lover of African women - literally speaking. His wife did not come to the post with him giving him opportunities to gather intelligence in a very undiplomatic fashion. He was very successful at that having more "inside" information than all other ambassadors. He also had better access to the President - through his liaisons - than the French Ambassador, who was always very frustrated by that situation. One day, I went to see the Belgian Ambassador to discuss something about the Congo. Before our discussion started, he was on the telephone, but he threw me some photographs which he said I might be interested in seeing. They were pictures of him and some of his "ladies"; I must say that he had exquisite taste in women.

At one point, I remember the Italian Ambassador who lived right next door - by this time I had been promoted to be the Political Counselor and therefore was living in better quarters - invited Phyllis and me to dinner. The evening was going along very smoothly until we were all invited into the dining room. All of a sudden, a great chill came over the party of 14-16 people; conversation stopped. The Italians and the Belgians had refused to accept the French Ambassador as the automatic Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, even though the Ivory Coast had agreed to that as part of their independence agreement. The Italian Ambassador had placed his Belgian counterpart in the place of honor - to the right of the hostess. The French Ambassador was supposed to be seated on the hostess' left. But the French Ambassador, always alert to such slights, had sneaked into the dining room before the guests had entered and had switched the name cards so that he would be seated to the right of the hostess. He then entered the dining room first and sat where he had put his name card. Almost all of the guest of course guessed what had happened and then no one spoke another word to the French Ambassador for the rest of the evening. That gives you some of the flavor of the diplomatic community of Abidjan in the 1963-65 period.

The French had always exacted a deal from the Ivory Coast which required that 50% of all tracked vehicles imported into the Ivory Coast would be bought from France. Some French businessmen, who were involved in logging and construction, signed a petition to the French Ambassador saying that they didn't want French equipment because it was inferior to other manufacturers. They wanted the quota removed so that they could procure from Caterpillar. The U.S. assistance agency was providing approximately \$15 million for purchase of heavy equipment for highway construction. The lowest bidder was another American bulldozer manufacturer. But the Ivory Coast government refused to accept the bid; it wanted Caterpillar equipment because it felt that it was of higher quality and had lower maintenance costs. The assistance mission pointed out that the other bidder was the lowest, but the Ivory Coast government insisted that over a ten year period, the Caterpillar would prove to be a better purchase. Our assistance people eventually went along with the Ivory Coast which was just as well because the lowest bidder went out of business the following year.

I should say a word about what American interests in the Ivory Coast were, as we saw them in Abidjan. We understood that it was not our role to replace the French, but to serve as a supplement to them and in some cases to serve as a prodder in a effort to get them to change some of their policies. We were in the Ivory Coast to fill in some of the niches that the French were leaving, such as, for example, assistance to small businessmen, that I have referred to before. The French were not very supportive of our efforts because they were concerned that

such assistance might have a negative impact on the large French monopoly corporations that were operating in the Ivory Coast. But essentially, we were in the Ivory Coast to supplement French efforts and thereby provide support to efforts that we believed would be beneficial to everyone in the long run. That was our general policy.

Occasionally, we would try to support the Ivory Coast on a major economic problem, as we did in the coffee quota issue that I described earlier. We also bolstered the government in its contest with its pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese neighbors. In the period we were discussing we were fortunate that Houphouet-Boigny was a very good President. We wished that he would have spent a few more resources developing the country's human capital, but in general we found him very helpful. He insisted on rigor in economic development - i.e. no corruption was allowed, the funds went into a development budget and not towards supporting a lavish life style for himself or other high ranking officials. He did have a large palace, but at that point, it was not an issue. There were some indications that this stable situation might change. For example, the planning for Yamoussoukro - the future grandiose capital of the country - was beginning. But in 1963-65, this was not seen as a major threat to a very rigorous and disciplined economic development program that the Ivory Coast was pursuing. There is no question that Houphouet was not a "democrat"; he was authoritarian and somewhat paranoid. In the African tradition, the country had only a single party and the President did not tolerate much dissent within that party. There were "elections" but they were pretty well pre-ordained. Houphouet really concentrated on economic development, giving no attention to political growth. His economic policies enabled him to build a solid base in the Ivory Coast, but after 1970, the rigor of the economic development system became frayed and corruption began to take its toll. The economy of the country began to collapse because the controls over expenditures collapsed and the Ivory Coast lapsed into an economic malaise that occurs too often in "Third World" countries.

Unlike its operations in the Sudan, the CIA station in the Ivory Coast played a very positive role. Its focus was primarily on events in Mali, Guinea and Ghana and its intelligence collection efforts were very helpful. While I was in the Ivory Coast, Jack Matlock arrived in Ghana, assigned as the political officer to our Embassy in Accra. Matlock was even then a Soviet expert and later became our Ambassador in Moscow. Jack looked at Nkrumah and his cohorts through the eyes of a Soviet specialist. His analysis was that what he saw was not "African socialism", but rather essentially a Soviet sponsored communist clique that had captured Nkrumah. His reports were well considered and convincing. William Mahoney, our Ambassador in Accra, also a political appointee, fully supported Matlock; between the two of them, they made a sufficiently strong case that brought a complete reversal of U.S. attitude toward Nkrumah and Ghana.

Under Secretary of State Averell Harriman visited Accra on a couple of occasions in an effort to bypass the clique around Nkrumah and talk to him directly, but he failed. So the U.S. concluded that Nkrumah was not worthy of our support and we used our influence with the World Bank and other donors to cut Ghana off from any economic assistance. That termination of assistance in addition to the already poor performance of the Ghanaian economy, stemming from the nationalization of their major export productions - coffee and cocoa - led to the collapse of the Nkrumah regime. That event was also helped by the good performance of the Ivory Coast which was so evident to all Ghanaians who worked in or visited that country. I found this change in U.S. policy very interesting because it was based on new insights into a local African situation

that a Foreign Service officer, trained in analysis of the Soviet system, brought to his assignment.

The Soviets and the Chinese tried to bring their influence to bear in the Ivory Coast as well, but they were not successful. On one occasion, a group of communist rebels were intercepted as they were trying to infiltrate from Mali. CIA sent one of its agents to assist in the interrogation of the captured. These infiltrators had originally come from the Ivory Coast, but had left the country for one reason or another. They had been brought together in Mali, from where they were sent to the Soviet Union and China for training in propaganda and armed subversion. Then they had been brought back to Mali to infiltrate the Ivory Coast. When they entered the Ivory Coast, they brought their classroom note books with them, which made for a rich intelligence collection for the CIA. The Station then assisted the Ivory Coast in preparing a "white" paper about the perfidies of the communist powers which was widely circulated in West Africa. This is how the CIA operated with its host.

**ROBERT J. MACALISTER**  
**Director, Peace Corps**  
**Abidjan (1963-1965)**

*Robert J. MacAlister was born and raised in the New York City area. He studied history at Bard College. It was at Bard that he became interested in foreign affairs while working at the State Department. In addition, he served in the Peace Corps. He worked in the Ivory Coast, Zaire, Chad, and Senegal. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on August 14, 1995.*

Q: *Well, let's pick up when you went off to the Ivory Coast. What year was this?*

MACALISTER: This was from 1963-1965.

Q: *What were your main concerns there?*

MACALISTER: This was the first group of Peace Corps volunteers to be sent to the Ivory Coast. I had a predecessor who had been there about six months, but he was transferred to Geneva for liaison work with other groups of volunteers. As Director, one of my principal tasks was to help the first group of Peace Corps volunteers get established. In this context, I, not only had to deal with the culture of the Ivory Coast, I had to deal with French colonial culture.

Many of the volunteers were teaching in what they called the cours complementaire, which I guess we'd call middle schools. And at this time (with one exception) the director of every middle school except one was a Frenchman. Most of the teachers were French as well. And the man in the Ministry of Education, who made the decision about affectation, about assignments, was a Frenchman. English was part of the curriculum, because they were following the French colonial curriculum, but initially some of the French were concerned. They believed we [the Peace Corps] to be the opening wedge of American cultural imperialism. Some of them were

persuaded that we were there to displace them culturally. Anyone who knows anything about the French knows that cultural displacement is the worst worry you could put in their minds. Eventually, my efforts, and above all the conduct of the volunteers, indicated that we were not there to displace the French culturally.

*Q: So what was the reception for the volunteers?*

MACALISTER: Well, it was mixed. They had a double reception. They had two societies to deal with. They had the society of their bosses, who were, by and large, the French. And they had the society of their students, who generally came from rural backgrounds. Also, initially, the volunteer's level of French was not very good. So they constantly found themselves under a lot of heat to get their French up to speed from their directors and colleagues, since they were working in a totally French environment. All this despite the fact they were there to teach English.

It wasn't just the French issue either. One of my volunteers was a young man named Robichaud who came from a family of French Canadian heritage in Massachusetts. He had studied in French at school, at least through primary school. He was entirely bilingual. I traveled frequently and called on Robichaud's boss, who was French. I used to ask how Robichaud was doing in his English teaching and all I would get was a string of criticisms about Mr. Robichaud. Clearly, Robichaud was a loser in this man's eyes. I would always look for some gracious way to end the interview and get out of there-to try to cut my losses. In any event, I said to the gentleman in French, "In any case, Mr. Director, Mr. Robichaud speaks French well, right? *N'est-ce pas?*" And he said, "Yes, but his accent!"

This was the dilemma that most of the volunteers had. Most of their colleagues were French, but unlike most of their colleagues, most of the volunteers were interested in getting to know the Africans, trying to learn about their country and find out what made them tick, not just to live a totally expatriate life. This set up tensions with their colleagues. The volunteers had joined the Peace Corps in order to learn about a new country. So they had a tough row to hoe.

Later on, other volunteers got involved with adult education for women, for example, where they were not in that close contact with the French and their immediate supervisor was not a Frenchman. In any event, I learned how the environment in which you have to work affects your ability to do your job. You have to be sensitive to that environment.

*Q: What were the volunteers' relationships with the Africans? How did that work out?*

MACALISTER: Well, let's say it was better than most of us had. The reason I say that goes back to my personal experience in Africa, particularly compared with India where we still have friends-people who visit the U.S. and look us up. One of the things I personally regret, in terms of my own African experience, was that I found it was much more difficult to become friends with Africans or to get beyond the initial level. My experience was that, for whatever group of reasons, it is harder for Americans to get to know Africans. The job that the volunteer had, and the context in which he or she had to work, had a real effect on the degree to which they got to know local people. Someone working and living out in a small village, particularly when they

worked in an activity that took place in the village itself, had a much greater chance of getting to know the Africans than someone teaching in a school with a lot of French colleagues.

*Q: Well, let's move on now. Where did you go from the Ivory Coast?*

MACALISTER: I came back to the US. I was Chief of French Speaking African Programs here in Peace Corps, Washington. But before we do move on, I would like to make one more point that touches on the Ivory Coast, but also goes beyond it. It has to do with the independence of the Peace Corps from foreign policy and intelligence. I think Dean Rusk once said that the greatest contribution the Peace Corps could give to foreign policy would be not to make it a part of foreign policy, and I agree with that. At the height of the Cold War in Africa, there was some suspicion, particularly on the part of the Africans, that the Peace Corps was somehow hooked up with the CIA. Obviously, the best way to negate any of the positive accomplishments that a Peace Corps volunteer could make would be to have that person considered an agent of the CIA. This was certainly floating about in the 60s. Radio Moscow and/or the papers were constantly going out of their way to link the Peace Corps with the CIA. In my own case, I had to walk the fine line of sitting on the Ambassador's country team, but not being involved in the process of gathering political information.

*Q: Were you under any pressure to gather information?*

MACALISTER: Well, I was, at one point, from a gentleman who was a politically appointed Ambassador rather than career. I resisted that pressure and I didn't have any trouble in resisting it, because the President's brother-in-law was the head of the Peace Corps at that time. Also at one time my administrative assistant's good personal friend was a woman whom I did know to be associated with the CIA. I didn't see any particular problem of their being personal friends in the capital. However, a situation did arise which did pose a problem. One of our star volunteers, the 62 year-old grandmother, who was involved in adult education for women. She was stationed in the President's home village. The President's sister was one of her students. We had purposely placed her there because she was a star! And the President personally assigned her lodging and everything else.

At one time during my tenure as Peace Corps Director in the Ivory Coast, there was a period of definite political stress- political machinations going on. One day during this period, my administrative assistant announced that she was going to drive up to Yamoussoukro, the President's home village with her friend from the CIA! And I said I do not want you to do that. It could be misunderstood and could jeopardize this assignment and could jeopardize our standing here in the country. Well, she went anyway. I, then, went back to Washington and asked for authority to send her back home which I got from Sargent Shriver. He backed his people up. It's nice to have a boss like that.

*Q: What was the Ambassador's view of that situation or was he not involved?*

MACALISTER: The Ambassador called me in and told me that I didn't want to rock the boat and so forth. He asked me to reconsider. I explained to him that I felt this was a very important point and that she had specifically defied my direct order.

*Q: Good. Good to illustrate a point like that. Otherwise, you felt relatively independent of the political issues?*

MACALISTER: Yes, I did. And I must say subsequently, where I dealt with career ambassadors I never....

*Q: But did you ever get into situations where the volunteers became politically active in either domestic or local politics or questioning views about U.S. policy?*

MACALISTER: I don't think I did. Of course, during the Vietnam War, there were occasions where Peace Corps volunteers would get involved with protesting the war. Jack Vaughn, who was then head of the Peace Corps, did put out a directive defining what was acceptable or unacceptable in terms of protests. My recollection is that the volunteers I dealt with respected that.

**DAVID MICHAEL WILSON**  
**Junior Officer Trainee/Press Information, USIS**  
**Abidjan (1963-1965)**

*Mr. Wilson was born and raised in Pittsfield, Massachusetts and educated at Columbia University and New York University Law. Joining the USIA in 1963, he served variously as Press Officer, Information Officer and Public Affairs Counselor in a variety of posts including Abidjan, Cape Town, Ottawa, Geneva and Brussels. He also served in senior level positions with USIA in Washington, DC. Mr. Wilson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: Well your first post was the Ivory Coast. Did you have any particular feel, I mean did you ask for any of this, Africa or not?*

WILSON: No, I was just assigned to it. Actually my first assignment, and I found this amusing at the time too, my first assignment was to Morocco. One day the training officer, Art Hoffman came running in and said, "why didn't you tell me?" I said, "What?" "Why didn't you tell me you were Jewish." "I didn't think that mattered." He said, "You can't go to Morocco." I said, "Why not?" He said, "We are not assigning Jews to North Africa." So they changed my assignment to Abidjan and the guy who was going to Abidjan went to Morocco. It turned out it was a good change except for the first PAO (Public Affairs Officer). I was surprised.

*Q: I really am too. I mean sometimes we were brought up in the Jewish faith and were you?*

WILSON: Yes.

*Q: I was wondering did Israel play much of a role, going back and all?*

WILSON: No, I mean it gave me a set of moral values.

*Q: I am thinking of the state of Israel.*

WILSON: No it didn't. At one point somebody asked me if I wanted to get the PAO job in Tel Aviv. I was very torn, I did not take it. I was torn because I was afraid if I were there, I might bend over so far backwards to be neutral that I would become anti-Israeli. That concerned me very much. I didn't take the job. But that was one of the major concerns I had. I felt like it would have affected me but I don't know. In my work in the BEX Board of Examiners) coming in, we were interviewing people from the New York area, who were obviously of Jewish background, I would take delight in saying, you know, "The Arabs have got all the oil. Why are we supporting the Israelis?" There was no correct answer, but my purpose was to see how they reacted. What kind of emotions could they be subjected to. That is the whole point.

*Q: Yes, absolutely. You are off to Abidjan. You were there from '63 to...*

WILSON: '63 to the end of '65.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about the Ivory Coast at that time. Can you tell me sort of what the government was like at that time?*

WILSON: It was a one party state run by the PDCI, the Parti Democratique de Cote D'Ivoire, and by Boigny. By today's standards, they have elections and we would have been pleased with it. But we weren't, because this was sort of the beginning of the Kennedy era. Well, I got there just after Kennedy was assassinated. Bobby had been to the Ivory Coast. In fact one of the stories, and I suspect it may be true, again I wasn't there, so it was third party. But they said when Bobby came through he went to mass, because it is a Catholic country, at least nominally. Most people are animist, but nominally Catholic. Bobby went to church at the basilica, and they passed around a collection basket. As the story goes, this guy who was one of the escort officers said, Bobby reached into his pocket and got out a dollar bill. He turned to his wife and said, "Do you have some smaller change?" She said, "Oh, Bobby, for God sakes, put the dollar bill in."

I worked very closely with Bob actually because he had a good sense of humor and in one sense the French were the enemies.

*Q: This is Bob Oakley.*

WILSON: Yes. We would take great delight in doing things that would annoy the French a bit. We worked on exchange programs together. It was a good time to be there. One of the few places that I felt that what I did really mattered because it was a developing country. I could get places. I had contact with good political leaders. I could have them over to the house. Bob would use me to get some of the people in the media, some were very much influential on the political side, and we worked together. I thought that was a very useful function for someone in USIA.

*Q: What was your job specifically?*

WILSON: I started out as a junior officer in training in USIA. Then I did the press information room.

*Q: What was our embassy like? Was it large?*

WILSON: A good size. They had several ambassadors. The first ambassador they had was James Wine who was a political appointee who was Kennedy's Protestant religious advisor. He was fine. Then we got George Allen Morgan, head of the Foreign Service Institute at one time. He came over and he was an intellectual. At least he thought he was. I can recall on President Houphouet-Boigny's birthday at one point, we had a staff meeting on what should the ambassador do for the president's birthday present. Ultimately it came down to the ambassador was going to give Houphouet-Boigny, the President of the Ivory Coast, a copy of this ambassador's book on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. I got a copy nonetheless. That was fine. It was a good sized staff. There was a consular section. It was small, but the problem at that point was as far as the U.S. government was concerned, the future of Africa was not with the Houphouet-Boignys in the Ivory Coast or Senghors in Senegal but Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Sekou Toure. And we could not have been more wrong.

*Q: Yes, they basically destroyed their countries, these guys.*

WILSON: I was thinking back. One of the things I really give Bob Oakley credit for is that Bob was assigned to Vietnam, and because of his contacts, he could have gotten out of it. He chose not to. He chose to go to Vietnam. I always admired him for it. After he was there for about three or four months, he wrote a letter back to the ambassador asking the ambassador to make certain that I, David Michael Wilson, got a good ongoing assignment. Bob took the time out from problems in Vietnam. Phyllis didn't go with him. But I really admired that about him. I really appreciated it. What was I going to do for him? He went out of his way to tell the ambassador he had a good officer.

*Q: Well did you find yourself, you were saying we were more or less putting our bets on the more radical elements. This was sort of the spirit of the times. Africa had great promise, and these so-called charismatic leaders seemed to be carrying the torch ahead of everyone else.*

WILSON: Well that is true. They were, but we really didn't give much aid. We figured at least, both Ivory Coast and Senegal were French protectorates. Every minister had his French advisor by his hand. Our job was to get beyond the French. They didn't deal with the Ivorians. I dealt with the university and set up some programs with a Fulbright scholar.

*Q: One theme in my interviews that has permeated when we have talked about West Africa has been the feeling of the French that we were trying to take over in the French speaking countries. Our people say this is the farthest thought from our minds, I mean as far as influence goes.*

WILSON: That's true. We wanted to have more input, but we did not want to shoulder the responsibility that the French were shouldering. Sure we have a lot to put in, but we are not prepared to put in a 500 man garrison in to protect the political situation as the French were and do.

*Q: Did you find yourself particularly in the USIA thing because you are talking about culture and all that which is probably the most sensitive point of the French zone of influence? Did you find yourself being suspect or the enemy by the French?*

WILSON: Well a little bit, by the French, not by the Ivorians. I didn't care about the French. I had good French friends. One was teaching, a Frenchman who had been in Vietnam and had been wounded, I had gotten to know him very well. I was teaching his wife some English. He said, "You know Catherine who is Vietnamese, she doesn't speak French that well and now you are trying to teach her English. What the hell are you trying to do?" I remember one of our first international visitor grantees; there weren't very many people to choose from. I mean we were after him; the British were after him; the Germans were after him. We got him and the French reps obviously. He is now a very wealthy lawyer living in France. Spent time in the Ivory Coast half the time. I got to know, as I said, several political figures who were in information or culture, high up in the party. I had a little summer place, a place down by the beach. Abidjan isn't right on the coast, you have to drive about 30 miles to get down to the coast. But right next to my place was a place that was owned by the secretary general of the national assembly who was a big party person. So I got to know him pretty well. In a small country like that if you were active and you showed that you care about people, they will open up to you.

*Q: Were you married at the time?*

WILSON: I was, yes.

*Q: Where did you meet your wife?*

WILSON: In Northampton, Massachusetts. She was going to Smith College. I was driving through one day and I felt the need of a woman. I called the dorm; I knew somebody in the dorm. The somebody I called wasn't in, but this woman answered. She became my wife. That is how it worked. We got married a week after the Kennedy assassination. We got married on Thanksgiving day in '63. I had to promise I would come back. Originally I had promised to come back in June of '64 to get married. Then when it came close to my leaving in early December, she said, "No, we are not going to wait until you come back. You could come back with one of those Peace Corps girls." So we got married a week after the Kennedy assassination. She finished up that semester at Smith and then she joined me. Then she went back to finish up her degree. She had six months to go. It was before I left the Ivory Coast. It worked fine. It was very interesting. This was hard for me to believe, but when she was corresponding with Smith College to go back and finish up, one of the offices she was corresponding with was the housing office. She was using the Block Postale international mailing address. They wrote back a couple of letters saying there was really no housing available in Northampton, Massachusetts, but when she came they would give her several places in Amherst which is not too far away. She knew where that was. Fine if they have nothing available. She got to Northampton in the fall, and she went into the housing office. They looked at her and said, "Oh, you are white." This is in western Massachusetts, a liberal school like Smith. Oh but you are white, plenty of places here in Northampton. But they figured Amherst had a larger black community than did Northampton. That is kind of amusing. But they were very good to her and let her finish up. She could not live

in the dorms because she had been a married woman and exposed to sexual things other girls would probably not been exposed to.

*Q: Oh my God. What about how easy was it to make friends and deal with the people of the Ivory Coast? I mean sort of government and business people. Was it relatively easy?*

WILSON: Because they were open. They were delighted to talk to people who weren't French. you know my French wasn't so great. I didn't speak Baoulé or any of the other local languages, but I spoke French to some, at least I thought I spoke some kind of French. They were very open. That was very different; that was very good. I said earlier at the first post I felt I accomplished more than any other more sophisticated places I have been because there everything is in place, and an individual really doesn't matter so much. In a small developing country, an individual who can make contact with certain people can matter, can make a difference.

*Q: Well what sort of things were we particularly interested in exposing Ivorians to?*

WILSON: Well, we certainly wanted to expose them to the idea of a multi-party state, since they only had one party really. That we did. We wanted to expose them to some of our culture, our music in particular which was very helpful. We wanted to expose them to the fact that we are alternatives to dealing with the French and just being a lackey in the French order. Those were the things we were interested in.

*Q: How did we view Sekou Toure and Kwame Nkrumah and all at that time? You were part of the African circuit so I am sure that people at the embassy were looking at developments there.*

WILSON: They were getting a lot of AID (Agency for International Development) money. Ivory Coast wasn't. Neither was Senegal.

*Q: Were we concerned in the Cote D'Ivoire about Soviet influence?*

WILSON: We were. We were also very concerned about Chinese influence. On the other hand, one of the major forces influencing the Ivorians was the Israelis. The Israelis set up a service corps for women run by the Israeli army. They were helping with sanitation, things like this. Very important for the Ivory Coast. In fact the lady who was heading it up, Colonel Worth, she and I arrived about the same time, and I remember her well. We were staying at the hotel. I had the most awful case of dysentery, and she told me what to do. She mothered me very nicely. The Israelis were on our side. Quietly but they were on our side.

*Q: What were the Chinese doing there?*

WILSON: Trying to gain some influence. They had no role in the Ivory Coast. The Ivory Coast did not recognize them. The Ivory Coast recognized Taiwan. But they had their own people come in.

*Q: Were we keeping an eye on the army there or not?*

WILSON: No, not on the Ivory Coast army. The Ivory Coast did not have much of an army.

*Q: How about Houphouet-Boigny? What was our view of how he was running things, and whither the Ivory Coast at that time?*

WILSON: He was a benign dictator as far as we were concerned. He was trying to bring his people along. The economy ran on cocoa, timber, this sort of thing. He was doing very well to try to modernize the country, and at least nominally he was democratically elected.

*Q: Was there any sort of opposition there?*

WILSON: Very little. It started to develop but there was very little at the time. But when there was, the only person I knew who had a cause to be killed was a supreme court justice named Boca who was killed by accident. He was in jail. Student movements were very important and I kept the pulse on those myself. One of the things I did was to have contact with our embassies in London and Paris because of many of the Ivorian students would go Paris or sometimes to London as students, so you keep track of them there.

*Q: One of our most influential instruments anywhere is this exchange program. How did it work in...*

WILSON: It was just beginning. We didn't have very many Ivorians who wanted to go. They didn't have enough English to go and study in the United States. We did not have the programs we subsequently got to give English training to grantees before they got into university training. So very few went to the United States. A few but very few.

*Q: The Peace Corps, were they doing much? What were they up to?*

WILSON: They were doing secondary teaching basically in various parts of the country. The ambassador justified getting a swimming pool at his residence on the basis of Peace Corps kids coming in from the bush could use it. So we got the pool and when they tried to use it, he was not too pleased with that. Anyway, they were doing a lot of teaching. That was where the emphasis was.

**GEORGE ALLEN MORGAN**  
**Ambassador**  
**Ivory Coast (1965-1969)**

*Ambassador George Allen Morgan was born in Tennessee in 1905. He received a bachelor's degree in psychology from Emory University and a Ph.D. in philosophy from Harvard University. He was a university philosophy professor before joining the U.S. Army in 1942. After World War II, Ambassador Morgan joined the Foreign Service. His career included positions in Russia,*

*Germany, and Japan, as well as an ambassadorship to the Ivory Coast. Arthur L. Lowrie conducted this interview in 1989.*

*Q: How was it you were chosen to become Ambassador to the Ivory Coast?*

MORGAN: I don't know.

*Q: The Ivory Coast was quite a change for you after your previous experience all in developed industrialized countries. How did you enjoy it?*

MORGAN: Very much. They were friendly, intelligent people, governed by a great President, just getting started with independence after many years as a French colony. I was happy to serve in such a different part of the world, in such a different culture.

*Q: Were you able to travel around the country much?*

MORGAN: Yes, a great deal, and I did so.

*Q: What were the principal goals of the United States at that time in the Ivory Coast given the dominant position of France?*

MORGAN: We had no major goals, just being helpful in a tactful and friendly way.

*Q: Did you have any problems during your period of Ambassadorship with interagency differences or with persuading Washington to pursue the kinds of policies you recommended?*

MORGAN: No interagency differences. I had some difficulty persuading Washington to help finance a dam to generate electric power, but I finally succeeded.

**JOHN D. PIELEMEIER**  
**Peace Corps**  
**Abidjan, Ivory Coast (1966-1968)**

*Mr. Pielemeier was born in Indiana in 1944 and graduated from Georgetown University. He joined the Peace Corps in 1966 and served in the Ivory Coast. He served in numerous USAID projects in Brazil, Liberia, and Southern Africa. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1997.*

PIELEMEIER: I was accepted by the Peace Corps in 1965 for two years of service that would begin after I graduated in 1966. The Peace Corps sent me to the Ivory Coast, where French is widely-spoken. So I prepared for this assignment. I didn't appreciate it at the time, but my parents were amazingly benign about all of this international travel and my going off to strange places. They had paid for my education at Georgetown, which is extremely expensive for a small

town pharmacist to pay for. My mother worked at "the store" managing the financial accounts, handling personnel, cooking pies for the soda fountain, and doing whatever else was needed. My parents didn't say "No" when I decided to go to Georgetown but supported me. When I came up with "crazy ideas" of going to Mexico and into the Peace Corps, they didn't get in the way. They were a little worried about the Peace Corps because nobody in our town that they knew had ever gone into the Peace Corps and Africa seemed to be the most unknown of all places for me to go.

However, it all worked out well. We had a very good training program in Quebec [Canada]. I learned to speak French with the Quebec accent. We also had some training at Oberlin College, in Ohio. Then I went on to Bouaké [about 200 miles north of Abidjan, the capital] in the Ivory Coast, for the last part of the Peace Corps training program. I was expected to be a teacher in a secondary school. With me were other Peace Corps volunteers who were going to almost all of the other Francophone [French speaking] countries of West Africa.

There were several people in that training group who have continued to be involved in developmental activities. I might mention one of them in particular, Margaret or Margie Weld, the sister of the recent Governor of Massachusetts. After she came back from her Peace Corps assignment, she married Jack Vaughn, the Director of the Peace Corps. David Bellamer is a noted African linguist.

*Q: Is there anything about the training program that you would like to mention?*

PIELEMIEIER: I don't think so. I remember one embarrassing event when I was learning Djoula. I had enough trouble speaking French, but we also had to learn Djoula during our six week training program. Djoula is essentially a "market" language used in Mali, the northern part of the Ivory Coast, and the Sahelian states between Senegal and Ghana. I remember in particular learning the numbers in class, which were based on a set of five, rather than 10. This was confusing enough, and then I had to learn the words for these numbers.

One day I went down to the market in Bouake to practice my Djoula. I saw a Malian blanket that I thought I really needed and started bargaining for it. I knew enough in Djoula to say: "How much is it?" The Malian trader gave me a figure. I immediately turned around and translated and recalculated the number in my head, based on a set of five and trying to remember the numbers in Djoula. I knew that according to custom, the next thing I said had to be: "Oh, no, that's too much. You have to lower your price." Automatically, that had to be the next phrase in the bargaining process. So he gave me another price. I turned around again and tried to calculate what it was in my mind and on my fingers. This price seemed better, but I thought that even this second price was higher than I could afford. So I said: "You must reduce the price again." He said: "No." Then he said something else which I eventually understood to mean: "You give me your price." So I calculated a price and gave it to him. He said: "Oh, no," and repeated his price. I repeated my price. I pretended to leave and then came back to negotiate further. He never budged from his price and seemed rather exasperated by the whole process. So I didn't buy the blanket.

The next day I went to class and found out that the price he had quoted to me was lower than mine! [Laughter] So after this experience I became quite humble about learning an African

language and using it.

We really weren't well prepared as teachers. We knew a little bit about teaching. In my case I was assigned to a school in the north central part of the Ivory Coast, in a town of 1,000 people called Katiola. At that time in the Ivory Coast there were very few trained Ivorians, even to teach high school. Most of the teaching at these schools was done by French expatriate "volontaires" [volunteers]. They were satisfying their French military service obligation by teaching in secondary schools in Africa. There were also some British volunteers at another school at Katiola. I was the only Peace Corps volunteer at this school, a new "college moderne."

There was a very strict and, I thought, kind of "mean" French director of the school. He would bring me my mail which came directly to the school. If a letter had a Washington, DC, postmark on it, he would say: "Oh, here is your mail. It must be from the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]."

In any case, mine was probably a typical Peace Corps experience. It was a little easier in terms of living conditions than a lot of Peace Corps volunteers, who lived in the "bush. For a time I lived on the school compound and then moved to the town, a few hundred meters away. Many of my fellow teachers were young expatriates, as I was, so it wasn't as complete an African experience as it might have been.

This was a useful experience for me. However, as I was teaching, I knew that it wasn't enough. I wanted to do something else. Peace Corps volunteers were encouraged to do other part-time activities in addition to their primary assignment. I decided that I was going to teach my students, who were about the level of 8th or 9th grade, how to teach literacy and health education, so that when they went home during the school vacation period, they wouldn't just let their fingernails grow. This is what students normally did, because their fathers and parents wouldn't let them work in the fields, since they were becoming "educated." I thought that these students, who had been drawn to Katiola from all over the country, could teach literacy and basic health education in their very isolated villages. This was the first time that they had been away from home.

Working with another volunteer, I trained a group of about 15 or 20 of my students to teach literacy and maybe another 15 or 20 to teach health education. During the summer school vacation period, I traveled all around the Ivory Coast and visited them in their villages to give them some support. I tried to give them some "technical" support and to help to deal with the problems they had encountered. Some of them had not continued to teach or hadn't gone very far in this direction. It was obviously a problem for them, as relatively junior people in very hierarchical and age-oriented villages to get the village chief to agree that they could teach literacy or health education to adults. In some cases my efforts were successful, and we were all quite pleased with some of the outcomes.

*Q: Apart from that, you were teaching English?*

PIELEMIEIER: Teaching English and anything else that the French didn't want to teach. I taught music and physical education with French as the medium of instruction, as well as six classes of English each day.

*Q: Did you have a fixed curriculum or...*

PIELEMIEIER: We had a curriculum for the English course, based on Peace Corps materials as much as anything. The other subject matter I basically had to develop myself. This secondary school happened to be fairly new, so it didn't have a lot of old books, materials, and notes around for teaching.

It was a good experience. Because of the requirement of working directly with the French and teaching a lot in French, it was almost inevitable that my French became fluent enough to survive. A Frenchman who "hated" Americans taught me French for a while. He would delight in picking on any slight flaw in my spoken French.

*Q: What did you do about that?*

PIELEMIEIER: I stayed with him for quite a while. I guess that it was a good idea because, in the long run, it probably improved my knowledge of French. Unfortunately, one night he got drunk at a neighbor's home and yelled into my open bedroom window, "Do you have whiskey?" I was in bed and kept quiet for the first calls. Finally, I responded in French, "Yes, I have whiskey, but not for you." Silence. Then a large rock was thrown through the window. Luckily, my bed was not under the window.

*Q: How did you find the students?*

PIELEMIEIER: The students were extremely interested in learning English. They were still vibrant and weren't at all "jaded" about education. Quite the opposite. They were a wonderful group of students. Their qualifications and their abilities varied significantly, but they were willing to do just about anything I asked them to do. They were generally well prepared for class. I remember this as being a very positive experience for all of us.

While I was in the Peace Corps, I traveled extensively. I traveled to Togo and Dahomey. I also traveled to East Africa during one summer vacation period, hitchhiking in Kenya and Tanzania. I tried to go to Zanzibar, but that was "off limits." So I got to see a little more of Africa, which also was intriguing to me.

Then, during the last year of my teaching experience, the story began to circulate among my students that I had gone to the "sacred forest" but without the permission of the village "witch doctor." In fact, I did go out to the "sacred forest" with "Petit Jean," an Ivorian who ran a little African restaurant. He wanted to show me some things there. He told me a story that when the French tried to build a road through the sacred forest, some little "gremlins" came up out of the earth and "blocked" the bulldozers. According to the Ivorians, the gremlins broke the plow blades of these big machines. So, the "sacred forest" was still there.

Probably a month or two after my visit to the "sacred forest," I contracted a form of paralysis diagnosed as Guillain-Barré Syndrome. The onset occurred at the end of the school year, just before Christmas in the middle of the night. I had strange prickly sensations up and down my

legs and instinctively felt that I immediately needed to get myself to Abidjan, six or eight hours away by road. Eventually, it became clear that this paralysis wasn't going to go away. I lost all motor function in my legs and shoulders. I had to be medically evacuated from the Ivory Coast and never saw my students again. I was told later on by some of my friends among the teachers that the story flourished that I was paralyzed because I had gone to the "sacred forest" without the permission of the "witch doctor."

*Q: You didn't recognize the cause and effect?*

PIELEMIEIER: Well, you never know about the fine arts of poison and other things in Africa. You never really quite know why and how things occur.

*Q: How long were you in the Ivory Coast?*

PIELEMIEIER: I was there for about 21 months before I was medically evacuated.

*Q: What year did you leave the Ivory Coast?*

PIELEMIEIER: That would have been in January, 1968. I was there from 1966 to 1968.

*Q: So what happened then?*

PIELEMIEIER: To be brief, I was medically evacuated to a US Air Force hospital in Spain, because the Guillain-Barré Syndrome could have been fatal. It is caused by a virus which attacks the limbs and also can attack the vital organs of the body. In my case the virus stopped before reaching the lungs or liver. However, the Peace Corps doctor wanted to get me where an "iron lung" was available, in case my lungs were also paralyzed.

After several weeks in Spain, I was transferred to Washington, DC to Bethesda Naval Hospital. After about two months at Bethesda, the Peace Corps terminated me. Luckily, my sister was a physical therapist. So, I went to Jacksonville, Florida to live with her. She helped a great deal with my physical therapy and gave me a lot of moral support. With her help, I regained much of my strength. I had to learn to walk again. I did exercises first in a swimming pool, where gravity has impact on ones muscles. I gradually was able to walk with crutches and then with a cane.

After three or four months of rehabilitation in Jacksonville, I found a job for the summer of 1968 in Philadelphia, PA, with a firm called "Trans-Century Corporation." This company employed a lot of former Peace Corps volunteers.

**GEORGE E. LICHTBLAU**  
**Regional Labor Attaché**  
**Abidjan (1966-1969)**

*George Lichtblau graduated from the New School of Social*

*Research in New York. He entered the Foreign Service in 1963. He served as a Labor Attaché in Abidjan, Seoul and Tel Aviv. He was interviewed by James Shea in 1992.*

LICHTBLAU: At the end of the year that I was on leave on my Rockefeller Grant, I wrote a book called The Politics of African Trade Unionism which was published by Praeger. On my return, I was then offered my first overseas Foreign Service assignment to Abidjan, Ivory Coast, with responsibility for most of the French-speaking West African countries.

*Q: George, in addition to your African travels, what sort of briefing were you given on general State Department procedures and overall policy before you left for your post?*

LICHTBLAU: I was given a brief period to brush up on my French which I had studied as a young boy, but really I was given remarkably little briefing or preparation for the post. However, having already traveled for four or five months in Africa prior to assuming my post, and having already stopped off in Abidjan and in a number of other French-speaking African countries, I was able to fit in very quickly. In addition to the Ivory Coast, I also covered Upper Volta, which is now Burkina Faso, Niger, Togo, and Dahomey, which is now Benin. On a number of occasions I was also able to travel to other West African countries such as Senegal, Ghana, and Nigeria.

I had certain advantages in that I was very eager to contact people to talk with them. At the same time, none of the embassies had any particular framework of how a labor officer in an African country should operate. The only thing they had was an awareness that my work could be rather sensitive and a concern that my contacts and my moving around and meeting with people could be interpreted as American imperialist interference in the politics of these countries.

Occasionally this did become a problem and there were from time to time complaints from the Ivorian government. But by and large I was able to establish wide and particularly good relations with the leadership of the African trade unions. Many of these people were very happy to take me around to their native towns and villages and to discuss with me their particular problems including sensitive relations with the government, economic problems, tribal conflicts, and so forth, which I widely reported. My reports were apparently received with considerable appreciation by the Department of State and the Department of Labor.

*Q: George, what were the particular political and economic situations at the African posts that you were assigned to at that time?*

LICHTBLAU: Then, as now, there was considerable tension, especially as the result of tribal conflicts in these countries, and this of course also had an impact on the labor movement. Another problem was the influx of migrant workers from neighboring countries into the relatively wealthy Ivory Coast. Then you had such problems as representatives of American firms complaining about government and union blackmail to pay off people. Also the government complained to the Embassy that I was spying and engaging in anti-government activities, which my Ambassador resented, but on the other hand, he couldn't do very much about it, since he did appreciate my being able to move around and talk to people. Later on, the

Ivorian government's sensitivity was reflected in restricting the movement of diplomats and rather conspicuous surveillance of one's movements and contacts, which of course put me on my guard. As a result, the Ambassador became somewhat frustrated and felt that maybe the idea of having a labor attaché wasn't such a good idea.

The Ambassador was George Morgan, who, although he had considerable academic background, proved to be rather incompetent as a diplomat. This was not only reflected in my own judgment, but also in such episodes as government officials and other diplomats, particularly the Belgian Ambassador, whose wife was Ivorian, coming to me and telling me how [Ivorian] President Houphouet-Boigny felt that he could not communicate with our Ambassador because our Ambassador hardly spoke French. Also there were complaints about our Ambassador's behavior that put me in a rather delicate position, since it was not very easy to report such things to anybody in the Department.

At the same time of this overall frustration of the Ivorian government with our Ambassador, there were some complaints about my activities which were reflected reportedly in a statement of the Ivorian Foreign Minister to the Secretary of State. However, I felt that this did not reflect on my record or my future assignments at the time.

*Q: George, can I break in for a second and ask what was the feeling of your fellow officers about your labor activities?*

LICHTBLAU: I think my status and my relations with the Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), and the acknowledgment of my good reporting and so forth were regarded rather highly, even though my relations with the Ambassador were not the best. This was also reflected in good efficiency reports.

*Q: Who was the DCM at that time, and also the political officer? Can you recall?*

LICHTBLAU: Alfred T. Wellborn was the DCM, but I can't remember the name of the political officer offhand. They have retired a long time ago.

*Q: How long did you stay in Abidjan, George?*

LICHTBLAU: I stayed in Abidjan from 1966 until the end of 1969

*Q: During your stay in Abidjan, you only had one ambassador?*

LICHTBLAU: No, shortly before I left, George Morgan was replaced.

*Q: And what was the attitude of Ambassador Morgan towards labor?*

LICHTBLAU: I don't know. I really had very little to do with him. The only thing that I remember is certain admonitions to be cautious in traveling around the country, so that there would not be any complaints from the Ivorian government. Some of these complaints were rather

strange. They came from a representative of the French intelligence to our CIA station chief rather than through formal embassy contacts.

[Let me mention] in this regard, a very peculiar incident. At one time, one of our visitors was a cousin of mine from New York. He worked for a contractor who had obtained a contract to remodel the then Russian Embassy in Abidjan before they broke of relations. I don't know how an American company got such a contract, but apparently it did. Of course we had this man over to dinner, and the next day I was immediately called in by the station chief who said, "How come?" and did I know that this guy was a Soviet spy? (laughter) I said that I didn't know that, and apparently the matter was then dropped. But it is a reflection of the climate of the times.

*Q: George, could you tell us about the internal situation in the Ivory Coast at that time?*

LICHTBLAU: I remember that I was well-received by the Ivorian trade union, the *Union Generale du Travail de Cote d'Ivoire* (UGTCI). A lot of the trade union leaders were rather eager to have a diplomat contact them and show a particular interest in what they were doing. They thought this gave them a certain amount of leverage. Many of them would invite me, take me around, and come and have lunch or come to social affairs.

I was also invited by them, not only in the capital of Abidjan, but also taken around to the various provinces, where people would tell me about their problems, both economic and political. During this time, there were a number of tense periods, particularly as a result of growing unemployment and economic depression during which people turned on immigrant workers. One particular target was the workers from Ghana, who had come in, as well as workers from Upper Volta and Niger, looking for jobs and who were working off the book, so to speak. There were some riots in which people were killed and it was at times rather tense.

The people, on the other hand, were also grateful to the American labor movement, particularly to the African-American Labor Center and to Irving Brown, who showed a growing interest in the trade union movement even though the movement tried to remain neutral and not affiliate directly with the ICFTU. Nevertheless, its political orientation was certainly more to the center-right and there was little evidence then of WFTU influence in the Ivory Coast.

This contrasted with the developments in some of the other countries, particularly in Togo and then Dahomey, now Benin, where visitors from the WFTU and Communist trade unions including the French [Communist] Confederation General du Travail (CGT) became quite obvious. In the Ivory Coast this anti-communist position was of course very much reflected in the breaking of diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union, I think, in 1967.

**RONALD D. FLACK**  
**Commercial Officer**  
**Abidjan (1970-1971)**

*Ronald D. Flack was born in Minnesota in 1934. After receiving his*

*bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota he served in the US Army from 1957-1960. His career has included positions in Athens, Manila, Abidjan, Paris, Algiers, Geneva, and Copenhagen. Mr. Flack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 7, 1998.*

*Q: When you finished the course in 1970 whither?*

FLACK: I was interested and did like commercial work and wanted to get a commercial job. As it turned out they offered me the position of commercial attaché in Abidjan which I took. We went in the summer of 1970 to the Ivory Coast.

*Q: You were there from 1970 to when?*

FLACK: From 1970 until the spring of 1971.

*Q: Could you describe Abidjan when you got there?*

FLACK: It was fascinating. We were not there long so I didn't get into it too much. It was a developing country but at a much more basic level. It was far less developed than Thailand and the Philippines. You had this pervasive French participation in the economy and tremendous French influence. It was almost a department of France. Independence was only eight years behind them. All of the major decision makers in the ministries were French and the Ivorians who were there were well educated in France and very nice people, but really on the margins of their policy making apparatus. They were not truly in charge of the central government.

*Q: I have heard that in some of those countries in those days people would call up from one of the embassies and say, "Let me talk to the white."*

FLACK: Yes. One of the amusing things that I remember from that particular assignment was, you know the French have this system in their military of instead of doing military service you can become a "cooperant" and you are sent off to work on French aid missions and exchange programs, etc. These are young, well educated French people going out to work in various ministries. Well, this one French fellow had been referred to Ambassador Root because he had gone to Harvard and when he arrived he went to see him. Well, Root didn't quite know what to do with him so he called me in and pushed him off on me. Anyway, I got to know Francois very well. He was working as a cooperant in the ministry of finance. Basically he and one other cooperant were running the ministry of finance. They were the decision makers. These were two 24 year old Frenchmen right out of graduate school. This is an example of how influential they were and how they ran things. Incidentally, the cooperant is still a close friend and is a world-famous wine expert.

The economy was superficially rather sophisticated. When you came into Abidjan, they had a very nice airport, and the center of the downtown area had a few tall buildings, a luxury hotel, and a few good roads ran through. If you didn't leave the center of the city you felt you were almost in San Francisco. But, you go one mile beyond that and you drop back two centuries. So there was this little island oasis of Abidjan which was very beautiful with some big buildings

which looked nice in pictures. It looked like a very modern city. That was the only place in the Ivory Coast where there was any city at all. There were other towns which were basically overgrown villages and a little bit of economic activity here and there. But, the economy back then was agriculture, coffee and cocoa. They were trying to industrialize to a certain degree but they were smart in that they didn't follow the disastrous policies of some of their neighbors who as soon as they left the French had said they didn't want to be an agrarian society, we want to be an industrial society. Those countries more or less abandoned their agricultural roots and tried to build steel mills and things like this. The Ivorians, perhaps partially because they listened to the French, said they were an agricultural society and for the time being we want to build on that. In those years and in the years up to fairly recently, actually, the Côte d'Ivoire was doing very well economically because they stayed with their agricultural roots.

*Q: What about the embassy? John Root was the ambassador?*

FLACK: John Root was the ambassador and actually when I arrived we were in the process of closing down the old embassy and moving to a new building, which is the present embassy. We had been in a rather dilapidated apartment house and during the fall of 1970 we moved into this very nice new building. It was in the downtown area but in a small little street that had no name. The Ivorians asked us what kind of a name should they put on it. We thought and thought about it and finally decided that it should be Jessie Owens. Root was the ambassador the entire time that I was there. We had a number of relatively high level visits. The President of the EXIM bank came, for example. I took him around. There were some major projects. A big dam project that was going up. There was a major projects competition from major firms doing business there. And some small business development also.

Because the embassy was small, there was an economic officer and I was the commercial officer, we basically worked very closely together doing some of each other's work. I left early because my wife got ill.

*Q: What about trying to be a commercial officer in a place essentially run by the French? The French have never been terribly forthcoming in these areas.*

FLACK: I didn't feel that too much. They were so overwhelmingly in charge of things. I don't think they feared the competition. They knew we did very little and that it was probably normal that we should do a little more. So, therefore, my activities and any firms coming in, especially on the Ivorian side at a political level, were very much welcomed. They welcomed the idea of diversifying, if you like, in the investment area. They preferred to have more balance in their foreign investment rather than all French. So, where the French might have been a little uneasy with it, they didn't consider it to be a major threat and they knew also that politically the Ivorians wanted more American and other foreign investment to kind of balance the French a little bit.

*Q: What sort of things were you concentrating on? I imagine agricultural machinery might be of interest.*

FLACK: That's right, and a lot of heavy machinery for major projects. I mentioned the dam so Caterpillar and this type of thing was big. There were some projects from light industry. I

remember one where a fellow was trying to establish a broom handle factory to make broom handles very cheaply to send back to the States. Well, you know the machinery for making broom handles is not exactly high technology. But, it was being brought in to set up a broom handle factory.

What was wonderful in doing this kind of work in the Ivory Coast was the travel up country. I went in some cases by small plane and sometime by car. As I said as soon as you leave Abidjan you go back a couple of centuries. There were little villages literally with these little huts. There were the costumes and dancing which were really very picturesque and very interesting.

*Q: Was there any concern of competition from the Soviet side?*

FLACK: Yes, the Soviets were also trying to send in a lot of heavy equipment under their aid program. Now, we did have an ongoing AID program in the Ivory Coast and so did the Soviets. They were trying very hard to come into certain areas. They were pushing more heavy industry which the Ivorians were interested in, but establishing a steel mill was not one of their high priorities.

Now, I didn't mention that there is a lot of iron ore in the Ivory Coast. The development of the iron ore fields was another big major project. It was something that was just becoming of interest when I was there. An aside on that is the elephants running around the area where the iron ore has become red from the iron ore dust and when you see them from the air they look red, which is very strange. They are the famous "Red Elephants" of the Ivory Coast.

*Q: Were there any trade problems that you had while you were there?*

FLACK: I can't remember any specific trade problem. It was basically promotion. Well, there was one case where a young African American entrepreneur came in and was trying to set up a small factory. It became clear after working with him a little bit that he was not exactly a very forthright and reliable person. I think there were a few of those around, not only from the United States but from elsewhere who were out to make a fast buck under dubious circumstances.

*Q: The Ivory Coast was considered the gem of the newly freed colonial countries. So, this must have attracted a lot of ...*

FLACK: Yes, it did. Of course, the president, Houphouet-Boigny, who died a few years ago and was president for life for decades, was the most respected and prestigious African leader for many, many years. He unfortunately like many of these leaders, allowed power to go to his head. He built palaces and such. Nevertheless he was a very smart man. I remember in one meeting with him, a meeting with the president of the EXIM bank, the president of the bank was talking about a certain delay in various projects that they had put money up for and they were not going ahead as fast as they should. Houphouet looked at him and said, "You know, here in the Ivory Coast we want to go very, very rapidly and that is why we go so slowly," which was kind of the wise man's thing, but it made a certain amount of sense. That was the Ivorian logic.

*Q: During the time you were there, how heavy was the hand of the government resting on the*

*people?*

FLACK: Well, that is hard to say. I can't say that it rested very heavily. The biggest building in town was the big agricultural bank and ministry all in one. From that point of view in agriculture the government was present everywhere in helping and managing the agricultural economy. For the rest of it, there was a plan, you know the French way of planning economic development, so in that sense I guess the hand of the government was there. But, I don't recall any feeling of oppression or any kind of political problem in that sense. Houphouet-Boigny was very much loved and respected and the system seemed to be working pretty well, even though it was a very autocratic system.

*Q: Your wife became ill?*

FLACK: Yes. When I had served in Athens a number of years before that, she had almost died from typhoid fever and they gave her a certain drug, chloramphenicol, that reduced her white blood cell production in her bone marrow. We didn't know this until we were in the Ivory Coast where we were taking a malaria suppressant. The one we were taking was very, very strong and she couldn't tolerate it. What it did was affect her blood cell count in her bone marrow. She became very, very ill and was evacuated to Spain. Actually she didn't feel well one day and went to see the doctor and never came home. She went from the doctor's office to the hospital to the KLM plane that took her to Madrid on a stretcher. It took them at least six weeks to determine what she had. She was told she couldn't take suppressants and if she ever got malaria she would die because she could not be treated. So, therefore, they said she could never go back and would never assign her to any malaria post after that. From then on I had a limited medical clearance as far as my wife was concerned. So, they had to move me out quickly. The State Department was going to do something for me but they weren't finding anything interesting for me, but the Department of Commerce said they needed a senior trade promotion officer at the U.S. trade center in Paris. I said "Yes" and we went up to Paris, where I was the senior of two trade promotion officers.

**CHARLES H. TWINING**  
**Ivory Coast, Upper Volta, Niger Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1970-1972)**

**Political Officer**  
**Abidjan (1972-1974)**

*Charles H. Twining was born in Maryland in 1940. He received his BA from the University of Virginia in 1962 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1964. After entering the Foreign Service in 1964 his assignments included Tananarive, Dalat, Abidjan, Bangkok, Cotonou, Douala, Ouagadougou, and Honolulu with ambassadorships to Cambodia and Cameroon. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed Ambassador Charles H.*

*Twining in 2004.*

*Q: So, you moved to the African Bureau when*

TWINING: In mid-1970, I was assigned to my first desk officer job as desk officer for Ivory Coast, Upper Volta and Niger. I stayed there for two years. The Africa Bureau had developed a strong reputation by that time, and there was real competition for the desk jobs. My travel to all three countries in 1962 and assignment to Madagascar, plus ability to speak French helped me rejoin AF.

*Q: What were our interests with those three posts?*

TWINING: As with Madagascar, in those days, we still very strongly that we wanted to keep the Cold War out of Africa. We had an Assistant Secretary of State, when I became the desk officer, Ambassador David Newsom, who felt equally strongly: "Yes, we don't want to go to Africa to fight the Russians; we want to go to Africa for more positive reasons," in support of U.S. national interests, he told us. The Russians were making such a mess of themselves in Africa, anyway, that it was easier to let them stew in their own juices. So, our interests in the beginning of the 1970s did not focus on the Cold War. We were still fairly idealistic, focusing on how to support development, how to enhance stability while broadening the democratic base, as we worked, of course, to strengthen bilateral relations. Peace Corps was larger than ever. By that time, we had Peace Corps in all three of my countries. Along with our AID activity, this represented the general USG approach in those three countries.

*Q: Well, let's take the Ivory Coast. Did you really feel that all three of these were France's problems, and we just wanted to keep a hand in, but not very obvious or very strong?*

TWINING: No, while France obviously had a greater range of interests in its three ex-colonies, we also had our own interests and concerns, including the protection of American citizens. I realized when I was desk officer for a country like Niger that it was sometimes very hard to identify specific U.S. interests, except for these very broad areas that I just mentioned. Ivory Coast was different. Ivory Coast had an economy that was really marching along. It was a key cocoa and coffee supplier, one of the leading producers in the world. I remember once, Mr. Mars, the man who made M&Ms called me to discuss the cocoa market in Ivory Coast. Those things were important, and you accorded them priority. Ivory Coast was really in a case apart from either Upper Volta, as it was known at the time, or Niger. When you have large stretched of sand up in the Sahel region of Africa, it's not as easy to identify your specific interests, unless it is something like voting in the United Nations. In all three countries we had excellent, professional diplomatic representation: John Root in Ivory Coast, William Schaufele in Upper Volta, and Ross McClellan in Niger. Their leadership was important to me.

*Q: Were the governments pretty stable in the three countries?*

TWINING: The government was very stable in Ivory Coast. It was a one-party state in a country of considerable ethnic and religious diversity. As one looks at the chaos there today,

you realize that President Felix Houphouet-Boigny was a very wise and enlightened leader. While keeping his hand firmly on the tiller, he drew out the best talent from the north, the south, and his home area in the center. The government had a lot of balance to it, something his successors failed to do. Niger was relatively stable, but the educated class had far fewer people. It was a country struggling to stay afloat, financially. It stayed afloat thanks to French subsidies, basically.

Then, there was Upper Volta, one of those countries which had already had a coup in 1966. One of the world's poorest countries, with the export of labor its main natural resource, it had a tradition of political and trade union activism. Moreover, Upper Volta, Burkina Faso today, borders six countries. We often worried that if there was too much instability in a place like Upper Volta, it could be contagious to the other countries of the area. As a result, we paid more attention to it than would normally be the case.

*Q: Well, I'm just trying to think now. With these countries, did you feel yourself an Africanist, at this point? I mean, was there a discernible African specialty that one could say "Wear the sash of Africa on it?"*

TWINING: Yes, I guess by that point I did. I had my Masters in African studies. I had had an African posting. I had also lived in Ouagadougou with Operation Crossroads Africa. Now, I was a desk officer, and the African Bureau of State had developed institutionally. It wasn't a handful of old guys, or just a few personnel, any longer. The younger hands were becoming more middle-aged. It was more of a bureau with a voice, a healthy development.

*Q: Tell me about the office, your opportunity to travel, the difference between a desk and a posting in a country.*

TWINING: The Office of West African Affairs was, and remains, the African Bureau's largest. I was fortunate at this learning stage of my life to have two strong Africanists as my bosses. The Director was O. Rudolph Aggrey, a career USIA officer with considerable service in Africa and whose father has been Ghana's most famous educator. His deputy was Harold Horan, also with African assignments under his belt. Both men gave us good policy direction and emphasized the need for us younger desk officers to give full support to our embassies in the field. We also spent considerable time liaising with the embassies of those countries in Washington. We worked hard, and our satisfaction in that office was real. Once I understood my responsibilities I had an orientation trip to the field in 1971 to visit my three countries and consult with the French in Paris, enhancing my own understanding and effectiveness as a result.

My experience on the desk convinced me that a desk officer is THE only person in government who knows – or is supposed to know – everything that the United States is doing in the country for which he or she is responsible. Thus, whether it is the National Science Foundation wishing to support a research project touching on your country, the Department of Commerce undertaking a trade initiative, or National Geographic Magazine intending to do a feature article on Ivory Coast, you as desk officer need to be on top of things so you can make a useful contribution or point out potential problems or demonstrate a conflict with

U.S. policy. No one else in Washington will know the minutiae of the relationship that the desk officer does. When handling three countries, that was a lot to absorb, but it was a good challenge. In a posting to the field, on the other hand, you follow what is happening in your area of concern, e.g., the political or economic situation, and inform and analyze it for your ambassador and Washington, while you are living in a foreign land and learning what makes it tick, enhancing your knowledge and understanding. What you do overseas produces a product to be used by the government “consumer” in Washington.

*Q: So, were talking about 1971?*

TWINING: 1970 to 1972.

*Q: So, then what happened?*

TWINING: In 1972, I was assigned to Abidjan, Ivory Coast. It is the sort of thing that should happen in the Foreign Service but doesn’t happen often enough, where either you do a country and then you do the desk for that country, or vice versa. It was easy for me to go to Ivory Coast, a country with which I already had familiarity and could fit right in. At the same time, I had just married my wife, Irene, and it was a good place for her to learn the Foreign Service life. Not only was there good living and safety in the capital city of Abidjan, but the place was developing rapidly. It had a modern hotel, with even an ice skating rink by the time we were about to leave. President Houphouet-Boigny had overseen the construction of an excellent road network all over the country. Every year he would hold the independence celebration in a different part of Ivory Coast. Government resources would pour into that area. I remember the celebration of August 1972 in Odienne, a dusty Sahelian town up in the remote northwestern corner of the country, next to Mali. The government put in resources to pave the streets and build a hotel, administrative buildings and a stadium. Water and electricity were expanded. It was a way to get development assets and services into an area. “An assignment” to Abidjan meant that if you were newly married, every weekend you and your spouse could take off for the west, or the east or the coast, or elsewhere up country, on good roads, stay in a lovely little hotel, and see the countryside in the area. It was a very good posting.

*Q: Tell me a little bit about the background of your wife; how you met her, and her background.*

TWINING: A friend with whom I had done African studies at SAIS said to me, at the beginning of the 1970s, “I know a person who went to Kent State University years ago, and she is now working at the White House. I would like you to meet her.” She said, “I’ll throw a little party, and is there a diplomatic couple we could invite?” I said, “Sure, there is the number two of the Ivory Coast Embassy and his wife, why don’t you invite them.” She said, “Great, why don’t you pick up this girl and the Ivorian couple and come out to my house?” So, that was my wife’s introduction not only to me but also to the Foreign Service, in a way. It got us together. It got my wife out of the White House, just before Watergate happened in mid-1972, good timing from her point of view.

*Q: What did she think about the Nixon White House?*

TWINING: She had worked on Capitol Hill before the Nixon White House. She enjoyed the glamour, but the hours were very long. She and I began going to White House parties together. I said, "Have you noticed what people talk about? They talk about not only what they do at the White House, but they're talking about all those bad guys out there." It was like they were circling the wagons. I remember saying to my wife, "That is not a healthy attitude. There is something wrong." It was just a month or two after I took my wife out of there that the Watergate break-in occurred. Somehow, it wasn't a complete surprise.

*Q: You were in Ivory Coast from when to when now?*

TWINING: We went out to Abidjan in mid-1972 and stayed until mid-1974. I was the political officer in the embassy. I supervised the consular section as well. It wasn't a tiny embassy like Tananarive, but was a medium-size post with the very good career ambassador I mentioned earlier, and the same Deputy Chief of Mission I had had in Madagascar, John Cunningham. It was always interesting. It was interesting as a political officer to see the positive and negative aspects of a one-party state. You saw what seemed positive efforts at economic development. People were getting wealthier, without question. Many people from neighboring countries were coming there to work because they could be richer than staying in Ghana or Upper Volta or Mali. Ivorians described their country as the "new Africa."

Yet you also worried about a one-party system which brooked no opposition. Ivorians closed up when you tried to pick their brains about whether they were able to have their voices heard. One of our concerns was the succession to Houphouet-Boigny, who was already old. There didn't seem to be a good succession mechanism lined up. In retrospect I called it right when I predicted it would be Finance Minister Bedie, but that was hardly the way it was supposed to work. It was closed, politically, which didn't make it that easy to work. At the same time, the Ivorians were nice, and they would invite you to their homes, and they would come to your home. Again, it was a lovely country, and yet there was something less than open in this one-party situation.

*Q: In other words, if a political officer wants to go out and find out what the opposition was, I take it you couldn't?*

TWINING: You weren't sure where the opposition was because it was virtually invisible. If anything, you would find there were regional differences. You would find there were differences of view within the party. There were generational differences. Those things, with time, you could start to put your fingers on. Did that amount to real opposition, per se? It amounted to trends, maybe. You could start pulling out trends from those differences. But, where was the opposition? There was a man in central west Ivory Coast, who used to write us letters a lot. I thought he was crazy. He went on and on, scribbling on and on. He is now the man who is president of Ivory Coast, Gbagbo. At the time, was he an opposition figure? I suppose. The word "opposition" didn't exist. He was, and yet his way of showing his opposition was by writing these strange letters to the American Embassy. It made you wonder about the quality of the opposition. So, it was just an interesting time in this one-

party state, which, before and shortly after independence had crushed the opposition or, more often, absorbed it. President Houphouët-Boigny was determined to keep it that way. He did so until his death. Unfortunately, he held on for too long.

*Q: In addition to your internal watch, what were some of the representative bilateral policy issues you raised with the government?*

TWINING: This was a period during which the U.S. was lobbying very actively on the text of the Law of the Sea Treaty. We made a number of demarches to the Ivorian Government to seek its understanding or support. We arranged meetings for visiting American delegations. Issues such as Exclusive Economic Zones, deep seabed mining, the right of innocent passage, and the definition of territorial waters were all very important to the U.S. We probably placed somewhat greater importance on our discussions on Law of the Sea matters with Ivory Coast than with some other francophone countries in the region because of the Ivorian role as a regional leader and because there was more expertise in the government.

Indeed, we were quite active in working with the Ivorian Government on regional matters in general, both in seeking its views and in influencing it to weigh in with others in the region to defuse problems. Because of the centralized nature of the government, it was often the Ambassador who did this at a high level, particularly if we needed action taken, but the DCM and I did our share, as well. Ivory Coast was the leading member of the sub-regional Council of the Entente (with Upper Volta, Niger, Togo, Dahomey), and the Entente heads of state would meet or communicate regularly to compare notes. Ivory Coast was also an important member of the larger francophone African grouping and of the Organization of African Unity. Issues on which we would have compared notes with the Ivorians regularly included concerns over the direction Dahomey was taking after the 1972 military coup and instability in Upper Volta and Ghana.

Much of my time was spent in preparation for major international conferences in Abidjan. One was that of World Peace through Law, in 1974. This organization, headquartered in Washington, brought together jurists from around the world every four years at the highest levels to discuss legal issues. As the Embassy control officer, I was in constant contact with members and staff of the Ivorian Supreme Court for a year or more beforehand to help make arrangements. A massive U.S. delegation headed by just retired Chief Justice Earl Warren and Justice Thurgood Marshall participated in the conference. Another major undertaking requiring considerable advance planning and liaison work was for a meeting of the Interparliamentary Union. A large delegation of Senators (e.g., Strom Thurmond, Jacob Javits) and Congressmen, and their spouses descended on us for the meeting, mobilizing all personnel and assets of the Embassy. Note that, with its world class Hotel Ivoire, Abidjan was one of the brightest lights on the West African coast and attracted many visitors and hosted many meetings. That all meant work for the Embassy.

*Q: What about the role of the French there?*

TWINING: While the number of French citizens in country was the highest of any Francophone country at the time, I believe, actual French personnel within the government

had dropped to relatively few. Frenchmen were still training the military and intelligence services, for example. On the other hand, there were many French “cooperants,” working mostly as school teachers. France had, and continues to maintain, an intervention force battalion, just outside of Abidjan. The Ivorians were always very aware that it was there. France left it there in case there was a problem in another country, and it needed to dispatch troops. The rumor mill also had it that France wanted to ensure a stable Ivory Coast, where its political and economic interests were so great, at any cost, and would deploy its troops, if necessary. The French embassy was strong, and it had more of an “in” with the President and ministries, than did any other embassy. The President was certainly pro-French. It didn’t become a competitive relationship between them and us, however. Because it wasn’t an equal relationship, we didn’t feel the need to compete.

*Q: Although you were a political officer, I would think that once the French get in and have influence, they don’t tolerate, if they can, any competition, particularly from the Americans. Is this the case there?*

TWINING: Oh, yes. It was very much the case. I think it’s the case anywhere the French had colonies, at that point of time. They still wanted to retain as much of a monopoly as they could. The French had major commercial interests in relatively rich Ivory Coast. They wanted to have it all and made it very tough for Americans to compete. Often, success for an American meant getting a French or Ivorian firm, or French-Ivorian, more likely the case, to represent the American company, rather than an American coming in and setting up shop himself. Sometimes the representation worked out well, sometimes not. To be an American investor, like Eveready batteries, took courage.

*Q: Did the French need to live a sort of an extraterritorial existence?*

TWINING: Many did. Not all. Some mixed well with Ivorians, partly because it was in their business or work interest to do so. There were also a number of French Ivorian couples, going back to their school days in France. Others didn’t, mix well. I should also mention the importance of the Lebanese community. The authorities welcomed them; they could invest their money safely and reconvert it without problem. They could make use of the Lebanese business networks throughout West Africa. French-speaking, they could represent a French firm. Still, the French were most important. They had important interests, in cocoa, in the timber industry. They not only made money for themselves, they helped make money for Ivorians. It was not a totally negative situation.

*Q: A lot of people from neighboring countries came in to work, didn’t they?*

TWINING: Yes. Perhaps as much as a quarter of the population was foreign: Maliane, Voltaico, Nigerians, Nigeriano, Dahomeans, Ghanaians, Togolese, Liberians. They often performed menial labor jobs on the plantations and in the cities. Their remittances back home were important sources of income for their countries.

A wager was reportedly made at independence between Houphouet-Boigny and the more socialist-oriented Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana: “Let’s see which one of us comes out on top,

i.e., which system – free market or socialist – would be more successful over time.” Indeed, when I was there 1972 to 1974, clearly Ivory Coast had come out on top. Ghana had gone through instability, coups. Ivory Coast had stability and growth. Ghanaians were coming to Ivory Coast to work, not vice versa. That was the reality. The Ghanaians looked at the Ivorians as people who liked to control, who liked to give orders without getting their hands dirty. The Ivorians, I think, looked at themselves as the people who were managers. That was the perception at the time.

*Q: Besides the French, were other embassies particularly active in Abidjan?*

TWINING: Note that President Houphouet-Boigny was so distrustful of communism that he would allow no embassies of communist countries to be established there. He saw any such embassies as elements of subversion, something Ivory Coast did not need. Indeed, I followed the fates of some Ivorian students who, unable to get scholarships to Western countries, ended up having to sneak out to attend Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow, or something similar. Not only were their degrees not recognized upon their return home, but they often brought back tales of racism or harsh living when they came back, hardly helpful to the communist cause. Through its Abidjan embassy operation, Taiwan made a major effort to keep the PRC out of Ivory Coast and worked through government authorities to seek to dissuade other members of the Council of the Entente from recognizing Beijing, either. The Taiwanese Embassy was very successful with Ivorian leaders during my time. Note that the South Koreans made a similar effort against North Korea through their Abidjan embassy, as well, acknowledging frankly that they were present for no other reason. Canada was quite active in Abidjan, motivated in particular by the need to show its Quebecois citizens that it was interested in the French-speaking countries of the world.

**David Shear**  
**Director, USAID, REDSO**  
**Abidjan (1972-197?)**

*Mr. Shear was born in the Bronx, New York in 1932. He graduated from New York University and Harvard. His career in the Foreign Service included posts in Nigeria, Tanzania, Ivory Coast and Senegal. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.*

SHEAR: Yes. We had decided before the Senior Seminar was over in August that I would become the first director of the regional office in Abidjan. Although directors' positions were still being approved in the White House, this job was brand new, so Sam could appoint me to it directly.

One of the problems in moving to Abidjan was that there was no adequate schooling for American personnel. The U.S. ambassador was sending his four children to a French school and was opposed to establishing an international school. But clearly some arrangements had to be made if we were to attract the level of young talent that I wanted. I also had a strong personal

interest; I hoped that our two young children would have an opportunity to learn French but also study within an English language environment. The result was, through the efforts of Irv Rosenthal of my staff, a small international school that started with eight students in accommodations provided to us by the U.S. Information Service. By year two, that school was renting its own facility and had 80 students, half of whom were Americans. It turned out to be an excellent educational opportunity for my own kids because they were with children of the Ghanaian ambassador, the Korean ambassador and some of the foreign businessmen who were Anglophone.

As part of my assignment to REDSO, I also served as the U.S. representative to the African Development Bank. That was important to me because having some responsibility for 19 or 20 countries receiving U.S. foreign aid, I had no counterpart government, no counterpart country to work with. The Ivory Coast, where the regional office resided, was receiving virtually no U.S. assistance because of its level of per capita income and where it stood on the scale of poverty. As a result, the African Development Bank received a good deal of my attention. The first task, however, was to organize this new office with a sense of mission to serve and support other posts. A second responsibility was to allay concerns and fears from these other posts that a “super office” was being established that would impinge upon their own responsibilities and authorities. So, within about a month after my arrival, we hired some very good consultants whom I had known for some time, and invited all the regional directors to come to Abidjan to discuss how this office could best serve them. That was extremely useful, I think. It by no means removed all the problems, but it went a long way in letting people vent their concerns and let me and my staff try to respond to them.

Within a month after my arrival, I also experienced first hand the role of U.S. ambassadors in some of these smaller posts. I got an almost unintelligible telephone call one afternoon from Bamako, Mali - which at that time had to go through Paris - and it was a very poor connection, but I could tell that there was a very irate gentleman at the other end of the line. It turned out to be Ambassador Bob Blake in Mali, screaming at me that the autoclave had exploded the night before and demanding to know what I was going to do about it. I had not the faintest idea what an autoclave was. One of the engineers on my staff who had just come back from Mali reported that it was part of a large veterinary laboratory that had been built outside of Bamako. The lab, it seems, was really a white elephant that had been designed inappropriately for the environment, and the autoclave (very important for the making of vaccines) was a very sensitive piece of machinery that wasn't built to the right specifications for that part of the world. I guess the fluctuations in current, which were not defended against properly, were such that indeed it did explode. I had no idea what to do about it except put someone on an airplane for a firsthand look. Bob Blake later became and is to this day a very good friend of mine. We still talk with some amusement about how it took me by surprise when the ambassador called screaming at me to do something about his autoclave. That project was also very useful as a lesson in inappropriate design.

*Q: What was the project again?*

SHEAR: The project was the building of a very large veterinary laboratory on the outskirts of Bamako, Mali, for the manufacture of livestock vaccines. Those vaccines were without question

very badly needed and could be well used by the Mali livestock industry. Migrant herders made up about 30 percent of the population, so it was a very important economic activity. These were knowledgeable herders who well appreciated the importance of health for their animals. The French had for years very substantial health programs for livestock. As a result, I got involved with redesigning parts of that lab and staffing it with two full-time technical assistance people from ORT who were experts in repair and in training. By the time I left REDSO just 22 months later, the laboratory was functioning well and the Malians were running it. It was a good exercise in seeing what one could do to redress a poorly designed project by involving very practical people and a government willing to cooperate in getting the problems corrected.

One of the major livelihoods in all of West Africa - then and now - is livestock production. The movement of the herds across the whole Sahelian Zone and down into the coast, to Lagos, to Cote d'Ivoire and to Benin is a major economic phenomenon. AID spent a good deal of effort in trying to build analytical systems to understand the movement of those cattle, how they were marketed, the number of people involved in the transactions and so on. We also then began to evaluate livestock programs that had already been undertaken. One of the things that we found - it is amusing in retrospect, but wasn't at the time - was that of \$125 million worth of livestock projects funded by AID or the World Bank, only two were remotely successful. Those were projects which concentrated on animal health and not animal production and marketing. It was very difficult to get a handle on how these animals were marketed in a way which would modify the traditional practices.

*Q: Could you determine why they were not successful?*

SHEAR: Yes, I think we very clearly understood why, but it was hard to correct in the context of the projects. They did not conform to the traditional husbandry practices of these herders. Very complex activities involving a series of middlemen were commonly accepted, which increased the price of the cattle to a point almost prohibitive in terms of entering into the commercial market. It was cheaper to buy beef along the coast, shipped in from Argentina - probably at some subsidized price - than it was to buy from Mali.

*Q: But these weren't marketed as livestock?*

SHEAR: They were marketed, and the constraint was not a Masai East African kind of problem where the people were reluctant to sell their cattle. The prices they had to charge were very high in relation to the quality of the animals. The marketing system was so complex and so embedded within society that at each step of the way a certain incremental cost went into selling a cow.

*Q: Well, was the Entente Fund active at that time?*

SHEAR: Yes, and we were very much involved in it.

*Q: Why were we supporting that? What is the Entente Fund?*

SHEAR: The Entente Fund was established in support of five countries in an attempt to give them greater cohesion under French influence. Those countries were the Ivory Coast, Niger, then

Upper Volta, Togo and Benin. Designed to support capital projects and loan programs, it essentially was to be linked to a very senior French technical assistance person who was an advisor to the Africans and directed both the policies and the movement of capital throughout the fund. The fund was very prestigious, and the Entente itself was seen as a politically desirable entity by the heads of state involved. So, with French assistance, there were, in effect, chief of state villages in every one of those five countries, even very poor economies like Niger. Neighboring chiefs of state could visit periodically - usually every two years - and there was a whole infrastructure laid out, with remarkable villas for them to reside in for two days at a time. And they were kept up at great expense.

*Q: I'm curious; why those five countries? Why not some of the other Francophone countries?*

SHEAR: Think of what was around those countries. There was Ghana on one side and Liberia on the other. Guinea, anathema to the French, of course, is west and north along the coast. With the exception of Mali and Chad on the other side, they form not a cohesive but some kind of coherent party politic. They were also at one point a semiautonomous component of the French Equatorial Empire, which was run out of both Brazzaville and Dakar.

*Q: And this arrangement appealed to us because we were then pushing regional programs.*

SHEAR: That's correct. It was a way of aiding the Ivory Coast, which was receiving no U.S. assistance, and Benin and Togo, very small countries for which it was hard to find viable programs other than some capital projects. So we tried to support the Entente Fund and we thought that it could also ameliorate some border tensions between the Ivory Coast and Upper Volta. Upper Volta was relatively very important to the Ivory Coast, because the latter had a great labor shortage and the Upper Voltans supplied much of its farm and plantation workers.

I want to talk about the Ivory Coast a little bit because it was a quite extraordinary economy. The Entente Fund was a mechanism for rationalizing assistance to countries under the terms of the Korry Initiative; this policy did not otherwise provide them with assistance. Sam Adams was very concerned about an \$18 million loan that had been concluded just before I went out to Abidjan; it was a small-scale entrepreneur development loan fund. The loan had been authorized the year before but had not been signed, so my first task was to negotiate it, get it signed and begin to get it implemented. This was very instructive, because it introduced me to a form of assistance I wasn't familiar with - a development loan fund of itself in the field that called for working with small-scale entrepreneurs and the local banking system. At the same time that that was going on, the French advisor to Paul Kaiya, Secretary General of the Entente Fund, was forced to leave because of illness, and I offered to provide a U.S. senior counselor as his replacement. For that position, we got a very competent ex-AID Director who spoke French well, was a very good economist and knew banking.

That permitted me, an American, to be accepted as I facilitated the negotiation of a very complicated loan agreement. That agreement had been hammered out in Washington and certainly justified the REDSO presence. It was designed without thought of whether the implementing countries could manage all the preconditions to disbursement, special conditions, and so on. It was an amazingly complicated loan, and it took about three months to conclude

negotiations and begin implementation. The loan was evaluated about four years later when the funds had been disbursed, and was relatively successful.

*Q: What did it cover?*

SHEAR: It was to support modernization of small-scale enterprise within the five countries. At the same time, the U.S. advisor came up with a brilliant idea to capitalize the loan repayments, so we developed a guarantee fund. That guarantee fund within about five years grew to \$80 million; it probably was as beneficial as the direct loan itself and used for the same purposes - in effect, recycled.

*Q: Were there other projects for the Entente Fund?*

SHEAR: We also then got the African Development Bank interested in co-financing with us within the context of the Entente Fund. We actually built a major highway in Benin, almost the length of the country, with co-financing from the African Development Bank and USAID. Along with the European Development Fund and the African Development Bank we rebuilt the entire port of Cotonou. Inside the port of Cotonou was a very large lagoon which hosted a vitally important shrimp fishery, and we knew that creation of this harbor would pose very substantial environmental problems for the lagoon. We undertook an extensive study that resulted in major breakwaters being placed in the lagoon associated with the port. They proved to be extremely successful and preserved the shrimp fishery, which at that time sustained about 12,000 households. It was a hard project to undertake because of its complications, its environmental implications and the fact that it opened up the port of Cotonou for international trade. I had no way of knowing then that Cotonou would later become a very important point of entry for U.S. emergency assistance. We used that facility for bringing in emergency aid when the drought struck a year and a half later - just good luck.

The period at REDSO was a wonderful experience for me. I learned an awful lot about capital projects and about both the positive aspects and limitations of engineers. We had some pretty competent engineers who needed special training in how to negotiate their way through problems. Most of their approaches to problem solving were essentially mechanistic. In Africa, mechanistic solutions are not solutions. We actually brought in a consultant to work with them on negotiation techniques. I don't think we were very successful, but it was a noble effort. One thing we were accomplishing, though, was to begin building a cadre and a roster of African consultants to work with us. I felt very strongly that assistance being provided by U.S. consultants was expensive and that those individuals were generally not knowledgeable enough about West Africa. Further, as I traveled around West Africa I met many extremely competent people in the local private sector, in universities and in African Foundations that we should use. So we began to build a roster of African consultants and included African consultants in our project design and evaluation extensively.

*Q: What were some main areas that REDSO was supporting in its projects and programs?*

SHEAR: The bulk of our ongoing projects were capital activities. We had a portfolio at any one time of over \$600 million in such projects, ranging from roads such as I earlier described in

Benin to bridges like the John F. Kennedy Bridge in Niger, begun years earlier and very important for opening up the southern part of the country. Many of the projects dealt with grain storage as well as transportation. At that time we believed - for the wrong reasons - that we could stabilize prices by establishing grain storage centers. I think that was a misguided regional activity, but we put it in place and put a lot of money into it. We built a number of educational facilities, but probably 50 percent of the money went into transportation and associated projects. It was a very large portfolio, it was very important that we report on it regularly to our clients (as we thought of the AID missions around us). So we published every 60 days a report on the status of every project in our portfolio, which usually numbered between 60 and 80 activities. It meant we had to visit every one of them - part of my strategy to make certain that we traveled - and indeed the staff traveled a great deal.

*Q: How was the morale of the REDSO staff, considering all that traveling?*

SHEAR: I think morale was pretty high, because the staff really felt they were having an impact on the successful execution of projects. Had I stayed longer, I probably would have witnessed some of the wearying effects of that much travel because some of our people were on the road 40 or 50 percent of the time. The downside was that when they weren't traveling they wondered how useful they were. We had to find a different kind of role for them.

*Q: What were the categories of expertise that you had at that time?*

SHEAR: We had a staff of about eight engineers, three full-time contract officers, three full-time procurement officers (very much involved in Food for Peace), two or three PL 480 officers and about 10 project officers. These individuals played significant roles in commodity import programs and balance of payment support, which was becoming an increasingly important component of our foreign aid program.

We also began to build a very strong staff of social scientists. As we became more involved in rural development and the cattle industry, it was obvious that we needed to be familiar with local cultures. I hired the first full-time anthropologist in an AID mission in Africa and the first environmentalist hired in the field. With specialists such as agricultural economists who knew a great deal about Africa and West Africa, we built a very strong staff. That staff would become increasingly important as a devastating phenomenon - an enormous drought - would ravage that part of the world before long. We were asked to handle at the Port of Dakar commodities coming in from the United States for emergency relief. At first they were not substantial amounts, but they were commodities of a nature we hadn't encountered before. I also became aware in my own travels that the crop failures of the year before, because of no rain, were about to be repeated, generating a growing sense of alarm. Such was the seriousness of the problem that the government of the Ivory Coast opened its borders and permitted cattle, migrant cattle ranchers and farmers to move into northern Ivory Coast from both Mali and Upper Volta. Benin and Togo did the same for cattle coming out of Niger, and so began the realization that there was a major crisis occurring, the dimension of which we really didn't yet understand.

*Q: Before we get to that, would you give some more details about the Ivory Coast at that time?*

SHEAR: The only programs we had then with the Ivory Coast were regional; we could have no bilateral activities. The Entente Fund was thus of much interest to us because it permitted us to proceed. The other projects we had were the inoculation program for smallpox and some fairly marginal programs. Our presence in the Ivory Coast was very modest indeed.

*Q: Was that welcomed in the Ivory Coast, the fact that we weren't doing much for them?*

SHEAR: It was always a sensitive issue. When the government would make noises about the number of people I was bringing into REDSO on a permanent basis, we would ask Paul Kaiya to talk to the President about the Entente Fund projects and how they enhanced the prestige of the Ivory Coast in relation to the other four Entente countries. The Ivory Coast was also getting the bulk of the \$18 million dollar loan I discussed earlier, because it was most prepared to use it.

The Ivory Coast was quite different from any other African country that I had been in. For the first time, I encountered extensive industrialized agriculture in Africa - I'd seen attempts at it by the Belgians when I visited Zaire shortly after independence, but they were then in decline. Agriculture in the Ivory Coast was growing, and growing very hopefully. It was developing the way I had anticipated that Nigeria would grow in the agricultural sector before oil was discovered. The Ivorian agricultural economy was built around the concept of the industrialized plantation run by a parastatal - a government-owned agency - on a very small percentage of the total acreage of any single unit it formed (maybe 10 to 20 percent of a rubber plantation). The remainder was owned by small farmers. The core plantation provided technical assistance and infrastructure and even schooling and health services to the outlying farmers. From the air it looked like one huge plantation, but in reality it might have involve four or five hundred small farmers and one core plantation. They did this with rubber, with palm oil, banana and pineapple, and were extremely successful. It was a very effective way of getting modern agrarian practices to the farmers, providing them with social services and keeping them on the land itself.

*Q: Were these all French run, or were they run by Africans?*

SHEAR: They were almost all French run and partially owned by French companies. They were at the same time extremely effective and very profitable for both the French and the Ivorian participants. There was a certain amount of equity in them; the Ivorian farmers also did extremely well. The problem that emerged then, and since, was that flush with foreign exchange earnings from agricultural commodities, the Ivory Coast began to undertake massive capital projects using short-term borrowing, creating great difficulties with the international creditors. The IMF came in while I was there to bail them out and forced the government into some austerity programs, which they adhered to for a few years until they satisfied the IMF and then embarked upon another binge of borrowing.

But it was a fascinating country. Rural services functioned better than in any other African country I'd worked in, and government stores supplied basic commodities fairly effectively. So the social system, the infrastructure systems and the health systems all worked quite well. We thoroughly enjoyed living there, I must say. It was difficult to get to know the Ivorians. We found it much easier to get to know other Africans, but that may be because the Ivorians tend to be more retiring and I did not have a direct relationship with them.

*Q: What about the African Development Bank?*

SHEAR: The African Development Bank was in essence a REDSO responsibility, and I thoroughly enjoyed working with it. The situation in the Bank at that time was extremely healthy and positive. A very competent Tunisian, Labidi, was the president. I had in effect witnessed the birth of the ADB many years before at a meeting of the DAC in Paris when its chairman took the initiative to help the Africans. The latter did not want any foreign equity ownership in their bank, so it was 100 percent owned by African governments, and suffered in size because of that. The Nigerians were most adamant in wanting to keep it an African institution. One of my tasks was to begin discussions to get the professional leadership of the Bank to acknowledge that it needed outside equity and to make them realize that the U.S. Government was prepared to play a significant role. I was authorized to offer and negotiate a \$10 million bilateral loan to the Bank, despite the fact that we no longer had loan programs on a bilateral basis. This was considered an exception because it was being made to the Bank, and so the president of the African Development Bank and I negotiated, and I got approval for the \$10 million.

*Q: That's before the Special Fund?*

SHEAR: Yes, but it turned out to be a precursor to the Special Fund. We had a number of joint activities with the Bank and I had arranged for highly competent U.S. professionals to provide technical assistance with project design. Two full-time AID employees were sent to the Bank in that capacity. They were very much appreciated, and both enjoyed their assignments.

Meanwhile, the \$10 million loan approval had to go to the Senate for Congressional notification, but I was unaware of that constraint. I negotiated the loan with the president of the African Development Bank and his senior financial advisor and requested from Washington authorization to finalize the transaction. We waited and waited...and waited. Finally, in frustration, I phoned Al Disdier, the senior officer in the Capital Projects Office of the Bureau, who hemmed and hawed and said the process was underway and I would get the authorization any day.

Not surprisingly, I began to get polite but concerned inquiries from the president of the African Development Bank, as he wanted to make a major ceremony out of this groundbreaking direct loan from the U.S. Government. I learned only then that there was an objection on the part of one of the Senators and that the loan was not to be authorized. It was one of the most difficult situations I encountered in my entire foreign service career.

*Q: Who objected, and why?*

SHEAR: I think it was Senator Percy, but I'm not absolutely certain. For one thing, there was the precedent of the United States providing capital to the African Development Bank. The other objection was more technical in that it had not been thoroughly discussed as a major new initiative. It was not just a normal project that hadn't been presented to Congress; it was a different kind of creature.

*Q: So it never went forward?*

SHEAR: Alas, no. I finally received a cable in which I was in effect asked to stand down. By that time, though, the ADB was planning its annual meeting in East Africa, and the president of the Bank had included on the agenda this “significant achievement.” I was scheduled to be present to sign the loan agreement with him. Instead, I had to cable him that it was not going to be authorized. I was so dismayed that I just packed up my family and left on R&R.

*Q: Sounds like somebody in Washington hadn't handled it well.*

SHEAR: That is an understatement. It was a major disappointment and embarrassment. When Labidi came back from the ADB meeting and I met with him, he was extremely understanding and very gracious about it, but I'm sure he was bitterly disappointed. It was one of many occasions in my career when the U.S. Government was not the most constant of partners. Because of the nature of our governance system, complicating factors arise after commitment to interfere with execution and implementation. Regretfully, this occurred many times.

*Q: I'd like to move now to the Sahel Development Program, in which you played a central role. What happened that led to that?*

SHEAR: The Sahel Development Program grew out of a natural disaster of extraordinary proportions which was slow in being understood by the donors and in some measure even by the Sahelian countries themselves. In 1970 the rains began to diminish, and by 1971 almost failed completely throughout the entire Sahelian zone. But the drought, which went on for almost three years, followed a decade of much higher than normal rainfall. As a result, nomadic herders, who comprised about 25 percent of the Sahel population, moved increasingly into the edges of the Sahara. There, because of higher rainfall, areas that had not seen grass for a century or more had begun to produce grasses once more. This led to a substantial increase in the number of cattle, sheep and goats making up the nomadic herders' livestock throughout the entire zone. This is a zone of enormous size, stretching from the borders of the Central African Republic to the Atlantic Ocean - an area geographically the size of the United States. The Sahelian Zone is roughly half of that, about 1.5 million square miles. It is rolling grassland, broken with acacia trees and some arabica trees from which gum arabic is derived. But for the most part, it is populated intermittently by large numbers of cattle led by the herders in search of grass and water on a fairly predictable series of grazing patterns. The decade of higher rainfall had led the nomadic herders, who were mostly Fulani, farther and farther north into the semi-desert areas, so the impact of the drought when it arrived was to isolate large numbers of them with their cattle. They were cut off from their normal grazing patterns and normal sources of water, making conditions desperate.

So great were the dimensions of the disaster that over 25 million people were directly affected, losing all or a significant amount of their crops so that they could no longer sustain themselves. Eight million of them were forced to leave their homes and move into areas of food availability - higher rainfall and some water. The number of people lost to the drought is unknown, but it is estimated conservatively that at least 100,000 died. Millions of cattle, sheep and goats did not survive; the Sahelian livestock herds were reduced by about 50 percent. In the decade preceding

the drought, however, the numbers of livestock had increased so substantially that even in the normal grazing areas overgrazing was significant. There was very little margin for error, very little cushion with the decline and almost complete cessation of rains for two years.

Foreign assistance in support of this disaster was extremely slow in coming, in large measure because the information was slow in being gathered and understood. To where I sat in REDSO came reports from my staff who were traveling extensively throughout the Sahel - reports of crop failures, but on a localized basis. We didn't have any idea of the extent of the disaster. There was none of the satellite coverage that we now take for granted (and which exists in some measure because of that drought), so we had to rely on reports from the ground that fell far short of forming an overall picture. Interestingly, the Sahelian States themselves were beginning to mobilize in support of the disaster. They were beginning to see on a nation-by-nation basis the extent of the impact of the drought.

*Q: Let's review the chronology. This early period was when?*

SHEAR: The rains began to fail in 1969. From 1970 through part of 1972, precipitation continued to diminish. That is to say, it rained everywhere to a certain degree, but for the most part no more than about 10 inches per year. At least 12 to 14 inches of rain fairly concentrated over a 90- to 120-day period is required for the successful production of the principal crops of millet and sorghum. So the drought that really lasted intensively over three rainy seasons took its toll over a four-year period.

By 1972, the Sahelian States had themselves - well before the external world and the donor community - realized the extent of the problem and began to organize an interstate committee headquartered in Ouagadougou, the capital of then Upper Volta. The Comité Permanent Inter-Etat de Lutte Contre La Sécheresse dans le Sahel (CILSS) was formed to gather data on the drought and then try to mobilize the international community to support the Sahelian States. Some had already undertaken extraordinary measures that even reached outside the Sahel itself. For example, the Ivory Coast opened its northern borders to Mali and Upper Volta (its northern neighbors), as well as Niger. Herders and their livestock from these three countries were allowed to enter into the Ivory Coast, which is a coastal zone with higher rainfall. Likewise, Senegal, although also severely hit by the drought, opened its borders to Mali and to Mauritania. Cattle by the tens of thousands moved across the Senegal River - which was then almost dry - south into some of Senegal's higher rainfall areas. One of the problems associated with the movement of cattle though into Senegal, the Ivory Coast and then into Ghana, was the fact that these cattle were unable to resist the tsetse fly. The herds were further decimated by trypanosomiasis, a form of bovine sleeping sickness. The drought also wiped out over time almost all the development efforts in that zone, with the exception of roads and basic infrastructure projects. The resources that governments would normally apply to assistance projects were not available, and almost all of the management and limited governance of these countries was directed toward trying to bring some kind of support to their own populations. In response, the CILSS issued desperate calls for international aid, which were only slowly heeded and understood by the donors themselves, but food began to flow in substantial measure by 1972.

There was, however, no logistical means of coordinating the growing flood of assistance, so that

the ports of Abidjan and Dakar and the recently constructed port of Cotonou (in which U.S. aid had played a part) were quickly glutted. Food piled up in extraordinary amounts on the docks, and much of it became spoiled. In response to the impact of the drought, a special meeting was held in Washington to deal with both the short-term emergency and the long-term implications.

*Q: What was the reaction in the United States and in Congress about this earlier period?*

SHEAR: There began to emerge a tremendous public response, because for the first time television presented to all Americans a view of mothers and children starving and dying of hunger. The impact on the U.S. consciousness was extraordinary. Never before had the public seen in their own living rooms the immediate impact of natural disaster in Africa. While images of war had for years appeared on television, natural disasters were something largely unknown, particularly of this dimension. The public outcry for action on the part of the U.S. Government was rapid and very substantial. Church and community groups mobilized in support of providing more U.S. assistance, and there was heightened concern on the part of the Administration about how to deal with the crisis. Congress became increasingly engaged, organizing hearings and raising questions virtually on a daily basis with AID and the Department of State about dealing with what was becoming a national issue. The newspapers also picked it up, and headlines appeared in *The Washington Post* and *The Boston Globe*, among others.

The conference in Washington called by the Africa Bureau was a very high profile one. I was at that time still the REDSO Director. We received about a month's advance notice about the conference, and from my excellent staff we assembled representative sociologists, agronomists and program planners to address a long-term way of dealing with the consequences of the crisis. The drought was a fact we had to deal with not only as an emergency but also in the longer term, addressing development problems and symptoms thus revealed. The result was a report generated by me and my staff that I brought along when I was summoned to Washington. The paper outlined the background of the Sahel where, unlike many areas of Africa, many characteristics were, if not uniform, very similar. In addition to a common historical and cultural background, empires like those in Ghana and Mali had substantial contact with the Arab world and almost none with Europe, and they had highly developed educational institutions such as the University of Timbuktu, established in the tenth century. Here were countries with a strong sense of history, although their modern independence started only in the 1960s. They also shared the heritage of the French Colonial Period, which lasted for slightly more than a century. That brought about a strong sense of allegiance to France and a strong identification with Francophone culture. The Sahel countries were characterized by an elitist governance where a small number of people - almost all of whom had been trained in France - had ruled in some measure with disdain for the peasantry, as the French did. But they could hardly ignore the tragedies that were unfolding before them.

*Q: The French were still pretty influential in managing and running the countries, weren't they?*

SHEAR: The French were extremely strong in the areas of security, overall policy and education. Their role in agriculture, while it had a strong research base such as the institutes based in Montpellier, was diminishing, and Sahelian States were looking for new technologies. The attachment to France was strengthened in the security area, as there were French military forces

positioned in almost every one of those countries. The strongest presence was in Senegal, where there was a regional base. But although the French for the most part were considered very important, the Sahelians were already seeking alternative sources of both financial assistance and technology. They were beginning to look to the Scandinavian countries and the United States; the Japanese at this time had not yet begun a major aid effort. Obviously, it was important that any assistance we provided be coordinated with the French. Fortunately, since the death of De Gaulle in 1969, there had begun to emerge a pattern of coordination with the French. Annual joint meetings were extremely useful in terms of programming, but perhaps even more helpful as a forum where we could get together around major issues and exchange information. We began to diffuse suspicions about motives on both sides.

The legacy of French colonial rule was an important factor in the Sahel. Unlike Nigeria, where the British governed through strong local, traditional organizations (e.g., chieftainships, emirates), the French had a more direct hand. Over time, they gained increasing respect for the strength of Sahelians within their own cultures, but that did not really directly impact upon the nature of their governance. French governance was much more centralized and directive than the British, and in many ways much more resistant to change. As a result, African public service was much thinner in the Francophone states than in the Anglophone states of Africa, and the government's ability to respond to the drought was somewhat more limited by weak local delivery systems and local governance.

The Sahelian States share certain commonalities in geography. From Chad to Senegal they stretch in an arch of almost 3,000 miles, basically at the same latitude so that as the drought would hit one country, it would hit them all to varying degrees. Mauritania was the most vulnerable, since it was the farthest north. The annual rains throughout this part of Africa usually moved north out of the Congo Basin in a fairly predictable way, petering out and stopping just north of the Senegal River. The drought hit Mauritania hardest, but all the Sahelian States were almost as negatively affected. As I mentioned, 25 percent of the population on average was engaged in raising livestock, for the most part migratory. Except for those who lived in the cities, most others were engaged in cash agriculture involving cotton, ground nuts or subsistence crops of millet and sorghum, with small amounts of rice being grown in the river basins.

Among the most striking features of the Sahel are these river basins. The Sahel is coursed by three significant river systems: the Volta, the Niger and the Senegal. As we were undertaking our analysis in REDSO prior to my bringing the strategy paper to Washington, we realized that in a macro-geographic way, the Sahel probably had sufficient water and land to produce crops to feed itself and perhaps even export. The Sahel need not therefore be a food deficit area, and we should be able over time to design production systems that, if not drought-proof, would certainly be drought-resistant. We had people on staff who had some experience in the U.S. Agricultural Service, and together we explored what had occurred in the States following the great dust-bowl disasters in the 1920s and the 1930s. Because a national effort resulted in the creation of a series of windbreaks that essentially changed the natural cover in almost all of the Great Plains, when droughts of equal or greater severity than those earlier in the century hit in the 1950s, the impact was minimized. There were no great dust storms, there was no great loss of soil cover and the impact on crops was not nearly so significant.

That awareness gave us hope that the technologies were available. The critical factor would be to mobilize the human and financial resources to deal with this and to develop an understanding of the soil and water systems in the affected area. So I would bring to the conference at least the beginning of ideas on the need for an integrated approach of a dimension much larger and more extensive than anything envisaged before in Africa. The natural conclusion was that this could not work without continued, well-coordinated cooperation among the French and the Americans (the two principal donors), other bilateral donors, multilateral development agencies and the Sahelian States. Not an easy task, and we were just beginning to have an idea of how to approach it. I sent a copy of the paper to Washington about a week in advance of my arrival so it could be circulated, and it was extremely well received at a time when the Africa Bureau was in substantial disarray. The State Department had been highly critical of the Africa Bureau and of AID generally. Henry Kissinger was then the Secretary of State, with Joe Sisco as his Deputy. Sisco was calling meetings every week for reports from AID on the drought emergency and disaster relief because of increasing pressure from the newspapers, Congress, television and the public.

I returned to the Ivory Coast after the conference, and within a week I received a call from Sam Adams, head of the Africa Bureau, reporting on a telephone call from Henry Kissinger. He told Dr. Adams that he would like me to come back to Washington to take on mobilizing efforts for the drought emergency and also to work on a longer term. I had known Henry Kissinger slightly during my days in graduate school, working with him directly and fairly intensely on two international seminars he was conducting for the Harvard Center for International Affairs, of which he was then Deputy Director. I'm sure he didn't remember me, but Dan Parker, the recently appointed AID Administrator, had visited Abidjan at REDSO, and we had an opportunity to discuss early on the policy paper which we were beginning to draft. Aware of my work history and philosophy and the quality of my staff and our approach, it was he who suggested that Kissinger, through the Bureau, approach me. I hadn't even completed my first tour in Abidjan and had been approved to return for a second tour, so it was with some reluctance that my family and I returned to Washington. I was fully aware that it would be a very intense and difficult time.

Prior to returning, though, I wanted to have a look first hand at what was happening in the Sahel. So I chartered an aircraft, and my wife, Barbara, and I, along with two of my staff, traveled throughout the area for 10 days. We went from N'djamena in Chad all the way to the Atlantic Ocean in Dakar and then back down the coast to see what was happening in the ports. In that ten-day period, we put together quite a remarkable picture of what was transpiring. Much of what we saw was appalling - large numbers of people brought together in camps so they could be provided with some kind of coordinated feeding and medical care. Some refugee camps in Chad and Niger served as many as 30,000 people. When we landed in Dakar and got out of the airplane, the first sensation was the smell of fermenting grain permeating the atmosphere. We went directly to the port, where tens of thousands of tons of grain rotted in great heaps on the docks.

*Q: Where had it come from?*

SHEAR: From all sources - from the United States, from the European Community, from other

bilateral donors and the World Food Program. During a brief stop in Nouakchott, we had visited its port, where several thousand tons of dried milk was spoiling, all of it from the European Union. I visited officials at the office of the European Union, which was then the European Development Fund, and they just shrugged off responsibility, saying that they didn't have sufficient staff for the inspections and that the Mauritanian Government should move any food arriving at the port. I was appalled both by their indifference and the inability of the Mauritanian Government to move the commodities. Dakar was an even larger disaster, and even at the port in Abidjan, which was much more efficient than Dakar, close inspection revealed large warehouses filled with grain that was spoiling. The awful truth was that global assistance in the form of thousands of tons of grain had made it to the coast, but was not getting into the interior. With that image in my mind, I returned to Washington to take up my new assignment.

**ROY STACEY**  
**Regional Planning Officer, USAID, REDSO**  
**Abidjan (1973-1975)**

*Mr. Stacey was raised in Hawaii and educated at the University of California and George Washington University. Joining USAID in 1963, he served first on the Somali desk in Washington and was subsequently assigned to Mogadishu as Assistant Program Officer. Continuing as an Africa specialist, Mr. Stacey served with USAID in Nairobi, Mbabane, Abidjan, Paris and Harare. From 1986 to 1988, he served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. Following retirement Mr. Stacey worked with the World Bank, also on Southern African Affairs. Mr. Stacey was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.*

STACEY: I was asked to go to the Ivory Coast in 1973 to be the Regional Planning Officer for REDSO in Ivory Coast.

*Q: Interesting. What's the role of the Regional Planning Officer?*

STACEY: It's funny that you should ask, because that's the same question I asked when they offered me the job. There weren't very many of those in AID in those days. The idea was for me to head up a section of the office, which was to do some long-term thinking on the West Africa region and what kind of regional strategy and programs would make the most sense. We were still in those days fighting against the restrictions of the Korry report. We had all kinds of regional programs that we had cooked up. Some of them looked like real Rube Goldberg operations in order to circumvent the restrictions of the Korry report.

*Q: Can you give me any examples?*

STACEY: Of some of these regional programs? Yes, I can. We had a series of programs with the Entente Fund, which were very strange because the Entente was hardly a regional body. It seemed to be built around a personality. I can't even remember the man's name, but he was quite a dynamic salesman.

*Q: You mean the Executive Director of the Fund?*

STACEY: Of the Entente Fund, who had developed certain personal relationships with people in the U.S. and AID. So there were a series of regional programs under the Entente Fund - like the Intermediate Credit Program- that looked promising but I think they were pretty much doomed to failure because the Entente was a kind of personality cult built around one person. We were delivering what we thought were some important projects to groups that we couldn't have reached otherwise.

*Q: What did you do with Regional Planning? What kind of ideas were you coming up with?*

STACEY: The work really became dominated by the great Sahelian drought in 1973. It was dominated by the enormous task of getting the food relief in. We had tons of food sitting on the docks that we couldn't move inland. We had food that was in danger of rotting in warehouses. We had a logistical nightmare in the 1973-1974 period. So in that context, the kind of regional planning that we did do was to look at the adaptive strategies of people. We had a situation in which the old systems that sustain people were breaking down. Old systems of production, systems of how people move their cattle and so forth were breaking down, and it wasn't very obvious what the new household strategies would be. We focused our research and our fieldwork on trying to understand what people were doing.

*Q: Triggered by the drought?*

STACEY: Triggered by the drought but it was part of a larger picture of the breakdown of these systems that used to sustain them. In the 1950's they had a period of abundant rainfall in the Sahel. The seventies and eighties had been just the opposite, so we were trying to understand how people were changing their lives. It became obvious to me at that time that one of the most fundamental aspects of their adaptive strategies was human mobility. These borders that we saw on the map, which were drawn conveniently back in 1899 when the Europeans sat down to divide up Africa, didn't mean a thing to these people. As a matter of fact, in order to survive, one or more family members always had to disregard borders. A lot of our work in those days- we had Mike Horowitz, a well known anthropologist from SUNY in New York who was under contract with AID for a couple of years - I had him working for me and an Ag economist from Perdue, so we had people who were good in research. We had very little understanding in '73 of the literature in French. There was enormous literature on this region, but we had hardly looked at it. Frankly a lot of AID people tended to disregard the French observations and the French conclusions. There was sort of an attitude that "if the French knew what they were doing, these countries wouldn't be in the state they were in." Which was unfortunate. Just on tropical forestry alone, there's a huge institute outside of Paris that has enormous data and information on forestry in West Africa. It was also a time of really familiarizing ourselves with French literature and beginning to understand a lot more about the region than we knew.

*Q: Were there any particular findings other than the one's you've mentioned in this research?*

STACEY: We did get into some project design work. As you recall, we had a rather unusual

appropriation of funds during the 1973-74 period for Sahelian projects and we had to obligate those funds in a very short time period. I do recall taking a team of about nine people up to eastern Burkina Faso to design an integrated rural development project. It was one of those situations where you've got x amount of money, you've got three months to design and approve the project in or you lose the money. You know that. The people in Upper Volta, which was the name of the country in those days, knew that. Everybody would give you all the right answers in order to come up with a project because there was money to be lost otherwise. So we went out and we visited sixty-two villages in two weeks time. We borrowed sleeping bags from the Peace Corp. We bought a bunch of tin food from the commissary and we went out in the bush for two weeks.

*Q: Nine of you?*

STACEY: Yes. We hired two bush taxis, these old Peugeot 404's. We'd throw out mosquito nets up over the trees every night and we had cots and we'd sleep out. We did all this in a bottom up way. We talked to farmers and so on. Of course we found out that the farmers had a totally different view of what the priorities were than the government did. We eventually reconciled those differences with...

*Q: Do you remember what they were?*

STACEY: The people were very interested in the water supply and roads as a first priority, and the government was interested in importing things. In other words, they wanted a project with lots of vehicles and all kinds of things like that. We were somewhere in between. We were looking at a project with much more intermediate technology, animal traction - no tractors- we were way apart on priorities. Eventually we decided on a technical package that we thought would work in the region based on the research, but it was all supply driven. What was driving this project was the money was sitting there, and everybody wanted to obligate it. We had a deadline to do it, and we did it and, of course, the project ultimately was not evaluated as a success. Funds were disposed; experts came out. Now if you go to the area today, which is where this project was located, it's a thriving little town. I would say that when the EC paved the road it had a major impact. We wouldn't do that. They wanted us to pave the road and we said we wanted to work with the small farmers. It was my first experience with a so-called Integrated Rural Development Project, and we began to realize later all of the problems of it.

*Q: You were doing well, you were getting local input. What was missing?*

STACEY: What was missing again was...what we really needed was a different kind of mandate to say we could go out and design the project and we'd have five million dollars, but it doesn't have to be a five year project. It could be a twenty-year project. Because what we really needed was drip irrigation over a much longer period of time. We put too much money into the project up front and considering the drought and the poverty of the country, we didn't really negotiate the local contributions, the recurrent costs. All the promises that were made on recurrent costs and so on were never met. Of course, we waived those ultimately because it's a poor country; they were suffering from drought and so on. In hindsight we should have had a twenty-year project with drip irrigation, making sure that we got the local contributions and recurring costs

paid for from the government budget.

*Q: Were there other projects you worked on from the Abidjan office?*

STACEY: I was supervising a group of people that were working on a number of projects. We had the Veterinary Lab Facility in Mali, in Bamako, which was a controversial project.

*Q: Why was it controversial?*

STACEY: Again, it was conceived as a regional project. It was to be a veterinary lab in Bamako producing vaccines that could be used for livestock all over the Sahel. There were various problems in terms of capacity, in terms of getting vaccines to other countries. There were various production problems. Again, it's difficult for me to remember some of the different projects, but there were many people who felt this project was headed toward being a failure. I was at the facility recently, and here it is almost thirty years down the road, and this facility did function and operate on a cost recovery basis. It took a long time for it to become viable, but it has become a viable facility.

*Q: Serving the region.*

STACEY: And it's serving the region. It was just twenty years before it's time.

*Q: Or it took twenty years to get it right. What was the understanding of the operation...the organizational arrangement?*

STACEY: In those days it made a lot of sense, because the kinds of presence we had in non-concentration countries was very small. We had one or two people in Niamey, and we had one or two people in Bamako. I felt that the REDSO operation made a lot of sense when we were keeping these kinds of micro-missions, if I can call them that, in the countries we were serving. But I don't remember exactly when the restrictions on the Korry Report were broken, but it was about this period of time. And suddenly these small regional offices, as we call them, became bi-lateral missions. Sometime between 1973 and the early eighties, we suddenly had twenty-five or thirty Americans in Bamako, plus a local staff of over a hundred. I think that's where we really lost our way, because we got into such staff intensive offices, putting all these Americans in place. During this period, 73-75, I felt we had the right balance of these very small offices, largely with embassy support - we didn't have separate AID administrative support and car pool support and so on. Then all of a sudden, after that changed I guess it was in the late '70's and early '80's again in hindsight we were taking the kinds of steps which kind of "de-responsibilized" (if that's a word) local officials. We were doing everything for them.

*Q: In your position, was REDSO involved in doing some of the strategic planning for the Sahel Development Program at that point?*

STACEY: Yes, this was a period of time when there was some early thinking on the Sahel Development Program. There was a lot of contact with the French at that time. We had an AID officer at the embassy in Paris who participated in some of the thinking on this. But it was a little

bit later, in about 1975, and it was after I left Abidjan and I had gone to the Club du Sahel, that we got much more involved in that.

*Q: Anything more on the REDSO experience?*

STACEY: No, not at this time. I think what that period confirmed for me, Haven, was that we could get into situations where we understood very poorly local constraints, local motivations, what people were really doing. When we understood those things poorly, on one hand, and, on the other hand, we had a supply driven obligation schedule to commit funds, that you were pretty much going to end up with a non-viable project in the long term.

*Q: What was your impression of why we had that supply driven pressure? Why were we being pushed to move ahead, ready or not?*

STACEY: This was a period of time when there was a supplemental appropriation of funds because of the drought in 1974-75, and I guess it stuck in my mind in those days that the amount of money, the obligation authority that we had every year, was not our biggest problem. It wasn't the level of money that was so essential as it was the real understanding of what we were doing and how we were doing it. That's why later on when the Sahel Development Program started, this was during I guess the next phase of my career, the fact that a lot of people worked very hard to get no year money for the Sahel Development Program. It became very important because we wanted to diminish this pressure on obligation schedules.

**GILBERT J. DONAHUE**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Abidjan (1974-1976)**

*Gilbert J. Donahue was born in Virginia in 1947. He received his bachelor's degree from American University in 1968. His career included positions in Mexico, Ivory Coast, Taiwan, Hong Kong, China, and Brazil. Mr. Donahue was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in April 2000.*

*Q: You finally found a place in the Ivory Coast where both of you could have a job, is that it?*

DONAHUE: That's correct. In order to do that, I switched cones. The cone system was still very new. There had been a fair amount of arbitrariness in assigning people their cone and because my wife and I had begun doing consular work, it so happened that we had both been placed in the consular cone. However, I was given the opportunity of switching to the economic cone and indeed it was an area that interested me. So, I was assigned to the Ivory Coast in the four person Economic Section. My wife was assigned there as the head of the one American officer Consular Section but reporting to the political officer at post.

*Q: Had you had any economic training?*

DONAHUE: I had had some Economics courses in university. It certainly would not be equivalent to a major in Economics. However, a lot of economic work has to do with accurate reporting. It's just reporting on economic and commercial issues rather than political issues strictly speaking.

*Q: You took French?*

DONAHUE: That's correct. I had studied French in university and had a very good program there. My professor there had collaborated with teachers at FSI on the French material. So, in fact, I got essentially a brush up in French. What was different at FSI at that time was, those of us who were going to Africa, in addition to getting language training, had area studies. We also had some training in African usage of French, which is a little bit different than continental usage.

*Q: Explain this a bit.*

DONAHUE: Just as English has pidgeon English, there is a pidgin equivalent of French, which often incorporates some local language words or word choices or syntax, or just a mispronunciation of proper French that is easier for the local people to use. Those of us who were having French training and going to Africa were going to many, many different posts. The use of this patois is more frequent in some places than in others. Apparently, it's used a lot in Senegal, so some of the people with whom we were studying were going there and we saw some films that had been produced in those African countries using that patois, so we would accustom our ears to it. Actually, in Abidjan, I heard more of Parisian French rather than this African patois. But we did hear it in the marketplace. We heard it on occasion on TV or certainly when we traveled up country when we were talking with local officials who had not had the experience of more advanced education in the capital or abroad.

*Q: In your area training, what impression were you getting about the Ivory Coast at that time? We're talking about 1974.*

DONAHUE: That's correct. Africa was still young and new. It had passed its first decade of independence, so I think the days of great excitement in the '60s were already passed. African countries had separated into two camps. There were those that were considered successful, had applied the right policies, had stable governments, and were making progress in economic development. Then there were others that were already seen as failed states because they had coups. They had courted if not communism then at least socialism. And many countries had had failed economic policies that were ruining what would have been a good patrimony of resources at the outset of independence and running the countries into the ground. In fact, Ivory Coast was right next door to one of those countries, Ghana. At independence in 1957, Ghana was considered by Britain, together with Kenya, the two former colonies that had the greatest economic possibilities on the continent. Ghana rapidly went downhill. By contrast, Ivory Coast was seen as the great success. It had implemented many of the policies and practices that were considered at that time to be the wisest courses and the most pragmatic policies for developing countries.

*Q: What was the feeling you were getting from your colleagues about Ghana? What was the problem of Ghana?*

DONAHUE: There were several problems. I am not an expert on Ghana. Certainly, the initial government under Kwame Nkrumah had been socialist. That had made a lot of people uncomfortable. Ghana was the first Anglophone country to attain its independence. The French counterpart to it was Guinea under Sekou Toure. They both got their independence in 1957. Most of the other colonies got their independence in 1960 or 1961. So, both Ghana and Guinea were a little bit ahead of the curve. Both of them got very involved with socialism at a very early stage. Ghana began with a pretty good basis of British administration and government, a good legal system, a good university, and a particularly good agricultural extension service to support the tropical agricultural commodities that it produced – primarily cocoa, some coffee -- and that were the mainstay of its income. Because tropical agriculture is even now not particularly well known, well understood, and still a matter of academic experimentation, an extension service or something akin to that is absolutely essential in order to keep tropical crops going. One of the first things the Nkrumah government did was to nationalize a lot of private sector plantation production or to use many of these government facilities as a kind of cash cow for other projects that were important to Nkrumah. So, unfortunately, in that initial period of independence a number of very magnificent looking public works projects were built with money that would have been more efficiently and more effectively used in things that were less flashy but nevertheless perhaps of greater benefit to the overall economy. Of course, Nkrumah after a few years in power, was overthrown, and there was a succession of coups and governments that misspent their country's resources. At the time that we were getting ready to go to Ivory Coast, Ghana was considered to have been already on the way to bankrupting its patrimony. Because I was going to an economic job and I knew that my portfolio would be agricultural commodities, I did a lot of work in the United States on those agricultural issues before leaving. I got up to speed on the international markets for cocoa, coffee, rubber, tropical timber, and cotton, other commodities which grow in the tropics and which were important to Ivory Coast's economy. Some of them had also at one time been important to the economy of Ghana. When I did my consultations, especially in places like New York, where many of these commodities are traded on the international market, traders would say that even then the quality of Ghana's cocoa was deteriorating and the quality of Ivory Coast's cocoa was improving relative.

*Q: This was a matter of care of the plantations?*

DONAHUE: That's right. Under British rule, there was a good combination of things. The large plantation owners themselves were educated people and paid attention to the science of the production. The British administration collected a lot of individual information from the plantation owners and worked with it in a research process so that they could understand best how to protect the crops, and what were the optimal growing conditions. They understood pests, problems related to storage, and so forth and disseminated that as well to the plantation owners. Under the Nkrumah and subsequent leadership in Ghana, a lot of that work came to a grinding halt. One of the impacts of the privatization, or Ghanaization, of the plantations was

a lack of good statistics coming out of the plantations, and the government apparently didn't use the statistics to the extent possible. So, indeed, the traders, many of them large companies, found they had to do their own research to a greater extent than before. Many of the large companies, and I'm thinking of cocoa in particular, were Hershey, Nestle, and Mars. They had their own experts in chocolate and cocoa who would travel to those major producing areas, go into the fields and actually look at the crop at various stages of growing. Based on those visits, they would do their own projections as to what the yield would be and what the quality of that year's crop would be. There are many things that can go wrong. There can be too much rain, too little rain, and storage can be a problem if the crop once harvested is not stored in the proper facility. They constantly talked about the deterioration of facilities on the Ghana side of the border and improvement at the facilities on the Ivory Coast border. It's interesting that historically Ghana had produced better quality cocoa and had much more extensive production of cocoa than in Ivory Coast. Before independence, Ivory Coast had not been particularly well developed as a focal point for the production of these tropical products. In fact, at the time of independence, the French had expected Guinea, whose capital is Conakry, to be the preeminent Francophone country in West Africa. Much of their infrastructure had been centered in Conakry. Their main colonial administrative center was Dakar, Senegal, but they had seen that the economic riches of the countries further south and east of that were going to pull the center southward, so they had expected that the main area of interest for French industry and commerce would move to Conakry. What happened was, Sekou Toure was also nationalizing businesses and industries right and left and much of the French investment in Guinea ended up either not being very significant or they were not able to retain it, so they moved on to Abidjan.

*Q: Nationalizing...*

DONAHUE: I should not use the term "nationalizing." I should again say "Guineanize." One of the aspects of socialism at that time was that it was very much tied to the concept of mercantilism, which was an important economic theory in the 1800s. In those days, a country thought that it needed to own and control all of its means of production in order to become wealthy. If its means of production were controlled by organizations outside the country, the fear was they would bleed it and take away the riches. Many African socialists who had studied in Britain during the heyday of socialism, the '20s, '30s, and '40s definitely held these beliefs. This was a part of the economic system in places as far flung as India and even Malaysia to some extent as in Africa. It's just that probably the starkness of success and failure in Africa is more apparent. Sekou Toure was nationalizing a lot of those industries and in the process steering away foreign investors.

There was a similar process in Ghana. So, many of the continental investors that were looking to improve the output of tropical commodities, improve their production, and have more of a vertically integrated production system looked to Côte d'Ivoire, which was welcoming that kind of investment. It was stable. They had all of the trappings of democracy and, although it was a one party democracy, it was nevertheless a benevolent one party democracy which was welcoming foreign investment. They took on board French influence. The French approach to capitalism at that time involved a lot of central planning. So, that was one of the aspects that was common to the countries that were more overtly socialist.

The difference was that in the countries that were very overtly socialist, all of the planning involved resources of that country itself. They didn't welcome foreign investment so much. In Ivory Coast, they did so that the government's investment for planning purposes was more in physical infrastructure – highways, railroads, airports, electric power, and waterways, which were in fact important in Ivory Coast. That is another area where in neighboring Ghana, a lot of bad decisions were made. Even the fairly good infrastructure that was there at independence was not maintained, as it should have been. You had the impression of Ghana using up its resources and having them deteriorate, where Côte d'Ivoire was building its infrastructure base and allowing private sector investments to come in and make use of it so that everything was improving.

*Q: Was the Department of State on the economic side looking upon the socialist influence – and I'm not trying to use this in a pejorative way, but the end result – you had the London School of Economics, the Convinced Socialists in France, who were allowed for the first time to really have a little playground down in the colonial place. They were training the leaders. It was a disaster. Tanzania. You can just go down the line. Were we seeing this as a pernicious thing at that time? Were we trying to do something about it?*

DONAHUE: One of the great differences between the East and the West during the period of the Cold War was the belief that Marxism was a scientific process, a scientific explanation of history. Both the Soviet Union and China, though in a slightly different way, shared this view. They believed in selfless humanity, altruism, and the extremely fair dissemination of resources. They didn't get production right. Nevertheless, this vision that they had of everyone having an equal share in all resources, an equal claim, was a very alluring dream for people who had been held down in the period of colonialism. So, during the Cold War period, probably it was unavoidable that Africa would be a kind of battleground and that there would be a lot of competition in terms of foreign assistance giving, a lot of effort to buy votes from countries in UN General Assembly meetings. On the political as well as the economic front, there was competition for influence. The main difference was, it was fairly easy to say with a degree of certainty what communist ideology was, to describe it, and to understand how it would impact in those countries. Communism was associated with a heavy dose of central planning, emphasis on public rather than private institutions, and so forth. It was less clear to describe the approach of western capitalism as a means of influencing what was going on in Africa.

Western capitalism was not one unique system. In the United States, then as now, we had a mixed economy. We had some public institutions that were large and important in the economy. We had many private ones. We had a legal system that allowed this to work. There weren't many, but there are some examples in the world of more pure David Ricardo-type capitalism. One of them was Hong Kong. The European continental view of capitalism, on the other hand, had a much greater degree of central government involvement in the economy. A lot of institutions that have historically been maintained in the private sector in the United States, such as standards setting institutions, were always part of the government in continental Europe. Also, continental Europe attempts to be more dirigist, with the government sending very clear signals, indeed demands sometimes, to the market, and a far greater degree of government control over regulation. Although there may be a bit of

competition, once the governments adopt a standard, the regulation is carried out with great effect. In certain continental countries, France chief among them, there has been a much greater belief in the importance and advantage of central planning than we or the other English-speaking countries have ever accepted. The Anglophone countries have tended always to have a degree of skepticism regarding the wisdom of government. I think we share that. In the United States, it's often extreme. We often have a high degree of resistance to what the federal government would want us to do. Canada has much less resistance. But nevertheless, we share the feeling that a lot of decisions should be made at the grassroots level and that we should reflect those upward to government rather than accepting as a matter of course what government has to say.

The reason I think this is significant is, for governments in Africa which were looking for leadership and guidance, it was relatively easy for them to admit the Russians, supercopy the Russian system, and adopt it in their own country, even though it had no relevance at all. The Russian brand of communism certainly was an industry-based communism. Chinese communism was of a different type and perhaps has greater adaptation to agriculture-based development countries. Nevertheless, it was easier for a government to take the whole package. It was like one stop shopping from Russia, whereas when they looked to the West, they were hearing a cacophony of voices that resulted in a lot of confusion. At times, some countries paid a great deal of attention to their former colonial master. For example, Ivory Coast, saw itself as a protégé of France, and Kenya paid at a certain point a great deal of attention to Britain. Such countries ended up developing systems that could be called capitalist. However, if you compare them side by side, they operated in a far different manner.

*Q: Looking at it at that time a highly centralized economy also lent itself to corruption or tribal bias. These were the new boys, not overly skilled, coming on the block and what happened was, you go out and loot.*

DONAHUE: There is certainly that. There is a propensity to that. I think there are other things as well. We have experienced this to some extent in the United States, but not the extent to which we have seen the newly independent countries joining the world community in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Whenever a political entity organizes itself – and I think one example can be when a group of people in a county in the United States, a village, decides to become an incorporated city, it has to take on board a lot of trappings of a government that it never had to do before. In Africa, the difference is especially apparent in former French West Africa, but is true for all of Africa to some extent. French West Africa was governed as a large area and certain cities were important. But the boundaries on the current map did not exist. So, the cities of Dakar, Conakry, Abidjan, and to some extent Lome, were great administrative regions and commercial centers for French contact with that colonial area. There were a few cities in the inland - Bamako, Ouagadougou, Niamey – which were centers in those regions. There was no effort on the part of the French to define nation states. During the period of French colonial rule, age-old migrations of ethnic groups had continued. In some areas, there were relatively more ethnic groups; in other areas there were relatively fewer. What happened with independence was a need to draw clear boundaries between countries. Sometimes, a majority group of people decided to draw a boundary around them

and adopt a name that was important to them, but they were not the only ethnic group. There are very few African countries today whose borders define a single ethnic group and where related ethnic groups live nowhere else. So, the border, for example, between Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana cuts across the Ashanti ethnic group. But Ivory Coast is one of the few African countries with as many ethnic groups as it has. It seems to me that it has 50-60 ethnic tribes, in distinction with most of the other countries having only 2-4. So, because there were so many tribes and their languages, customs, cultures, and so forth were quite different, certainly among the educated elite, there was a great deal of interest in adopting French as the literal lingua franca and adopting many of the ways of the French in their social intercourse. From that standpoint, Ivory Coast had more going for it under independence. There was more of a desire on the part of people to identify as Ivorians rather than as members of the Baoule tribe or some other ethnic group. That having been said, those ethnic divisions are far from overcome and have become a political problem in Ivory Coast today.

*Q: You arrived in Abidjan in 1974. Who was the ambassador? How did the embassy work? What was your impression of Abidjan and the Ivory Coast?*

DONAHUE: This was my first time anywhere on the African continent and actually my first assignment at an embassy. In Mexico, I was assigned to two consulates but did not work at an embassy. The embassy in Abidjan was quite large and much larger than our bilateral relationship with Côte d'Ivoire would justify. It was a regional center for USAID for West Africa. In addition to having the bilateral element, it was a regional center for backstopping AID programs throughout West Africa, an office that is still there called REDSO [Regional Economic Development Services Office]. In addition, the State Department had a regional center in Abidjan for budget and fiscal operations. One of the reasons was, there was a lot of talent available for the FS national and third country national pool so that they could employ Anglophones to work on Anglophone countries and Francophones to work on Francophone countries and so forth. It was relatively easy to work. In fact, Abidjan at that time was considered the preeminent city in West Africa in terms of services, both general availability of services and their constancy. I can certainly vouch for the fact that in terms of water supply, electric power, the quality of the surface of the roads, and other services that we used, they were quite good and very rarely failed. That is a lot to say for Africa at any time, even now, but especially back then. So Ivory Coast had very good services.

Ambassador Robert S. Smith, who had been an employee with USAID and was considered one of the very few AID people who became an ambassador, headed the embassy at that time. However, he had experience in West Africa. I believe he had never served in Ivory Coast before, although he may have visited there. I believe that he had not known French before that assignment, so that this was really the first assignment when he was using French. He was in his 40s at the time and had divorced his wife and recently remarried just before going to Ivory Coast. So, he had a new wife who had never lived outside of the United States before. Her name was Didi. The deputy chief of mission at the time was Walker Diamonti. He had a lot of experience in Africa, especially West Africa. John Ferriter, a very sharp person with academic training in law, headed the Economic Section that I worked in. I really don't know what academic economic training he had. But the legal training became very useful in his analysis and ability to provide guidance on the commercial side when

occasionally we ran into problem with American companies feeling they were discriminated against. At that time, the commercial function carried out by the embassies was done by State Department. There were very few Department of Commerce personnel abroad. So, the person with the title of commercial officer was William Ramsey. He had a couple of third country national employees who worked with businesspeople, a typical commercial operation where we were on the one hand flogging American exports to Ivory Coast, on the other hand helping Ivorians do business with the United States in many ways, and also providing various kinds of services for American companies that had invested in Ivory Coast. There was a small American Chamber of Commerce that we worked with. The Commercial Unit held occasional trade fairs that often had a regional audience.

Another officer in the Economic Section was Melinda Kimble, who was doing the financial economic work. Ivory Coast was significant for a number of reasons. It was the headquarters of the African Development Bank and the U.S. Treasury at that time was very interested in putting resources into the African Development Bank. One of Melinda's jobs was looking at that operation and the financial transfer side. Also, at that time, and I believe it continues, the French backed a currency for Francophone West Africa known as the CFA franc [Communauté Financière Africaine]. The currency was convertible with the franc. 50 CFA francs would convert to one French franc. So, Melinda also followed the financial element between the government of Ivory Coast and France and the Ivorian balance of payments and other issues. My brief was the agricultural sector, which was probably 95% of Ivory Coast's economy. Ivory Coast did have some industry, a lot of which was related to agriculture.

*Q: What was your slice of the action?*

DONAHUE: I had agriculture and agroindustry and all of the things that would relate to that. In other words, if there was interest on the part of American companies in selling to Ivory Coast or if Ivorians wanted to export something to the U.S. in the agricultural realm, I would deal with that. There were a number of agricultural and extractive industries. When American companies sent their cocoa or coffee buyers to Ivory Coast, they would come to see me and I would occasionally go out into the field with them to look at something. Nestle and other companies did some low level processing of cocoa in Ivory Coast and American companies were interested in that, so I would work with them on that type of project. During my period in Ivory Coast, the OPEC oil price rise took place and created consternation on world markets. One of the effects was that oil companies started looking everywhere for oil. The international oil companies became interested in exploring for oil offshore of Ivory Coast because oil had been found on the coast of Nigeria. There was the expectation that there would be oil in the coastal regions of a number of the West African countries. One of the problems with Côte d'Ivoire was it has a very narrow continental shelf and a deep plunge very close to the coast. As a result, it was a very difficult area to do prospecting offshore. I think the technology was still in its early stages then. This was before the North Sea oil had really been developed and there was not a lot of knowledge about how to drill for oil in very deep ocean depths, but eventually this was done. It was just at the very early stages.

Also, Ivory Coast is a producer, although a very minor one, of diamonds and some other gemstones, so there was some interest then on the part of American companies in Ivorian

diamond production. Ivory Coast was a major producer at that time of tropical hardwoods. We don't see as much use of solid hardwood in the United States as in Europe. The tropical hardwoods – like mahogany, teak and rosewood -- are highly prized in Europe and Asia. They are quality woods that are quite pricey and Europeans and Asians are willing to pay the price – I think Americans somewhat less. Nevertheless, there has been an industry in this country using such woods as a veneer to plywood. So, the American Hardwood Plywood Manufacturers Association was also quite interested in Côte d'Ivoire.

OPEC's successful effort to raise the international price of oil in the early 1970s resulted in a massive influx of U.S. dollars into the coffers of the OPEC countries. Since most of them were underpopulated and undeveloped, except for the petroleum sector, those countries alone simply could not utilize these additional billions of dollars. One option was to buy U.S. Treasury bills, and the equivalent government bonds from other OECD countries. However, there are limits to the size of that market and eventually the oil-rich OPEC countries had to consider other possibilities. Meanwhile, the major international banks eyed the petrodollars greedily and offered top interest rates to place them. Their problem was what to do with all this excess liquidity. Up till then, the primary source of development finance for developing countries, especially African countries, was the international development banks, chief among them the World Bank. By the mid-1970s, however, the major international private sector banks, such as Bank of America, Citibank, Chase Manhattan, and their European and Japanese equivalents, were all angling to finance developing country economic development projects with their newly gained supplies of petrodollars.

I saw much of this activity taking place in Ivory Coast because it was considered one of the most "bankable" or "investible" countries in Africa at the time. Since Abidjan was already a financial center for West Africa, the presence of the African Development Bank headquarters lured other major banks to establish regional centers. All of the banks were very aggressive in seeking to place loans, and it is highly questionable whether they always performed adequate due diligence on the loan recipient, or even on the project itself. I had long conversations with the U.S. citizen heads of the Bank of America and Citibank in Abidjan regarding their efforts to place loans. They were literally pushing loans on the nascent development agencies in West African countries, most of which had no previous experience with private sector lending. The head of Citibank regularly informed me of the many millions of dollars of lending his New York headquarters expected him to place in a given quarter. This included many shaky projects in such countries as Zaire. I even accompanied the Citibank chief by private airplane to a site in northern Ivory Coast where Citibank was backing the industrial production of cotton and cotton processing. We were given a tour of the facility by the American setting it up. This was a first for Ivory Coast to enter into large-scale production of cotton, and the project interested various institutions, including the World Bank.

Unfortunately, both the public and private sector institutions failed to do their homework, or to coordinate sufficiently well on these massive, market-based development projects. Within a decade, various banks and international institutions had backed similar projects in so many developing countries – especially those in Africa – that the world market was oversupplied in cotton, as well as other commodities. The end result was that countries like Ivory Coast,

which had successful commodity-based economies in the mid-1970s, subsequently became even more dependent on an ever more volatile world commodity market whose prices were at substantially lower levels. By the mid-1980s, many of these countries were no better off, and possibly much less well off, than before they had undertaken the major investments. There is little wonder that African countries still stagger under enormous international debt burdens, many of which involve private sector institutions, and the countries still lack the wherewithal to clear their debts.

*Q: Looking at the cultural side, the United States is a major agricultural country with also a very big industry of supplying agricultural machinery and all that. France has its own very strong agricultural economy, highly subsidized. I would think that it would be very difficult for us at that time to break into Côte d'Ivoire's agricultural equipment market because of the French.*

DONAHUE: Obviously, the French – and I think this is another element of this competition between communism and capitalism that I mentioned – the former colonial powers had strong commercial interests in their former colonies. So, they had interests not only in influencing the governments there as a kind of bulwark against growing Soviet influence on the continent, but they also wanted to do a good deal for their own industries. The U.S. was seen as an interloper quite frequently in those markets. Again, the whole concept historically of colonies was to ensure the wealth of the colonial power. They grew up during the period of mercantilism, this belief that you had to own land in order to be rich. The concept was, the world was a zero sum game. If one power gained territory, it was a loss to another power, so there was a desire to maintain a degree of parity there. When you had a colony, you exploited it and brought all of its wealth back to your country, and the colony, bereft of its own industry, became a captive market for your country's manufacturers. This is one reason why very few of these countries had any kind of industry to speak of before independence. In almost every case, they were importers of industrial products and exporters only of raw agricultural products. So, yes, you're right, the French had a great deal of interest when Ivory Coast became a market of importance. Investors came in to run plantations. Widespread plantation-type agroindustry had not been a feature of Ivory Coast prior to independence. It had been in Ghana, but not in Ivory Coast. So, companies actually became very interested in Ivory Coast. Producing commodities which could not be produced in Europe – examples were pineapples, bananas and strawberries, that are not fruits that are produced in Europe, but for which there is a great market in Europe. If there was any citrus production in Côte d'Ivoire, it was very minimal, but those other products were definitely there. French companies like Peugeot, Renault, and Rhone-Poulenc all had interest in providing agricultural and transport equipment to Ivory Coast. However, they did not produce everything and they were not always selling it at the best price. So, there was competition from other European manufacturers like Mercedes Benz and Volvo and certainly American companies that were interested in the market and had a particular niche. The big American company that was involved in transport and construction equipment was Caterpillar. I think Massey Ferguson was there for some type of agricultural machinery. Since Abidjan was a center for the region, executives would live in Ivory Coast and travel to neighboring countries to manage sales and service. The natural territory served out of Abidjan was every place west and north. At that time, Lagos served a similar function for areas east of Ivory

Coast and as far south as Cameroon. A number of American companies had groups in the region. The one country in Africa at that time which American business was careful about was South Africa because of various concerns on the part of the U.S. government in doing business with an apartheid regime and restrictions on the kinds of business that could take place.

*Q: Who was the president of the Ivory Coast?*

DONAHUE: The president at that time was its first chief of state, President Felix Houphouët Boigny. He brought together a number of features. This was in many ways typical but also atypical of that first generation of African leaders. Houphouët Boigny was one of only two Africans who ever served in a French cabinet. HB had been trained as a medical doctor, trained in France, and was actually a member of the cabinet and served as minister of health in the French government. The only other African leader who had a similar background was Leopold Senghor, who ended up becoming the first president of Senegal, who I believe was the French minister of culture and was the one who defined the concept of “negritude,” which influenced and probably gave birth to the concept of black pride in the U.S. They were far ahead of their time and they were intellectuals from the period of the ‘30s and ‘40s and had their formation in French government in the 1950s. So, indeed, both of those men were trained and ready to take on the reins of government. HB in addition was a titular head of his tribe, the Baoulé, in central Ivory Coast, headquartered on the town of Yamoussoukro, which towards the end of his life he designated as the national capital. During the period that we were in Ivory Coast, which was the middle of HB’s period as president, represented already the demise or was past the peak of his presidency. You had mentioned earlier the problem of corruption. This was a period when the corruption of the Ivorian ministers was becoming apparent.

One of the themes I was talking about earlier is putting on the trappings of sovereignty. When these countries became catapulted on the world stage as sovereign states, most of the black Africans had never held positions of authority. If they had, it was the running of a high school, a village chieftainship perhaps, the running of some small association or enterprise. Very rarely had they had any control of the kinds of resources that a government would command. They certainly had not had to make the kinds of decisions that a modern government would have to make. This was true even if they were the leader of a traditional African tribe, where they would have been responsible for what we would call “local government,” but it would not have involved national defense and certainly not what we would call international diplomacy, relations between major countries that are jockeying for influence. So, they had to become something that they had never become and never perhaps even dreamed of becoming.

Supposedly, HB was actually very happy when he was a doctor. When he studied medicine, he saw his role primarily as bringing a higher quality of public health to his people in Ivory Coast. But the nature of French administration took people with a given skill level and shifted them wherever they were needed within the French system. Therefore, much of his medical career was not spent within the confines of modern day Ivory Coast. Rather, French West Africa included much of the region from Senegal to Benin. So, part of the process of

independence resulted in bringing people who had worked very well together in a very large French administrative system back to their home countries. In many ways, they had to become known again in their own country. They had to reestablish relations with their own tribe, with neighboring tribes and other people in their home environment. More likely than not, they had not lived at “home” during their adult years, or had much contact with those people as they had pursued an adult career elsewhere. There were several things that made HB particularly good. Having worked well with people from other parts of West Africa and indeed with France, he was able to work well with the various tribes in Ivory Coast. There was no single majority tribe there. So, he was able to build ties and bring into his government structure people from all of these various ethnic groups. What they shared was the French language, the concept of French administration and the idea of being able to administer something, although what they had administered perhaps in their adult careers was not the country that they were going to administer following independence.

HB was able to have a kind of overarching structure that worked at least in those early days. He established the PDCI [Parti Democratique de la Côte d’Ivoire], which was the first and major political party. Rather than encourage a system whereby there would be many political parties, as was very common in Anglophone countries, he encouraged all people to come into the PDCI and work within that structure. So, not everyone in the PDCI was of the same view. There was a party with a broad range of views, but if people wanted to participate in the government, they had to be inside that party. He did not brook another political party. The main newspaper in Côte d’Ivoire, the *Fraternité Matin*, was in fact the mouthpiece of the PDCI Party. To the extent that it had independent reporting, it would be of neighboring countries, not of Côte d’Ivoire or France.

*Q: As an economic officer, did you find that behind much of the Côte d’Ivoire administration, there was a Frenchman on these plantations or was it pretty much in the hands of the people of Côte d’Ivoire?*

DONAHUE: A few years before independence, France began to draw future national boundary lines across what had been French West Africa. Then, France established administrative centers in those cities that were to become the future capitals of independent governments. During that pre-independence period, French people headed all the offices that would become ministries. Each French minister had an African *chef du cabinet*, chief of cabinet. That system maintained itself pretty much for one or two years after independence. By the mid-‘60s, in some of those countries, there would still have been an occasional French minister. In Côte d’Ivoire, this period of shift took place earlier so that by 1970, all of the ministers were African, Ivorian, and the *chef du cabinet* position then went to a Frenchman. I believe in almost every case during the period I was in Ivory Coast, the *chef du cabinet* was French. There might have been one or two ministries with an Ivorian *chef du cabinet*. One reason why the French Embassy in Abidjan could be so small was the large number of French citizens working in ministries who reported back to the French Ambassador. He, in turn, met weekly with President Houphouët Boigny.

*Q: Did the embassy find that you were dealing more with the chef du cabinet than you might have?*

DONAHUE: Protocol is very important in developing countries and I think particularly in Africa. The question of status and the trappings of office are very important. I used to think it was just Africa, but I know this is true in Latin America, as well. I used to think it was just small countries, but it can be large countries also because this pattern is very important in Brazil and China. I think that it has to do with needing to give the world a face. It's an image issue. So, typically, a cabinet member wanted to meet with the ambassador. The head of the national legislature would want to meet with the ambassador. But if the ambassador was not there, then the DCM or charge. The chief of the Political Section, if he were seeking a meeting, would probably have to meet at the level of the chef du cabinet. Those of us with less rank, first or second secretaries, would have to be content with someone lower down in a ministry. That having been said, once you established a relationship with an African and had a social relationship outside of the office, sometimes it was indeed possible to overcome the strict protocol problem and deal directly. On occasion, I was able to do this.

There were several instances when we had an informal route for whatever reason. For example, one of the issues that I was responsible for was labor. I suppose because I had agriculture and industry related to agriculture, which was most of the industry in Ivory Coast and would have employed more people, therefore, I also had the labor portfolio. It so happened that Didi Smith before she married Bob Smith had worked in the Department of Labor and had a number of former colleagues there who were interested in doing something with labor in Ivory Coast. They put together a kind of goodwill mission with the theme of safety in industry. It was supported by both the Department of Labor and the AFL-CIO and had therefore two Ivorian sponsors, the Ivorian Ministry of Labor and the Ivorian Labor Union. Because of Didi Smith's particular interest in this, and the fact that she knew some of the Labor Department organizers, we worked closely together on this mission. The agenda was a weeklong session, involving training seminars and some social events. Didi and I would jointly go to the Ministry of Labor and the Union to try to get their assistance in putting together the program and talk about what the embassy would do and what they would do and so forth. In those instances, we overcame these bureaucratic barriers and would be dealing directly with the minister of labor, directly with the head of the labor union.

*Q: How about private enterprise there? In so many parts of Africa, the Lebanese have sort of inserted themselves in as the business group. Was this true in Ivory Coast?*

DONAHUE: Very much so. There was a kind of stratification in the economy. At the highest level – and I'm talking about private sector, not public sector – there were a few international banking institutions, airlines, and certain large businesses that had major investments in Ivory Coast and were run by Europeans or in one or two cases Americans. Examples were the Credit Lyonnais and in the case of the U.S., Bank of America and Citibank, both of which had a presence there and Americans headed them. Peugeot, Renault, Mercedes Benz, and Caterpillar were all headed by expatriates. There were two or three large French transport companies with shipping interests. Air Afrique was headquartered in Abidjan, which was a private sector entity of African countries, but nevertheless with a fairly sophisticated hierarchy because it had to meet certain standards in order to run an international airline. I think Air France had a major office there at the time. In fact, even PanAm did because

PanAm flew there. So, there were those international companies that represented a kind of world class. Some other companies that were related to them, but didn't represent as large an investment, were also often headed by expats [expatriates]. For example, the major hotel in Côte d'Ivoire at that time was the Hôtel Ivoire and I believe it was part of the Intercontinental chain. Certainly, it was an international standard hotel. The hotel manager was Swiss. So, you would see people of that type that represented the well-paid international executive community.

Then under that level would have been what I would call for want of a better term the "plantation" or "industrial" sector. The heads of those organizations were Europeans, but they did not represent such large corporations. In many cases, they lived upcountry rather than in the capital. Or they would have a regional responsibility and they would be resident in Abidjan but would not remain in Abidjan all the time. So, they were there but not there so prominently as the higher level executive. Below them there was yet another stratum. At the time we lived in Côte d'Ivoire, there were 50,000 French citizens, which was more than during the time prior to independence. Many of the French would have been employed either directly by the French government in a bilateral economic development assistance program, or by an Ivorian ministry as experts in a particular area, often technologists, e.g., scientists or engineers. Or they were in education, faculty members at the university, like that. Because they were living in Ivory Coast with their families, there were employment opportunities for their spouses.

So, there were strange anomalies that many kinds of jobs that one would think could go to a local person – that is, an Ivorian – would often go to a Frenchman or a Belgian. Shortly after our arrival when we started encountering this, there was sort of a shock. We knew we were in Africa, but would sometimes forget we were in Africa. When we went grocery shopping, the people stocking the shelves might be African. The people at the cash register might be African. But the person who cut the cheese for you at the cheese counter was a French woman. The person who would cut the sausage or whatever was a Frenchman. We would go to a Belgian butcher. There was a French bakery and I mean to tell you, the people actually making the pastries were French. So, you had this anomaly. It was in Africa, but much of it was out of Europe. Another thing that sort of shocked us was that there were only one or two TV stations in Abidjan and one of them broadcast international news, news from Paris. It took a while to realize that when they talked about everything happening locally, it was happening in Paris. There was no Ivorian element at all to that. The outlook on world news was definitely that of France as opposed to that of Ivory Coast. I think it was on TV because of the large French community.

Below this level of French expatriates, who happened to be working in the economy because it was convenient (they lived there), were the Lebanese. They represented the vast bulk of the retail sector. Certainly the small shops, the small specialty stores that would be equivalent to a five and dime, the pharmacies and things like that, any little thing like that that you need in your daily lives, a lot of times the shop owner would be Lebanese. During that period, there had been a diaspora from Lebanon because Lebanon had experienced civil war and was still in the early stages. So, the Lebanese community was increasing. Many of the Lebanese situated in Ivory Coast had gotten word back to their families that it was a good place, it was

stable, they could make a good living, and so forth. So, during the entire period we were there, there was an outpouring of Lebanese to the country. Interestingly, just below the Lebanese in terms of numbers and the size of their business was the Vietnamese. That was because there had been an equivalent diaspora from Vietnam, especially South Vietnam. There were some wonderful restaurants run by Vietnamese. I've never visited Vietnam, but people who have said this was like taking something from Vietnam and just reassembling it in Ivory Coast. It was just as they remembered. We had a friend in the embassy, a man who had a Vietnamese wife, who said that for her being in Abidjan was closer to being at home than being in the U.S. ever would be because there was such a large Vietnamese community there with whom she had a lot in common.

Below that, I would say West Africans of any nationality except Ivorian so to speak, ran the rest of the economy, at the level of the street. So, when you went to the market, you could buy something from a Nigerian woman. Most of the sellers were women. Nigerian. Senegalese. Guinean. Ghanaian. Whatever. You could speak a smattering of languages. I would say buying at the market, we would use as much English as French. Typically, we would buy as much from an Anglophone as a Francophone. So, after I had been in Côte d'Ivoire for a few months, I started wondering where the Ivorians were. Part of that was, we employed so very few at the embassy. A typical embassy employs FS nationals. In that embassy, probably 80% of the employees were third country nationals. I believe in my experience, that's a record. There were a number of reasons. They needed people with particular skills, certainly an ability to read English. I think that was still a lack in Ivory Coast. Among the educated people, they could definitely handle French, but probably not English as well. But then I also discovered that the Ivorian economy was doing so well. A combination of factors. The government was still growing and employing a lot of people and the government paid so well that Ivorians preferred to work for their government or for some large industry or organization that would give them prestige. If they were in the academic community, they preferred to work at the University of Côte d'Ivoire in Abidjan or a high school, a lycee, in Abidjan rather than up-country. So, again, there was the anomaly that when we traveled up-country, in positions of authority, we would see more foreigners often than Ivorians. A typical lycee in a town up-country would have more than half of its teachers French, so-called "cooperants," the French equivalent of the Peace Corps. The Ivorians who had the education to teach at the lycee level wanted to be in a big city, in Abidjan. They didn't want to be up-country. That was true of engineers, people who maintained the water system, the power system, and other industries up-country. If the *cooperants* were available, they would go up and take those positions and the Ivorians would stream to Abidjan. At the time I was living in Ivory Coast, I believe the population of Ivorians was five million and there were an additional two million non-Ivorians living and working somewhere in Ivory Coast.

*Q: You were there from '74 to when?*

DONAHUE: From 1974 to 1976.

*Q: Were there any major things, coup attempts, natural disasters, major visits, or anything of this nature?*

DONAHUE: In terms of Ivory Coast's economy and politics, it was a time of great civility. However, the issue of corruption was becoming apparent. I think that was to be expected. There was a great deal of effort on the part of various aid donor countries to influence Ivory Coast, and kickbacks and various kinds of hanky-panky involved in contracts were becoming commonplace. That was true for the airlines and almost any major project that Ivory Coast had. I remember on one occasion, we went to a reception at the home of the foreign minister where my wife and I noticed he had a very large Impressionist painting. I don't remember the artist, but it was one of the major ones. When we were remarking about it, one of the people attending the reception said, "Oh, yes, and that is a real one, but you should see his home in Switzerland that has even more." We knew, and I think this was generally understood in the embassy, that many of the ministers were taking advantage of their position and were certainly living beyond their means. What we knew on paper was that the minister's salary would certainly not have put into his hands a painting valued at many hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars. So, the extent of corruption was becoming apparent.

There was no natural disaster. I believe they're rare in Ivory Coast. However, the government in neighboring Liberia was falling at that time. We didn't really suffer any kind of difficulty, but some Americo-Liberians were permanently exiled from their country as a result of the coup.

*Q: This was Samuel Doe.*

DONAHUE: Yes, this was Samuel Doe's revolution against President Tubman. We didn't really suffer any ill effects. We did notice that there was an influx of people from Liberia. They were not true refugees, that is village people, but business people who found that they could no longer make a go of it in Liberia. In many cases, Côte d'Ivoire was just a way station to some other place. We had made friends with the Liberian ambassador in Abidjan at that time and enjoyed him and his wife very much. They were Americo-Liberians. They told us a little bit about the experience of the Americo-Liberians in Liberia and about their concerns about what would happen if the Tubman regime were overthrown.

Generally speaking, Côte d'Ivoire was very safe and very welcoming and we felt very comfortable there. I do remember, though, that during this period when there were a large number of people coming across the borders from Liberia, the Ivorian government wanted to try to control this. A typical way of moving was along the coast and involved the highway, which is not continuous, from Liberia to Ghana. The Ivorian government erected roadblocks that would go into effect usually around sundown. We had diplomatic license plates that were very apparent and we were almost never stopped at a roadblock in Abidjan, but if we were traveling outside of the capital city, where the local police might not have been so familiar with our license plate, occasionally, we would be stopped. There was always a sense of apprehension. Once they saw our documents, there was no problem, but we never knew. That was the one period towards the last part of our posting there when we felt any degree of tension or apprehension about being on a highway. Otherwise, we really didn't feel affected by anything going on in neighboring countries.

**ROBERT S. SMITH**  
**Ambassador**  
**Ivory Coast (1974-1976)**

*Robert S. Smith graduated from Yale. He served in USAID in the Sixties and for six years in the State Department. In 1974 he was named ambassador to Ivory Coast. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1988.*

SMITH: On the corruption issue. Because it would be impossible for the U.S. to do business--either government business or private business--in any African country if we were purists about corruption.

For example, in Ivory Coast, the country I know best, the President encouraged his Ministers to have investments and land to develop agriculture, and so on, on the theory that he was, first of all, trying to build an indigenous middle class and, second of all, trying to build it around those best educated and most forward looking leaders of his country, his Ministers and others of his senior officials. The fact that some of this then got abused by a number of them was an inevitable outcome. Power is centralized in African countries. The tribal leader in African society is expected to look well, dress well, live well, so that his people can look up to him.

SMITH: When I was later Ambassador in Ivory Coast, I learned--whether I learned directly or through members of the Embassy staff, I don't recall at this point--that an important Ivorian official serving as Ambassador in another country was in on a very dubious payoff scheme with Ivory Coast. It was such a dubious scheme and such a big payoff that I thought that the Department ought to know about it. Fortunately I took the precaution of putting it in a letter back to the Department to the Bureau of African Affairs rather than in a cable or an airgram. And I got a response back, "For God's sake, Bob, stay out of that one," because getting anything public about it or anything spread around about it would, they felt, have generated more problems than it was worth getting into.

Q: *I'd like to move now to your time as Ambassador to the Ivory Coast. How did you get the job?*

SMITH: I think I was a loyal and hard worker for Dave Newsom, and when he saw his time coming to an end and a prospective appointment, ambassadorial appointment again for him, he offered to help some of the people around him find other assignments. And I considered myself very fortunate because, after all, I was not a career Foreign Service officer. I was going to a choice country from Africa's point of view and from the U.S. point of view toward Africa. And I think it was a combination of having worked hard, and I hope well, for David in the Bureau of African Affairs, the fact that I visited Ivory Coast on two or three occasions and met high level people there and so therefore was already known to the leadership and third, that I was pretty fluent in French, that I was nominated for the post.

I am aware, looking back, that there was some resentment about this from career people, not that I knew of anyone else who was particularly in line for the job but may have been. And also some concern on the political side because I happen to be a lifelong registered Democrat, and here was Nixon as President and had to get through that clearance process, which was not as strict as it apparently is today in the Reagan Administration, but it still figured. I somehow managed to get enough support from enough quarters to get the appointment.

*Q: Did you have any trouble with Senate clearance?*

SMITH: No, that was very simple.

*Q: You know, talking about the resentment, I mean after all you had certainly served your time much more than so many appointments.*

SMITH: Well, I really, you know, I was kind of neither fish nor fowl, because I was not a political appointee clearly and yet I was--well, some people sometimes referred to me then and still have as one of those "AID ambassadors". There are a few who had a longer time, though mine wasn't that long, in AID and became ambassadors. So we were not career Foreign Service but we were career international affairs and career government service people with a knowledge of Africa. Yes, I think I went to Ivory Coast knowing as much about Ivory Coast as anyone who's ever gone there when they got there, to say nothing of what I learned while I was there.

But there were always some underlying problems I think, plus I think I have to admit that there are a lot of things I might have done differently if I'd had the career diplomatic experience, serving at other levels within an Embassy other than that one post in Paris many years earlier and in a unique setting in the delegation to UNESCO and then this jumping, the next overseas post being as Ambassador.

*Q: What was the United States' interest in the Ivory Coast? We're talking about the 1970s as you went there in 1974.*

SMITH: Ivory Coast was the gem of the French empire in Africa and was still what many people referred to as *chasse gardée* or a protected hunting area of the French. And the French involvement was still, and is to this day, still very great in that country. We had no overriding political issues with them. They were very pro-western. They were very anti-communist. I'm talking about the leadership and pretty well through the country. They were politically stable. They were economically a success story. So our interest I would say was mainly in maintaining good relations just because they were one of the keys to the French area.

We had an interest through some investments. We bought a lot of, and still do, Ivory Coast cocoa and coffee, some fish, shrimp and things like that. But basically, you know, if you come down to it in terms of the world as a whole, our economic interests in Ivory Coast were minimal. It was more a question of maintaining good relations and of being able to get the views of the very wise and experienced President of Ivory Coast on some of the other issues in Africa. Frequently I was

asked by the Department to consult him not so much on Ivory Coast issues but on what he thought about communism in Africa, later on Angola, problems of coups in other countries, etc.

It even started before I got out there. I was named to Ivory Coast at the same time one of my colleagues was named Ambassador to Niger, one of the little countries inland from Ivory Coast, and I went out at the beginning of March and there was a coup d'etat in Niger just about the time I got out to Ivory Coast. And the President of Niger was a very close and intimate friend of Houphouet-Boigny, the President of Ivory Coast, and this guy was--he wasn't killed. His wife was killed in the coup. He was put under house arrest and so on. One of the first instructions I got was to go into President Houphouet to ask whether the U.S. should quickly recognize the new government there or hold back as a kind of protest against the coup toward one of his friends and one of the long-time independence leaders in Africa. And it was Houphouet's advice, "No, I'm very sad that my brother has been deposed," and he in fact had done a lot to help Diore's family to get out of the country.

*Q: The deposed man was?*

SMITH: Hamani Diore. But he said, "We've got to go on. We've got to live with our brother countries. We've got to live in this world together. We want relations to be as normal as possible with a new government there so that it doesn't get ideas of communist affiliation or something else, so please tell your government go ahead and send the Ambassador out." And we did. And I think that Houphouet's views were an important consideration in the timing of sending our new Ambassador out.

*Q: Could you describe--we're talking about President Felix Houphouet-Boigny. Could you describe his style of rule, his personality in your dealings with him? Because he's a major figure in African history.*

SMITH: Here I am very prejudiced in his favor, because I think this is a remarkable man, and I say this to begin with. I've read a lot about him. I met him for the first time in 1967 on my first trip to Africa. I had gone out with Joe Palmer when Joe was first named Assistant Secretary and I was in the Special Assistant assignment, and George Morgan was ambassador in Ivory Coast at the time. The Embassy had a military attaché's airplane, and we flew together to Yamoussoukro the President's birthplace where he keeps a palatial home, for a day with him. And that had been my first impression of him. And I've seen him quite regularly over the 21 years since, including as recently as four months ago.

*Q: He's still the President?*

SMITH: He's still the President. He is today in his mid-80s. He brought this country to independence, but not only did he do that, he was the leader of the principal independence movement of all of French West and Central Africa, starting right after World War II. Something called the Rassemblement Democratique Africain was the creation of Houphouet-Boigny.

Houphouet himself was a tribal chief of the largest single tribe in Ivory Coast. He was a cocoa and coffee planter. He had medical training as far as the French allowed, to kind of a

paramedical or sub-doctor level, in Dakar. In that training at a particular school in Dakar he had the opportunity to meet a lot of other French Africans who went up there for training.

So he didn't get into politics until he was in his early 40s. But by then he was widely known within Ivory

Coast and widely known among some of the neighboring colonies. He was the principal spokesman of Ivory Coast to France. He was, in fact, a Deputy in the French Assembly representing Ivory Coast, and one of two Africans to become Ministers in French governments. He was Minister of Health in several governments in the mid-50s, particularly under Mendes-France. I forget who the others were. So he cut a very important figure in French-African relations, in inter-Africa relations and to some limited extent in relation to some of the English speaking Africans such as Nkrumah next door and the Nigerians, though much less so, because the line of division was pretty sharp between the francophones and the anglophones.

When independence came, he was, well, prior to it he was made, I think they called him Prime Minister, and then he was made President at independence, and he has been re-elected every five years ever since. He's now in his mid-80s. He has not named a successor. This is a point of concern for a lot of people. His own statement on this as recently as two or three years ago was that he was reluctant to name a successor, and have fights start to undermine that successor until it became absolutely essential. There's some talk now that he may name a Prime Minister. There is a mechanical means of succession in the country, but that does not guarantee that the successor will become the permanent President.

This man operates as a father figure and a patriot--he's truly the George Washington of his country. Only George stepped down after a couple of terms as President and retired to his Mount Vernon farm. Houphouet is not willing to do that. He looks upon, and talks about even his Ministers as "my children." My wife and I were back on a visit in 1980, for example, and we went to see Houphouet Yamoussoukro and several Ministers were there at the same occasion, and we were there for a luncheon. And after the luncheon we sat and talked privately with Houphouet, my wife and I, and I don't know what the reference was, but it was something about how he had to see all these Ministers that day, as well as seeing us, because he had to deal with the children's quarrels among his Ministers, "les querrels d'enfants." And that's truly how he looks upon his people.

He's capable of fantastic mediation and negotiation. He believes strongly in, another word he uses a lot is "dialogue". Encouraging dialogue, or the Africa word for it is palaver, within the country, among countries and so on. He has taken a stand believing in dialogue with South Africa, much to the disgust of some of the leaders in the southern tier of African countries and the English-speaking countries. He has not favored sanctions. He has favored dialogue as a way of getting the white South African government to change its views, and this has showed up a lot of the time.

He's been very effective, and while there have been coups all around in neighboring countries and counter-coups and more coups, and while there have been from time to time rumors of coups, nothing has ever really evolved in terms of an anti-Houphouet takeover attempt in Ivory

Coast. Now, this isn't to say it couldn't happen if the man reached a point of being so old and perhaps senile that nothing is happening. They are quite sensitive--this last trip was in November. My last trip was in March and November before that--

*Q: This is March of 19--?*

SMITH: '88.

*Q: '88.*

SMITH: The people in the country are quite sensitive to what happened to Bourguiba in Tunisia.

*Q: This Habib Bourguiba who was forced out after he turned senile. This was last year.*

SMITH: Right. He was much like Houphouet. They were both pre-independence leaders who brought their countries to independence, fathers of their country and all those parallels, and friends. Not intimate friends, but friends. So everyone was watching that as an example. And there have been a few stirrings in Ivory Coast that seem to be linked at least in part to, well, look what happened to Bourguiba.

*Q: When you had a problem, let's say you had an economic problem or any problem, did you go to the Foreign Minister or did you go to the President?*

SMITH: It depended on the depth of the problem and the circumstances. I would frequently do both, see the Foreign Minister first and then the President. Sometimes I would deal with other Ministers directly. Ivory Coast was very open about--gave Ambassadors a good deal of freedom about seeing people. We were very free to travel around the country, no restrictions on travel. We were asked to inform the Chief of Protocol when we were planning a trip, for our own protection and so he could alert Prefects around the country, but not in any way to control our travels. The only restrictions we had was we were not free to look at military establishments or discuss military issues with the military officials in the country. Now, we could talk to the Minister of Defense, who was a civilian. That restriction even applied to our Military Attachés.

*Q: And what did our Military Attachés do?*

SMITH: They were allowed to meet socially with the counterpart military. They spent time with the French military advisers. They were allowed on certain, you know, guided trips to military establishments, things like that.

Coming back to how--you'd asked me how I dealt with the President or the Foreign Minister or other Ministers on different issues. Sometimes Washington would ask all the Ambassadors in Africa to go in at the highest possible levels on issues coming up at the UN, for example, or the sanctions issue or Southern Africa. It got particularly hot in--I was there from '74 through '76,--in '75 when the Angola issue became heated up and when, as we said, Henry Kissinger discovered Africa in Angola.

*Q: Could you describe the Angola issue please for the record?*

SMITH: The Angolan issue essentially was that there were at least three groups in opposition to the communist-led government of Angola after independence. Independence was I believe '74 of Angola.

*Q: I'll check on that. '74.*

SMITH: '74. And a pro-communist or certainly far left group took over the government and there continued to be opposition groups fighting it. And the question was what our role should be in relation to those opposition groups. We did provide military support to at least one of them. I think maybe to two of them. One by way of Zaire, one by way of Namibia and South Africa. And Kissinger felt that this was very important to offset the threat of a spread of communism in Africa. And this led to his traveling to Africa for the first time, talking to a number of government leaders. He did not get to Ivory Coast, but asked for, wanted Houphouet's views. And the then Assistant Secretary for African Affairs Bill Schaefele did get to Abidjan to see Houphouet and we went to see Houphouet on this question and Bill also had a private luncheon with Houphouet on this question.

Essentially Houphouet favored our supporting UNITA, the principal opposition group to the government in Angola, because he felt that this was one of the ways to keep down the threat of the spread communism in Africa. So we had his blessing for our policy. Here again was where he didn't reflect the opinion of say views at the UN. [Tape off.]

*Q: Well, again then we're really talking about a rather unique relationship in that we were using--using is the wrong term--but accepting--*

SMITH: Turning to.

*Q: Turning to the leader of the Ivory Coast as an adviser. [Interrupted by telephone.] Turning more to the nuts and bolts. How did you find our Embassy staffed in the Ivory Coast?*

SMITH: Let me just tell you one more Houphouet story because it's very interesting about the man. Let's go back to when you were asking much earlier about corruption. I came across a situation in which a big payoff was being made by an American company to an intermediary, non-Ivorian African in order to get something done in the way of a U.S. investment. And this was a time when Congress was beginning to say a great deal about objecting to payoffs and all the rest, and I thought I was in the right to challenge this. And I simply said to the American company representative that I thought that this was not consistent with our laws and I did not think it was a good precedent to be setting and so on.

I thought that the people listening to me would understand this and would accept it. Instead these Americans proceeded to tell this African intermediary what I had said. Well, the African intermediary--[Interrupted by telephone.]

I had a visit from this African who in fact was the son of another former President who had been defeated in a coup, got killed in a coup, who had been a friend of Houphouet and, therefore, Houphouet was befriending these sons of the former President, another of his old buddies. And I told him the same things I had told the Americans. Well, he went right back to Houphouet and said that I was interfering with his ability to do business in the country. And, lo and behold, very quickly I had a call from the presidency to come in and see the President. And the President sat me down, we were very friendly, good friends by then. He knew I was a friend of his and a friend of his country and the U.S., of course, was friendly and so on. But he admonished me in no uncertain terms that this was not something I should have done because, and I quote him, "this man was just trying to earn an honest living".

Alright, you can say he was condoning corruption, payoffs. Again, it gives you an idea of how those fit into African society. He was also defending loyally the son of a dear friend. Now, I happen to think that the man in question was an abominable person and he has proven to be that in a number of other ways since, and I'm sorry that Houphouet did this. But it didn't hurt me, it didn't hurt our relationship then or thereafter. This, again, was one of the ways that this man was very straightforward. And you could deal with him on a plus or a minus. There were times when I had to go in with an unfavorable U.S. position, such as our position on coffee, an international coffee agreement where the U.S. didn't want it and Ivory Coast, as a major producer, wanted it very badly. And that meant having to make an unpopular statement. Alright, he made clear what he didn't like about it so I would be clear to get that conveyed back again, but it never affected personal relationships. A very unusual man.

*Q: Well, moving from him to the Embassy, how did you find it staffed and how it worked when you were there?*

SMITH: Well, we had an Embassy of about 17 Americans in the Embassy itself and probably 150 Americans in the U.S. government offices in the country as a whole, including an AID regional office, going back to what I had helped bring into being 8 or 10 years earlier. Therefore, a large AID presence, a USIS staff a regional Military Attaché's office, a regional CIA office, a regional budget office for the State Department, a whole lot of people who had regional responsibilities not directly under my authority. So it was an odd kind of governing and negotiating and dealing. When they were doing something in relation to the Ivory Coast, they came under the Embassy and under the Ambassador. When they were doing something, traveling elsewhere, or programs elsewhere, I had absolutely no say in it. We worked this out I think reasonably well.

I think the Embassy officers felt that they were oddly in a kind of minority status in all of this. I'm sorry to say there was a little too much segregation of the Embassy people on the one hand and the AID people, who were the largest other group on the other hand, with the Defense and CIA people, a few of them fitting in kind of in between and mixing fairly easily.

I tried to keep some balance in this. Again, my own orientation helped, my own background in having been both in State and AID. The AID Mission Director and I, the regional Mission Director and I, had worked together in the AID Bureau of African Affairs at an earlier stage. The Junior Economic Officer in the Embassy and I had worked together on some debt negotiations in

the time I was in the State Department, so I had old friends and acquaintances and colleagues in both areas.

There were a few times when I really had to say to one side or the other I just think you are being unreasonably isolated or separatist or prejudiced or whatever. There was that kind of thing.

*Q: Was your DCM helpful, supportive in all this or not?*

SMITH: I had a very bad history with two DCMs. I don't know whether you want to go into that or not.

*Q: Well, I'll tell you. I'm not trying to get into personalities. I mean I know nothing of the background of this, but I'm trying to get how Embassies work and some of the problems. So whatever you'd care to say on that.*

SMITH: Well, without getting into the personalities, one of the first DCMs had probably been as involved in Africa as I had. The second one had never been involved in Africa before. I don't think either one of them expected as much of an activist Ambassador as I was. My interest in the country, my interest in the issues, my wanting to be involved in all of them, and also a pretty strong background in administration, meant that I probably got into things more than I should have. I should have, looking back, left more of the inner workings of the Embassy complex to these two DCMs. And I think much of where we had a problem was, one, that I was not career Foreign Service but, two, that I was thoroughly interested in the details. And that meant that except that, when I was traveling, they probably felt they didn't have enough to do. We probably could have worked that out. We weren't able to.

*Q: Well, how was this resolved?*

SMITH: Well, I asked the first one to leave and the second one was away from the post in the last few months that I was there and then came back as DCM in the transition with the new Ambassador and then he went on somewhere else.

*Q: This is an unclassified interview, but it's a question that I do ask. How did you find the CIA there? Was it supportive, or how did you find it?*

SMITH: Very cooperative. Very cooperative. The principal CIA man there for most of the time I was there had had a similar post elsewhere in Africa in a place I had visited a number of times, and I knew him from those visits. So we had at least an acquaintance before I got to the post in Abidjan where he already was. My wife and I got on very nicely with him and his wife. She was French and was in charge of French teaching for the Embassy at the time, and my wife was taking regular French lessons, not from her but from one of the other staff members. So we had a nice social relationship. And I always felt that--he was, of course a regional person, covering several countries. So he was one of these that was traveling a certain amount, had involvement elsewhere as well as in Ivory Coast, didn't have major things to do.

*Q: I would think that in the Ivory Coast this was not a high priority by any means.*

SMITH: No, it was more a good place to be located and to travel from and back to. In a few instances when I wanted particular information that I thought could come best from him, he was very cooperative. And I can't recall any clashes or problems. I had had a fair number of dealings as Deputy Assistant Secretary with CIA people, and again I've had quite good relationships on various working levels on economic issues before I went out to Abidjan.

*Q: Well, to move beyond this you left in what 1976?*

SMITH: Left in '76.

**CHARLES C. CHRISTIAN**  
**Deputy Director, USAID, REDSO**  
**Abidjan (1978-1980)**

*Charles C. Christian was born in Missouri in 1927. He received a bachelor's degree from Westminster College in 1950 and a master's degree from George Washington University in 1971. Mr. Christian joined USAID in 1961. His career included positions in Indonesia, Afghanistan, Laos, the Philippines, and The Ivory Coast. He was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1995.*

CHRISTIAN: Yes. This was a regional development support operations with the servicing of numerous countries in West Africa.

*Q: How big a staff or operation did you have there?*

CHRISTIAN: We had thirty or so technicians who were located regionally in Abidjan because each of the Missions in the region didn't require full time technical support in each of the skill areas. It was economically feasible and a very good use of resources as far as USAID was concerned. It was an awfully tough duty station for many of the technicians though, because travel in West Africa was about as difficult as any place in the world at that time. And it meant spending an inordinate amount of time in pitiful airports. They have improved over the years, as all places have. The international travel, hotels, and so forth have come a long way since I started with AID. Maybe its the wrong things that have improved.

*Q: What were you focusing on?*

CHRISTIAN: I was focusing on keeping the office moving, and seeing that we got support for the technicians, and reasonably efficient scheduling of the technicians. Gordon Evans was Mr. Outside, and I was Mr. Inside. He, as the Mission Director, did most of the traveling to the other posts, that was required by the position. I made a couple of trips, to Mali, to Guinea and one to Senegal. I had been to Niger and to Upper Volta before. I had an earlier role before, as deputy controller of the agency, to set up the financial operations in the field in support of programs in

West Africa. I had gone out to visit the likes of David Shear, when he was a REDSO/Director, and John Koehring, when he was Mission Director in the Cameroon, and the wild man who was Mission Director in Niger, (I don't remember his name); he drove us in his car across the desert so fast that I was sure that I wouldn't come back alive. He died out that way I think; I believe he had a heart attack while he was out there in the late 1970s or early '80s. Norman Schoonover was mission director at USAID/Senegal. Two new mission directors came out to Mali and Burkina Faso, Upper Volta it was called then, John Hoskins and Ron Levine, a couple of young lawyers. I had a lot to do with selecting the controllers to go into the new missions in West Africa. I recall having a lot of trouble getting John Koehring to accept the idea that he needed a Controller in the Cameroon. John was a pretty strong character, and he thought they were doing just fine without another position. I finally forced that issue with the powers that be in Washington. We finally got a Controller by the name of Steve Liapis on-board and John later came back with only high praise for Steve, and thanked me forever after.

*Q: How did the operation work out in the other countries?*

CHRISTIAN: It was a big step forward. Previously they had received only long distance Controller support from Washington. Washington was providing whatever services they got, but that of course was extremely limited. This was 1974. Don Walls was assigned to Niger, serving Niger and Upper Volta. Phil Amos went to Senegal, and served Senegal and Mali, the latter initially was a very small program. As I said Steve Liapis was assigned to the Cameroon. We also sent a controller, Harry Shropshire, to the regional operation in Abidjan.

*Q: How well did that work?*

CHRISTIAN: The structure is still basically in place today, with controller positions added to some of the other Sahel countries. We had trouble monitoring the generation and use of local currency in the Sahel. The local currency tended to disappear in large chunks according to audits released in about 1980-82; it simply wasn't accounted for, particularly in Mali. We undertook the Sahel Financial Management Program to correct the problem. That was quite an undertaking in training host country nationals throughout the Sahel.

*Q: That was the time of the congressional concern about \$10 million that couldn't be tracked?*

CHRISTIAN: That's right. I have a sneaking suspicion that much of that audit report was unjustified, because the auditors were non-French speaking, and a lot of the first generation project officers had been transferred by that time and the newcomers were not necessarily strong in defense of past performance, nor experienced in dealing with audits. That may apply to some of the controllers in place as well as to the project manager side. They probably did not stick together as a mission and present their case in a balanced way. I venture to say this, inasmuch as about a year later we had a French-speaking TDY controller out there, and he found many records in French that would have accounted for at least some of the funds in question. There were a lot of French records in the archives, but at that late date it would not have done AID any good to try and make a correction. We had already taken our punishment, and we had a good Sahel financial management project underway, which I felt was benefiting the host country

financial types by training them and making them better equipped to account for their finances in the future.

*Q: But how did this issue affect the program?*

CHRISTIAN: Like many of my experiences at AID, we were able to take a hit and convert it into a much better situation. It is unfortunate that a loss occurs in the first place, but we do not just leave it there. It is to our credit that we are able to do that. It is usually a situation where we have had too few human resources to obtain the necessary level of accountability. There is a list of things that contributed to our inability to do as well as we should have in the financial areas.

*Q: But you are now talking about your work with REDSO? What kind of issues were you faced with in that unusual operation.*

CHRISTIAN: The big thing was keeping the clients, the missions that we were servicing, satisfied; that each Mission was getting a fair share of the talent in a timely manner. Frequently, more than one Mission wanted the same person at the same time to assist them on some phase of project design or implementation. Frequently you had to juggle and try to placate the powers that be. Sometimes there were unhappy campers!

*Q: Did you have to deal a lot with the morale of the staff?*

CHRISTIAN: You have families there with the husband away because he is always traveling. The least gratifying was that the community spirit was not there. The relationship with the host country was not there. There were not too many community facilities; there was a small pool at the Ambassador's residence. It depended on the nature of the Ambassador and his wife as to the access you had to that. The tennis courts were extremely limited and in poor conditions. You had to be an African hand and really feel the calling. There was an oasis at the Hotel Ivoire that was too grandiose for that part of the world, but it wasn't like the latest excess in senility. I am referring to the basilica in Yamousoukro, the largest church in the world, surpassing St. Peters in Rome.

*Q: Generally you found living in Abidjan difficult?*

CHRISTIAN: It was quite a change to go from the Asian to African lifestyle. The Africans seemed to be in pitched battles when they were just having a friendly discussion. Their natures were very different from the Asians, which you gradually came to understand in time. Abidjan was extremely high humidity, but you did have the beach. The staff developed a lifestyle there, especially if they had a French background, that made it enjoyable for many. The housing was reasonably good; the food in the marketplace was plentiful, but at that time the exchange rate for the dollar was extremely unfavorable. If you went out for pizza with your children, it was like going to one of the most expensive restaurants in Washington, DC. It changed over the years. The next time I went back, things were more reasonable. There was a cost of living index while I was there that took care of that, but it was just the feeling that you were paying too much for what you were getting. Travel was extremely expensive there, so you didn't travel much by air. My wife did a circle tour by car around the Ivory Coast. She and a couple other ladies took our

car and drove all around the Cote d'Ivoire, and a lot of it was washboard roads. She enjoyed that; she saw the dancers on stilts up in the villages and all the local culture, but the roads were bad, limiting access. Politically, and also economically, things were not very good in Ghana at that time, so we couldn't go there. I have been to Togo though. Togo was a pleasant surprise. I got over to Benin for a few days. Because of all the French influence, if you are a Francophile you are right at home in that part of the world. A lot of French ex-pats remain from the colonial days.

*Q: What about the quality of the staff?*

CHRISTIAN: We had a good US hire group, qualified people. The foreign nationals had not been trained in American office procedures. We had to use whatever was available in the controllers office in the way of ex-pats, and to gradually bring local foreign nationals up to speed, who were slowly being trained. The largest crew was in the Communications and Records (C&R). Also on the management staff, which was being developed by Anne Bradley who was a former secretary who had served in Laos up-country with the legendary Pop Buell. She could handle most everything that came in the way of unorthodox ways of doing business. (At times I was not sure either of us would survive.) We had staff from the other coastal countries like Guinea and Ghana at that time, because things weren't going so well in those countries in terms of development. One of the things that impressed me in the Ivory Coast was how much progress they had made development-wise compared with other countries in the region who were much better off at the time of independence less than 20 years before. The Ivory Coast based its progress on small agriculture programs, and the country had accepted retaining a lot of French ex-pats working in their government.

*Q: Were you involved in any development projects in the Ivory Coast?*

CHRISTIAN: No. We had a little PVO activity and a RUHDO, a housing program, but that wasn't under our auspices really. As an interesting, at times humorous, aside: There was a long standing, if not big, dispute between Gordon Evans, the REDSO Director and the head of RUHDO as to RUHDO's place at the table for country team meetings. The RUHDO chief had been in Abidjan for ten to twelve years, and knew everyone in town, if not the country. For this reason, the Ambassador wanted him in the meetings, and Gordon didn't feel that the guy was high enough ranked on AID's totem pole to be at the country team meetings, particularly, if Gordon's higher ranking division chiefs weren't included.

*Q: So there was some competition which was typical of RHUDO everywhere. They tended to operate quite independently of AID.*

CHRISTIAN: I remember Zim made a comment once, but I didn't get into it with him. He said he had no idea why we were giving out assistance in this functional assistance area since we hadn't even been successful at home with housing projects.

*Q: That's another story, but it shows the interesting history of those kinds of operations that get special funding and special mandates and tend to be operated independently of the AID organizational structure.*

CHRISTIAN: There is always something like that. I wasn't aware of it in the field. I think that was the first place I ran into the housing program.

*Q: Then what happened?*

CHRISTIAN: About the end of my first tour in Abidjan, I had lunch with Golar Butcher, the Assistant Administrator for Africa. Gordon had a dinner for her with all the division chiefs, and the next day I was to have a luncheon for her, and it just so happened that this second round was to include a lot of women and minorities, and, of course, that put me in high esteem with the Assistant Administrator, a minority female. At that time, you folks were looking for an Associate Assistant Administrator in the Africa Bureau, and I was tapped for that position back in Washington. I came back in June or July of 1980.

**STEDMAN HOWARD**  
**Regional Post Management Officer, USIS**  
**Abidjan (1978-1981)**

*Mr. Howard was born in New York and raised in New York and Massachusetts. He was educated at Wake Forest College (Illinois); Worcester Junior College; University of Massachusetts; and the University of Maine. He joined the United States Information Agency in 1971 in Washington and served there, dealing with management matters, including the Voice of America (VOA). Mr. Howard also served abroad as Public Affairs Officer in Abidjan, Lilongwe (Malawi) and Kampala. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.*

*Q: But did you have a site of operation?*

HOWARD: I hypothetically lived and worked out of Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

*Q: You went out there when? This would be?*

HOWARD: It was June of '78.

*Q: And you were doing that particular job from '78 to when?*

HOWARD: '81.

*Q: '81. Talk about the job then.*

HOWARD: I was in effect a freelance management consultant with 16, actually in effect 12 live clients and four passive clients. There were 16 countries in the territory, four of which had no USIS installation, but did have little pots of money and sometimes an FSN employee and usually with the responsibility tagged to the pol/econ officer or to the DCM or even the admin officer. I went into places like Bissau and Nouakchott. You'd have to know the geography of West Africa;

they're pretty small countries. Banjul and Gambia which we had no installation. I also went to Freetown, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and Senegal. And Guinea where we had PAOs with live posts and I followed generally the coast and across the Sahel coming down to Nigeria. In Nigeria we had a full executive officer so I went back up to Nigeria, but for the 15 other countries I was the primary management consultant. I'd go and help them do their financial planning, do their personnel work, work on their real estate problems.

*Q: Did you run across the situation, I'm told, which was prevalent in much of that area say with lots of State Department junior officers. Junior officers doing a first time tour and really don't know their job that well because they're just beginning.*

HOWARD: Now, at the time that was not the case with us. At the time our situation was that these posts in the late '70s existed with a grade structure that still persisted, that had been established in the early '70s. A post like Sierra Leone, for example, the PAO is the equivalent to the class one officer today, which was actually a class three in that system at the time in the old service. That class one or three-grade level had been established and there were three and sometimes four officers in the post. By the time I got there there was one officer and probably half or less the number of FSNs that once were there in most of them. It didn't matter what the size of the post was; it was smaller and of lesser magnitude than it had been when the grade structure was imposed. This resulted in the proposition that we had a great number of older and far more experienced officers. It made for somewhat more rational programming activity and sometimes more rational management, but a very low energy level. These were 20% and 25% [hardship differential] posts. It was not uncommon to find someone take the assignment and come with their air freight and no dependents and mumble when you asked them where their household effects were. Then they would bail out on the 5<sup>th</sup> of January following their arrival with their air freight simply readdressed because they had come to collect the 25% on their 250 hours of annual leave.

*Q: We're talking about a pay differential.*

HOWARD: Yes. At the time you were paid at your hourly rate for unused annual leave at whatever the prevailing rate was at the place you were assigned. If you retired at post overseas and you were at a 25% post and you took your base hourly rate plus 25% on your annual leave. If you had accumulated a year's annual leave on top of your ceiling and that's what many people had done, you had probably close to 500 hours of annual leave at a 25% premium. People would come out to do that. They'd retire at post. The 25% differential was not calculated into retirement annuity, but it certainly was calculated at a pay out annually. So, people retired at post and when they retired at post, they were in the Service one day and the day they got on the plane they were retired, they were retirees. They flew home.

*Q: What was your impression of the operation in these areas, the effectiveness of what they were doing?*

HOWARD: It varied. It varied quite significantly where you had younger officers. You had more adventurous programming. You had more elaborate programming. Occasionally you would have a very experienced officer who was quite serious about what he was doing and he was making

some real serious progress. The thing about Africa, which makes it different from other parts of the world, is that you can have some very immediate impact. Situations are small enough at a level where you can walk in with, say, four journalism training programs and in a year you can improve the look of the local media market. Well, you can't do that in France, you can't do it in Germany. You can't do it anywhere else. But you can do it in Africa. Where you had good solid people who were carefully crafting a program, you got it. Sometimes they were brand new and sometimes they were old.

Many of the older people when I first went out there were just riding out their retirements. We had an awful reputation. Africa Bureau (AF) was difficult to staff because people saw that careers could be made in Europe or in Latin America. We ended up being pushed to take officers who were less than stellar, who were close to retirement. It took about a four or five year serious effort on the part of the Office of African affairs that USIA will weed that practice out, when you get to the point where you have no officers. What helped was John Reinhardt, who was the director of USIA under the Carter administration, came along in one fell swoop and virtually downgraded the whole world one grade. He certainly did it all through Africa. All of a sudden you went from a class one to a class two post. There were no class two officers much as there are none now and we were down to class three and class four, sometimes just post-junior officers. My first PAOship was in Malawi. When you get up in the morning with malice aforethought and tempted to chart your way to doing harm to U.S. national interests you failed. The country just had no impact. No matter what you did you couldn't do noticeable harm. It was a marvelous laboratory to experiment for me because I'd been telling people how to run their posts for three years. Here was my own live experiment where I had to live with what I did. I discovered that I was a little naïve in some cases and very much on the mark in other parts.

In '81 when I finished that original post management assignment, I went to be a PAO in Lilongwe. I had said to the area directors: I could fix the post's problems, but I could not do it as a transitory visitor; I had to own it. It had to be mine. I had to have the durability to impose and work through the problems that my policies created, and I had to live with the results. I had to be there to make sure that the follow-through happened.

*Q: While you were working in Abidjan, how did you find, most of the area you were covering had been former French colonies hadn't they?*

HOWARD: Yes, about a two to one ratio French to British.

*Q: With the French influence, were we in head-to-head competition with them or how did it seem to work vis-a-vie with the French?*

HOWARD: They were close to 20 years past independence and in most cases they were the second successor if not the third or fourth successor governments to the initial post independence. So, the degree of French influence changed in each of the countries evolving in a different rate in a different scheme and so the countries where you could declare some sort of commonality and uniformity in 1960, by the time we hit 1980 it was very low. Language was a commonality and the French maintained their discipline through the financial support that they gave through the French franc. They maintained exchangeability, the exchange rate of 50 to 1,

which means they carried an enormous burden in stabilizing these countries' economies because their own economies could not have carried that kind of exchange rate. In return, where their economic interests dictated, they more or less had more influence or less influence. They had very little background influence in Senegal. President Senghor was his own intellect and he had his own sense of independence from the French and his own sense of connections with the French and his French connections were through the Sorbonne not through the Ministry of Finance. Houphouët-Boigny of Ivory Coast, on the other hand, the entire relationship was economic and indeed the French were behind virtually every ministry. If you didn't know the Frenchman who ran the ministry in the Ivory Coast, you weren't going to have anything done.

The British handed over and walked away and that was Sierra Leone and Gambia and Ghana, Nigeria, Lome, the French were not really there. There were a few Germans floating around because it had been Togoland.

Benin was a French speaking version of the Nigerian economy and they derived a lot of their business by doing business with Nigerians and the Nigerians did business with each other or other Nigerian restrictions could develop. Each country had evolved to the point where things were slightly different. You couldn't make any generalities. The generality you could make was that because there was a formal common defense agreement and there was a formal support structure in terms of currency exchanges and economic support, yes, but the countries ran all the way from complete western orientation in the Ivory Coast to Soviet bloc clients in Mali and Guinea, Guinea where they delivered snow plows. In 20 years they had become different countries; they really were. If you look at a language map of Africa it looks like a very finely drawn jigsaw puzzle. For 55 countries there were 500 plus languages. You impose various overlays over Africa you discover that the commonalties disappear. The lines run quite differently. It's like trying to interpret what's going on in Yemen. About the only commonalties I noticed was in the French countries the phones didn't work and the mails were useless and the food was good. The British countries, the mails ran, telephones worked and the food was atrocious.

*Q: As a management officer sitting there, how did you find your relations with our ambassadors and their USIA counterparts? Was it basically pretty good cooperation or were there problems?*

HOWARD: All over the lot. There were problems in some places and very solid cooperation in others. It depended on how much the ambassador understood about our program and how much the PAO went out of his or her way to acquaint the ambassador with the details of the program. I would say we were not as successful nor as earnest a group of educators as we should have been in that regard. We should have been much more diligent about teaching our State colleagues. We should not have assumed that they knew what they were looking at by virtue of their having looked at it. I discovered after the fact that woeful ignorance is what we are and what we do for a living is one of the great aggravations of the consolidation. I would say that there were countries where it was a very contentious relationship and countries where it was all over the map. There's no way to draw commonalties from it.

**GORDON W. EVANS**  
**Mission Director, USAID, REDSO**  
**Abidjan (1978-1982)**

*Gordon W. Evans was born in New York in 1932. He graduated from Antioch College and received a Master's Degree from the University of Pennsylvania. His assignments abroad included Ghana, Nigeria, India, and Ivory Coast. Mr. Evans was interviewed in 1998 by Barbara S. Evans.*

*Q: Your last overseas assignment was with REDSO. Explain what that was all about.*

EVANS: REDSO is a product of the late 1960s. It refers to the Regional Economic Development Services Office. There was one based in Nairobi for East Africa and one based in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, for West Africa. My appointment as Director of REDSO/West occurred in August of 1978. Here again, the team of Butcher and North believed in my ability to run such a program and I was always appreciative of that.

I directed REDSO from September 1978-September 1982. The 85 staff included agronomists, economists, capital development officers, civil and water resource engineers, lawyers, contract officers, health planners, nutritionists, and a variety of other specialists. Its principal function was to develop projects within bilateral and regional programs and occasionally to evaluate existing projects. The REDSO Director's authority was subordinate to that of each bilateral Director, but REDSO teams of two to five specialists would arrive in the requesting country after data collection and the rough project paper outline was reviewed by the Director and his or her staff. They would generally return to Abidjan to complete a series of such papers. Often, one of my staff would be working on three or four projects simultaneously advancing them each week. These roving teams were a bit like Johnny Appleseeds, spreading ideas and approaches from country to country. They kept USAID directors current on what was going on in neighboring countries and in the region in general. That idea alone was very valuable. The 24 countries within the REDSO/West bailiwick constituted an area larger than the Continental United States. During my four year assignment, I visited 23 of these 24 countries.

*Q: Did you have specific goals when you arrived in West Africa?*

EVANS: I believe I did and, to a certain extent, they were controversial. But I still feel they were right. My first goal upon arriving in Abidjan was to attempt to have REDSO/West get a better feel for the dynamics of this vast region. The UK, France, Belgium, Portugal, and Spain had controlled the destiny of these 200 million people until just two decades earlier. Balkanized and non-communicating, the region would clearly benefit from institutions of collaboration and sharing. The Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa provided helpful planning data, but was really too remote. Our work with the Entente Fund in the four countries bounding Ghana was too restrictive. Therefore, much of our effort was focused on strengthening ECOWAS, the Economic Commission of West African States, based in Lagos, but directed by a brilliant, dynamic Ivorian. Though ECOWAS did not include the Cameroons, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, and Zaire within our region, it did cover a substantial part of the REDSO region. We furnished

them every AID project description within their countries and supported strongly their movement toward a West African common market facilitated by an infrastructure geared to that region. This was in contrast to what was left behind by the metropole powers. The ECOWAS framework is solid, but evolving the political will to allocate national resources for the good of the region will take perseverance and constancy. ECOWAS does have a legitimacy and a focus that Kwame Nkrumah's grand design for a United States of Africa never had. There is a reason to hope that future AID regional projects in West Africa could and should be planned and implemented through entities such as ECOWAS.

*Q: What about the African Development Bank?*

EVANS: A second major focus was in strengthening the staff of the African Development Bank based in Abidjan. This institution was one of three regional development banks that the U.S. supported throughout the world, including one in Asia and in Latin America. Our principal effort was in improving the quality of project design, implementation, and evaluation, especially in the productive and infrastructure sectors. The ADB hired bright, aspiring officers from all over Africa. Its missions, not unlike those of the World Bank, supported competent professionals in many of the 51 countries of Africa.

The African Development Bank was not unlike our REDSO in concept. Much of its good work was done through contract sector teams. They ranged widely throughout Africa building field experience and often focusing on, if not breaking, major logjams in a specific sector. Our AID advisors worked with the resident staff in ADB/Abidjan. They assisted in advancing a career service with improved position descriptions, annual evaluations, and more formal peer-competitive promotion. They assisted in sharpening project contracting so that field project implementation could be reimbursed more accurately and measurable progress accomplished. They assisted in computerizing project record keeping including repayment schedules for recipient countries. They also arranged training in the U.S. for key ADB staff and worked closely with other advisors to ADB from the World Bank and other countries. Our AID assistance was minimal, but in its steadfast manner important.

The U.S. Department of Treasury maintained principal liaison to the African Development Fund for the lesser developing countries of Africa and kept their resident director informed of our assistance. The three regional development banks were an important supplement to the World Bank, UNDP, and bilateral assistance.

*Q: Are population dynamics important?*

EVANS: The continent of Africa is underpopulated relative to South Asia, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, overpopulation in Sub-Sahara Africa is likely to be one of its greatest constraints to development and quality of life. Ghana was a leader in having a broad based population policy as early as 1970. The informal migration involved probably 20 million people over my 10 years in Africa. This migration was dynamic in the sense that movements were largely from the interior to the coast, but also from one country to another along the coast. The vast bulk of these 20 million people were coming to the coastal countries for employment. Families who joined the wage earner often were not acknowledged by the host government and so schooling, health

services, housing, and other benefits to the resident population were generally not available. Population growth still averaged an estimated two percent annually in West Africa. Dakar, Abidjan, Lagos, Douala, and Libreville, among others, were examples of urban breakdown due to uncontrolled migration. The Population Council, the work of the World Bank, and to a certain extent the African Development Bank, would support population programs, particularly knowledge of ways in which to bring the two to three percent annual growth down. But by and large there was little support from AID/Washington after Golar Butcher left office.

I'll never forget the new Assistant Administrator for Africa sitting in our REDSO/West briefing room. I tried to set the stage for REDSO's work within the region and touched on some thoughts about a regional population strategy that we were working on with the Bank and with ECOWAS. His eyes literally glazed over. I presumed he felt that this should be none of our concern. He may have represented the mentality that has devastated the population programs in countries receiving AID assistance and in shackling the UN Fund for Population Activities. Fortunately, countries such as Scandinavia, Canada, the UK, and Germany are much more supportive and the UN continues to do extremely important work in the field of population dynamics and control.

*Q: Can you make comparisons between the regional or bilateral approach?*

EVANS: Of course, it is easier to provide assistance to a subcontinent under one central government such as India, but I found the REDSO assignment in West Africa challenging and intriguing. In our small way, the U.S. was patiently assisting through modest projects to undergird a movement toward national and regional participation in the world economy. A generation ago, this was far from the mind of the controlling metropole powers. The REDSO staff were true professionals who knew the region and worked long weeks, often far from Abidjan. We initiated, reshaped, or evaluated over 50 bilateral and regional projects during my tenure in Abidjan. An over-simplified conclusion is that well managed regional projects represent solid developmental assistance if the participation of host governments are strongly supportive. The nature of nationalism tends to assure great host government support for bilateral projects. In respect to Cote d'Ivoire, AID assistance has always been minimal because of its high per capita income and significant French resistance to our presence. Our limited assistance was in the agricultural sector through the Entente Fund. The Entente Fund was directed by Paul Kaya, said to be Houphouet Boigny's son, and focused very limited U.S. resources on Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Togo. Though Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana had nearly identical per capita incomes in 1960, by 1980 Cote d'Ivoire's was nearly four times that of Ghana!

But Barbara and I had agreed that I would retire at 50 years of age. This was not because of disappointment with our career, but because of a feeling that a post-REDSO directorship would be anticlimactic. Therefore, we initiated the retirement action in the spring of 1982 and departed Abidjan in October of 1982.

**BRUCE F. DUNCOMBE**  
**Economic Counselor**  
**Abidjan (1979-1983)**

*Bruce F. Duncombe was born in Massachusetts in 1937 and graduated from Amherst College and the University of Minnesota. He entered the Foreign Service in 1979. His career included posts in Abidjan, Cairo, New Delhi, Jakarta, Lagos and Abuja. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

*Q: So, you went to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire from 1979 to 1983. What was the political economic situation there, when you arrived?*

DUNCOMBE: Very stable. You had a single party government. Houphouet-Boigny was the long term president. By the standards of African countries, it was doing quite well. It was a fun place to live.

*Q: This was considered the jewel of the former French islands, wasn't it?*

DUNCOMBE: That is correct.

*Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?*

DUNCOMBE: Nancy Rawls.

*Q: How did you find her as ambassador?*

DUNCOMBE: A very, very pleasant person to work for.

*Q: What were American interests in Cote d'Ivoire?*

DUNCOMBE: I think primarily the fact of the stability of the place that was a small market for a number of American exports, but the French influence was predominate. There was no getting around that.

*Q: Did the French make it obvious that they really didn't want to have us around there?*

DUNCOMBE: Well, they certainly didn't want us to sell any of their wheat there.

*Q: The French don't have that much wheat there do they?*

DUNCOMBE: Yes. They were selling their wheat. I don't remember, at this juncture, whether it was soft wheat or hard wheat. I don't remember whether ours was soft or hard, but the French was the other. I thought the French baguettes were absolutely outstanding. I had not too much sympathy for the agriculture attache, who was trying to get American wheat in.

*Q: Of course, this is one of the big battles that went on. The French, from what I gather from people who dealt with this, were very protective of their position as to form a colonial power and market. They were very commercially-oriented. Our interest was generally in... We had to go through the motions of selling things, but essentially, we were happy as long as the countries*

*were stable.*

DUNCOMBE: I think that is right. My first response to your question on that was our interest there was in the stability of country, wishing them well. They were doing quite well. They were very prosperous, by west African standards. They have fallen on some hard times recently.

*Q: At that point, was Houphouet-Boigny making good investments? Was the money going to the right places?*

DUNCOMBE: Probably not. It had a lot of state enterprises. They were developing sugar plantations and sugar mills that probably didn't make an awful lot of sense. What we used to call the parastatal corporations, essentially state enterprises. In general we don't think too much of that economic organization.

*Q: Looking at it as an economist, on practical terms, did these government enterprises make sense? They might have made sense politically, but economically?*

DUNCOMBE: No, they did not.

*Q: So, this wasn't just a matter of a political outlook - that we are a free market. But, this is the cold, hard look of an economist looking at these things?*

DUNCOMBE: That is correct. One of the curious things about the Ivorian economy is that, in many respects, a lot of the work is not done by non-Ivorians. Our guess was at least a quarter of the population of the country was non-Ivorian Africans from upper Volta, now Burkina Faso, Ghana, Senegal. In many respects, I characterized the Ivorians as *rentiers* in the grand tradition of having other people do the work for them. It was the Voltaks, the Malians, and the Senegalese that harvested the coffee, and the cocoa, and that sort of thing. These Ivorian owners sort of derived land rents, and their prosperity from the labor of others.

*Q: It's somewhat the same with the Saudis.*

DUNCOMBE: I won't comment on Saudi Arabia, because I have no first-hand experience.

*Q: The Saudis are having a change of it, but were using other people's... They had the oil.*

DUNCOMBE: Sure. When I was in Egypt, the major source of foreign exchange earnings for Egypt was the remittances of the Egyptians who were working elsewhere in the Middle East, in Saudi Arabia, in Iraq, in Libya. The remittances of the Egyptians, outside of Egypt, was the major source of Egypt's foreign exchange earnings, even ahead of oil.

*Q: Were there any issues you got involved in, during this 1979 to 1983 period, between Cote d'Ivoire and the United States, that particularly engaged you?*

DUNCOMBE: I remember there was constant controversy about how to manage the coffee and cocoa agreements. Beyond that, I don't remember the details of what the arguments were. In

general, the United States has never been terribly happy with commodity agreements. The producers of these primary products... I guess Cote d'Ivoire also had interest in the rubber agreement as well. They attached much more importance to them than we do. It was a constant back and forth, in terms of positions in these commodity agreements. I'm far enough away from it at this point that I don't remember the details.

*Q: I was just wondering. These things with Cote d'Ivoire... It was just one of a number of countries, like with Brazil, and other places, that were dealing with on these boards. The role of the United States and Cote d'Ivoire would be somewhat diminished because of a bigger hole.*

DUNCOMBE: Cote d'Ivoire, at the time I was there, was the world's major producer of cocoa. They were a significant producer of coffee. It was smaller than Brazil on coffee, but was not a fringe producer. Their coffee was robusta, rather than arabica. That gets into a different set of issues.

*Q: Ghana used to have something like this. They produced cocoa, and all that.*

DUNCOMBE: Yes, but the cocoa marketing board in Ghana, as I understand it, screwed up the industry. A lot of the Ivorian cocoa was in fact cocoa that was smuggled out of Ghana, because the growers could get a much better price marketing it through Cote d'Ivoire.

*Q: How about your French counterpart? Was he working at almost a different level? Was it an embassy there, or commission?*

DUNCOMBE: French embassy.

*Q: Was he more or less a member of the economic council of Cote d'Ivoire?*

DUNCOMBE: No, but they had a lot of access, because in the ministries, they have a number of people called "cooperants." These are French nationals who, in lieu of doing military service, were spending time in public service. They were placed with the government of the former French colonies. People used to refer to the finance ministry as the "white man's ministry." It was essentially "French cooperants," who was the African minister's Chef de Cabinet, and that sort of thing.

*Q: Were we kind of watching the French/Germans? I can't remember at this time whether Mitterrand was the president of France or not, but certainly there had been a strong influx. The French, for their own political purposes, whoever was in power, had been picking up money on the side. Were we concerned about French influence by payments, or special deals?*

DUNCOMBE: I can't really answer that. There were 50,000 French nationals at Cote d'Ivoire at the time that I was there. As you know, the African franc is tied to the French franc. It was the French franc, albeit on the basis of 50 to one. What has happened now that the Euro is now the currency in Europe, and the franc is gone? I quite frankly have no clue. But, there was always a big debate as to whether or not the monetary union that was there was detrimental or beneficial to the former French colonies. But, the fact of the matter is they were not able to have

independent monetary policies. Unlike the situation you had in Ghana or Nigeria or Zaire, the governments were not able to run down into the basement of the palace and print money. You had more price stability then you did at a number of the other African countries.

*Q: How did you find the statistics at Cote d'Ivoire?*

DUNCOMBE: I can't, quite frankly, remember at this point.

*Q: In your section, were there other economists or economic officers?*

DUNCOMBE: There were two or three others, yes.

*Q: Was it interesting to get out and travel?*

DUNCOMBE: Absolutely.

*Q: It must have been a fascinating place.*

DUNCOMBE: I had a wonderful time. There were pretty good hotels scattered all over the country. They had the habit of having the national day celebration at various cities around the country. Every time there was a national day, they might have important people come in to a place that did not have any accommodations, so the government was sponsoring hotel building. There were fairly decent hotels in most of the cities, all around the country.

*Q: You mentioned that Ghana cocoa growers were there, shipping their stuff down into Cote d'Ivoire to get better prices. Were there any other economic relations with the other countries around, that were significant?*

DUNCOMBE: Other than the movement of people into Cote d'Ivoire, I don't recall anything else.

*Q: Was there any concern about getting too many people from other African countries, coming in there?*

DUNCOMBE: At that time, no. These were the people who did the work.

*Q: How did you find the people in Cote d'Ivoire that you were dealing with at the executive level?*

DUNCOMBE: Charming.

*Q: It has always been considered the "Paris of Africa."*

DUNCOMBE: I also found the Nigerians individually charming, but that's an entirely different story.

**MARY A. RYAN**  
**Administrative Counselor**  
**Abidjan (1980-1981)**

*Mary A. Ryan was born in New York in 1940. She received both her bachelor's and master's degrees from St. John's University. Her career in the Foreign Service include positions in Italy, Honduras, Mexico, Ivory Coast, Sudan, and an ambassadorship to Swaziland. She was also a member of the Kuwaiti Task Force during the Gulf War. Ambassador Ryan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in March 2003.*

*Q: Then what happened?*

RYAN: Well, April of 1980. Then I went to French language training and I went to Abidjan as the administrative counselor. Which was a job I wanted. I wanted to be administrative counselor, I wanted to learn French, and I knew about Abidjan. I knew how nice it was; I had been a rover there for a while. And so I went. Nancy Rawls was the ambassador. That was another drawing card for me. She had been a DAS [deputy assistant secretary] in the DG's [Director General of the Foreign Service] office, or Director General in the DG's office for part of the time that I was in personnel, and I really admired her. I thought she was wonderful. And so off I went to Abidjan.

*Q: And you were in Abidjan from April of 1980 to...?*

RYAN: Well, it must have been July, June or July, because I took some French, in '80 until was it October, September or October of '81.

*Q: Nancy Rawls was the ambassador?*

RYAN: Yes.

*Q: She's no longer with us. But what was she like and what was her background?*

RYAN: I don't know her background. She had been ambassador to Togo before she went into Personnel. And she was just the most lovely woman. Very gentle, very nice, very smart. Everybody wanted to work for her. She was just somebody that you wanted to be around. The unfortunate thing after I got to Abidjan was that she was desperately ill. She was ill with cancer, and she was almost never there. She was always back getting treatment. But she was a wonderful, wonderful person.

*Q: Well, in this period of '80, '81, how would you describe the situation as you saw it in the Ivory Coast?*

RYAN: Well, at that time the Ivory Coast was the richest country in West Africa. It was a

tremendous drawing card for other Africans in West Africa, so that we had our choice of the best of West Africa who came to Cote d'Ivoire to work. We had all nationalities in the general services section, for example, because the Ivorians liked to wear white shirts and ties and work in offices. They didn't want to do general services work, and so we had Nigerians and Guineans. We had everybody – people from Burkina Faso, from Upper Volta, working for us. We did have a tremendous amount of talent in the embassy, in the administrative section, both Americans and Foreign Service nationals. It was a big operation. It was a joint administrative office. We tried to do a lot of work with AID. I thought the director was impossible. His deputy was okay, but the director was just – he was always looking for, you know, that we were slighting AID somehow, and we weren't, but he was always complaining about that. I think now they're finally building a new embassy, but we were looking for a new embassy at that time, and so I did a lot of that kind of work. A lot of talking to people who were rich, who had property, and who were interested in selling it to us. And nothing ever worked. Nothing ever worked. Nothing ever worked for close to twenty years, you know. But that was very interesting. I liked that a lot.

*Q: The Cote d'Ivoire, it's been a very nice place in Africa. Did we have much in the way of interests there?*

RYAN: No, not really. We had some interest. But this was twenty years ago, and they were rich. They had coffee and cocoa. Houphouet was still the president. One of the really wise old men of Africa, and it was very stable, and so mostly we reported on what was going on in the region, that's what my sense was, more than anything going on in Cote d'Ivoire. Because it was fine. There was not much going on.

*Q: There were other rather small post countries around the area. Did you get involved by having an efficient operation and supporting them?*

RYAN: We did to a certain extent. We certainly did a lot of shipping things to them from the port inland. We did that. And I knew all the admin officers around me, because I knew them from personnel, or from AF. It was good. It was a very good assignment, but it was also a little boring.

*Q: This is, of course, one of the problems.*

RYAN: Yes. And then, Nancy wasn't there. I really went to work for Nancy, and Nancy was away a lot, and her deputy was very nervous. He didn't know anything about admin, and was very nervous about what we were doing, and so he, quite frankly, drove me insane. So, when AF said they needed somebody to go to Sudan, I leapt at the chance. I had never been to Khartoum as a rover. Had I ever been to Khartoum as a rover I would never have gone back!

**CARL C. CUNDIFF**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Abidjan (1983-1986)**

*Ambassador Cundiff graduated from the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee and the Fletcher School at Tufts. He entered the Foreign Service in 1966. His career included posts in Saigon, Paris, Lagos and Abidjan and he was named ambassador to Niger in 1988. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1996.*

*Q: What was your next assignment, Carl?*

CUNDIFF: I went as deputy chief of mission to the American embassy in Abidjan, Ivory Coast.

*Q: Who was your ambassador there?*

CUNDIFF: The first year my ambassador was Nancy Rawls and the following three years my ambassador was Bob Miller.

*Q: And this gave you a chance to use your French, again. You have been head of the Economic Policy Staff in the African Bureau and economic counselor in Lagos, both of which were supervisory positions but of small sections in terms of staff in both cases. Embassy Abidjan is a pretty large mission. What did you see as your primary function/responsibility there?*

CUNDIFF: Well, I think that my primary role there was to be the principal manager of the mission under the overall management and direction of the ambassador. This meant in a sense that my function was to support the ambassador's objectives and to interpret his requirements to the directors of the other agencies located in the mission in Abidjan. And to work with them and work with the ambassador to make sure the operation was smoothly functioning.

*Q: The agencies in Abidjan are of course concerned with Ivory Coast, an important country in West Africa. But I also think in the period you were there they had regional responsibilities to some extent. It is kind of a regional center for Francophone West Africa. How did you deal with those agencies that really weren't all that interested in what was going on in Abidjan - were more interested in a broader region? Was that a problem sometimes?*

CUNDIFF: I think that is one of the challenges that managers at a post like Abidjan always face. That is to say that you have some people who are working in the mission who are focused on the bilateral mission's objectives and working with the local/host government in that regard.

And then you have other members of your larger mission whose function may not be to relate at all to the Ivory Coast or the Côte d'Ivoire and whose major function is to travel in the area and support their agencies' objectives in other countries in the area. In the case of Abidjan the principal example is AID. While I was in Abidjan, AID had minimal contact and activities with the Ivory Coast because the Ivory Coast was considered to be a fairly high income country by African standards at the time. And we had very, very minimal support through AID...hardly any as I recall.

And at the same time we had a very large AID presence but the AID presence was focused on supporting AID missions throughout West Africa. So you had agricultural experts and

educational experts and health experts who spent a good deal of their time traveling outside of Ivory Coast-whose families remained in Ivory Coast as part of our mission. But these officials really had responsibilities throughout the area.

*Q: Did that create some community, some morale problems sometimes? You didn't have maybe as many people to be on the school board or play soft ball or whatever people do as part of an American embassy community as you might in another post in Africa.*

CUNDIFF: I think that presents for management, in a post like that, it presents a challenge to keep morale high by having activities where everybody feels like part of the official family. And when I was in Abidjan working with Ambassador Rawls and later with Ambassador Miller for three years...especially Ambassador Miller and his wife and my wife, we all worked very hard to create an atmosphere where everybody felt that their work was appreciated and where there were opportunities for social engagements with each other. I would have to say that we were fairly successful at that.

*Q: Before we come to U.S. relations with Côte d'Ivoire, I would like to ask you if you were involved or the embassy was involved in the African Development Board or any other regional organizations that had their headquarters in Abidjan?*

CUNDIFF: We were involved as a U.S. mission in working with the U.S. Executive Director to the African Development Bank and Fund. Essentially our support, as I recall, was more of administrative support because the U.S. Executive Director to the African Development is a Treasury Department official. His or her responsibilities are really not under those of the ambassador per se. But we had a cooperative relationship and the U.S. executive director of the African Development Bank and Fund was invited to our Country Team meetings. And certainly he was made to feel a complete member of the official "American Family." We had very close and productive relations but still the functions were quite different.

*Q: Turning to the government of Côte d'Ivoire, under the direction of the ambassador you, besides supervising and coordinating the agencies probably also supervised the political-economic as well as counselor and administrative functions. Were you involved yourself directly in contacts at high levels in the government or in reporting? Or was that pretty much done by others?*

CUNDIFF: I was involved in a quite a bit of the high level contact work. The first year I was there, I served quite often as chargé. Ambassador Rawls had a medical problem that required her to return to the United States periodically so I served as chargé d'affaires fairly often. In that context I had direct contact with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and with other ministers in the government. And when I was deputy chief of mission under Ambassador Miller, I continued to have substantial contact with high level officials and ministers. Not as often perhaps as I had under Ambassador Rawls. But again, I served as chargé during periods when Ambassador Miller was on vacation or on consultations in Washington and so on. So I had a lot of high level contact on a regular basis.

In terms of economic and political reporting, I supervised the economic and political sections. In

that regard I was responsible for those functions.

*Q: Côte d'Ivoire, as we have said, is a hub of communications in the region. Was the government, was the embassy interested and involved with other regional issues of interest and concern? Of course the war had not yet started in Liberia. I don't know if there were any sort of regional issues that you particularly got involved with during the period you were there?*

CUNDIFF: Not that I recall. The issues of a political nature were largely the standard diplomatic dialogue with the host government of the Ivory Coast.

*Q: And the head of government, the head of state was Houphouet-Boigny. He had been there for a long time. He was called the "Old Man" or I don't know what he was called...*

CUNDIFF: That is right.

*Q: Did you have contact with him?*

CUNDIFF: I had contact with him upon occasion, largely of course when I was serving as chargé; from time to time I had to make demarches directly to the President.

*Q: But probably more with the Minister of Foreign Affairs?*

CUNDIFF: Correct.

*Q: Were there elections and political parties in this period?*

CUNDIFF: At that period there was essentially the one dominant party of the President, which had been around a long, long time, the PDCI. This was a political party that went back to the period of obtaining independence from France.

*Q: Speaking of France, in Francophone West Africa or Africa I guess we always have to ask about the interaction with the French embassy, with the French business community that was sizable. How did you assess that at the time you were there? Was there room for the United States to do things, and opportunity?*

CUNDIFF: Well, there was certainly room for the United States to do things and the opportunity. At the time, Phillips Petroleum, for example, had a very large investment in the development of an offshore petroleum platform not too far from Abidjan. And there were other U.S. companies involved. Mobil Oil was involved in a small refining project. And there were some other U.S. businesses. Citibank was there. And Morgan Guaranty Bank was there. And Chase Manhattan Bank was there.

But, the fact remained that the French were in a very strong commercial position. Many commercial investments had been made in earlier years and those were still being managed and expanded by the French. But, I would say in some ways, the French presence was declining gradually. In response I think to declining economic opportunities in the Ivory Coast. That was a

period when coffee and cocoa prices were no longer so strong and Ivory Coast was in the midst of an economic crisis that frankly went on as I recall for some time thereafter.

*Q: It was the same period that the neighboring country of Ghana was going through a very difficult economic situation for some of the same reasons but other reasons as well. And then I am sure there was also the fact that coffee and cocoa prices were largely set internationally - supply and demand and increased supply from new producers and so on. But I'm sure that internally or domestically there was always debate about reducing your prices and whether the government should subsidize growers and that probably caused a lot of political controversy.*

CUNDIFF: That is correct. The internal pricing of cocoa and coffee prices was a major issue. And traditionally Ivory Coast had a very centralized government control and purchasing operation where the small farmers, particularly on the cocoa side but also coffee, would sell their produce to a government controlled agency. Which in turn would be involved with the processing of the coffee and the export of the coffee and cocoa.

*Q: Was the embassy much interested in what was happening in either Liberia or Ghana, both immediately neighboring countries?*

CUNDIFF: Yes. Interested but not seized in what I would say was an active way because Liberia for example had some very severe difficulties as I recall. Samuel Doe had come to power during that time. We had an embassy in Monrovia which was dealing with him and with that government. And just as we had your embassy in Accra dealing with Rawlings and his government. So I would say that we were keeping an eye on the area-neighboring countries but not actively engaged if you will in any other way.

*Q: Because later on in the case of Liberia there were refugees. There was perhaps assistance going to Charles Taylor and others through Côte d'Ivoire and I think the embassy in Abidjan got quite involved in issues related to Liberia but that came later.*

CUNDIFF: That was later. During my time there I made a personal trip into Liberia to the iron ore operation in Northern Liberia. Across the border and the river there and into upper Liberia. But that was strictly a personal trip.

*Q: Was there any U.S. mining activity going on in Côte d'Ivoire during that period?*

CUNDIFF: None that I recall. The oil exploration and development was substantial.

*Q: Was most of the oil offshore?*

CUNDIFF: Yes. In fact, to my knowledge, all offshore.

*Q: The embassy building was new, or was it old?*

CUNDIFF: Old.

*Q: It was old but built for us. A nice building I suppose.*

CUNDIFF: Not really. It was a very small rented building in downtown Abidjan. It was small in comparison to our requirements. We did not feel comfortable with it from a security point of view because it was right on the street and we did not have a compound around it with a large fence and that sort of thing that you might have in a lot of newer embassies.

*Q: Is it the building that we still have as far as you know?*

CUNDIFF: To my knowledge we are still in that same building.

*Q: Was security a major concern at the time you were there? Other than the general concern about terrorism and threats emanated from our experience in places like Tehran and Beirut and the Middle East?*

CUNDIFF: Well, that was a period as you know, because of developments in the Middle East, embassies worldwide were concerned with security. And Abidjan, like all other embassies, was taking measures to make our situation more secure. We did not, we didn't feel any threat from within the Ivory Coast or really from within the region. Our concern was more with spill-over possibly from the Middle East.

*Q: Was there a large Lebanese community in Abidjan?*

CUNDIFF: Yes. And growing as a result of the instability and problems in Lebanon. There were many Lebanese families in Ivory Coast and they kept in close contact with their family members in Lebanon. There was very substantial travel between Abidjan and Lebanon. As I recall Middle East Airways provided service between the two.

*Q: You mentioned earlier that you did your Ph.D. research in Beirut, in Lebanon. Have you kept in touch with matters relating to Lebanon over the years or with Lebanese in a place like Abidjan? Did that sort of give you entree or something at least to talk about?*

CUNDIFF: Yes, it gave me something to talk about and some entree you might say. But I think speaking French well was as helpful to me as anything else in meeting Lebanese in Ivory Coast.

*Q: We talked a little bit before about your assignment to Lagos, about Abuja, the new capital in Nigeria, which was just then being conceived and getting underway. Côte d'Ivoire has another capital, too, Yamoussoukro?*

CUNDIFF: Yes.

*Q: I don't know exactly at the time you were there what its status was and did you need to go there frequently?*

CUNDIFF: I'm a little vague on what the status was at the time. While I was there I think it was declared the capital of Ivory Coast as an honor to Houphouët-Boigny, the President, since it is

his home town. President Houphouet-Boigny had built a number of facilities at Yamoussoukro already including a large palace for himself and a large party headquarters and a very nice luxury hotel. And as well, a number of educational institutions with a focus on science and technology and teaching. But he also was in the process of building a large basilica in Yamoussoukro which I later visited when I came back to Ivory Coast.

*Q: At the time you were there, when you were the chargé and did meet with the President...you usually did that in Abidjan or did you go to Yamoussoukro?*

CUNDIFF: In my case it was always in Abidjan. The President's office was downtown and his home, his residence, was usually where he received diplomats and that was close to where I lived and many of the other diplomats lived as well.

*Q: Which was near that big hotel, I think also.*

CUNDIFF: That is correct. Near the Hôtel d'Ivoire. In Cocody, which is a part of Abidjan, by the hotel.

*Q: Is there anything else about the assignment to Abidjan that we haven't covered that you would like to?*

CUNDIFF: I don't think so.

**ROBERT H. MILLER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cote d'Ivoire (1983-1986)**

*Ambassador Robert H. Miller was born in Port Angeles, Washington in 1927. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included positions in France and Vietnam, and ambassadorships to Malaysia and the Ivory Coast. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.*

*Q: You then got another shot as ambassador. You were in the Ivory Coast from 1983 to 86. How did this assignment come about?*

MILLER: In the normal course of things. I spent three years as Director for Management Operations and one day was called by Personnel and asked if I would allow my name to be put on a list for the Ivory Coast. I said I had never been to Africa and asked for time to check with my wife to see how she felt about it. I came back and said sure. Somehow my name came out of the hopper and we went off to the Ivory Coast as the representative of President Reagan.

*Q: What was the situation in the Ivory Coast in this period?*

MILLER: Before I answer that let me say that it took me four or five months from the time I was considered as a nominee for Kuala Lumpur before I was on my way. The process had lengthened to ten months from the time Personnel first called me up to the time that I actually arrived in the Ivory Coast. As I understand it, it has gotten even longer.

*Q: What was the delay?*

MILLER: The delay is one in the nominating process. The pulling and hauling between the State Department and the White House, the additional requirements in ethics in government forms, for background investigations, for medical examinations--the paper work is just very slow. As it happened my nomination finally went up on the day that the Senate adjourned for more than 30 days, therefore the nomination was sent back to the White House saying it had to be resubmitted.

The situation in the Ivory Coast was a fairly favorable one. The Ivory Coast, like Malaysia, was one of the few success stories among former colonies. The Ivory Coast, even today, is the world's greatest producer of cocoa and the third or fourth greatest producer of coffee. And it also exports a number of other things like tropical hard woods, etc. It was very prosperous and it had a long record of prosperity. What it suffers from today was too great an assumption that that prosperity would continue. It got very heavily in debt, prices of cocoa and coffee dropped and I understand today it is in dire economic straits. But basically while we were there it was a country under civilian leadership, a civilian elected president, who had been elected five times, since the country has been independent, and he is still the president. He is getting very old and people are restive for a change, especially with the turn in the economic situation.

*Q: What is his name?*

MILLER: Felix Houphouet-Boigny.

*Q: When you went out there did you go out with instructions or ideas of what American interests were--what you were trying to accomplish?*

MILLER: Yes. The Ivory Coast was an easy country for the United States Ambassador because it basically was supported by France as an ex-French colony and one of many ex-French colonies in West and Central Africa. The United States looked to France to support these countries with aid. Our interest under the Reagan Administration and probably also under previous administrations, was to try to promote US investment in the region. It had concern about subversion via Libya and there were some incidents that occurred during that time which added substance to our concerns, but we didn't pay a great deal of attention to the Ivory Coast because it was: one, too prosperous for our aid; two, it was basically supported by French and we were happy to have it that way. The French ambassador was by far the most visible, highest profile ambassador in the country. Most of the leadership, having been educated in France and having ties with France were really oriented towards Paris rather than towards Washington. I was fortunate when I got to the Ivory Coast that Houphouet-Boigny had just had a State Visit in Washington with President Reagan and was still basking in the glow of that experience. He had been the first black African leader invited by the Reagan White House for a State Visit; it had been a very successful visit even though relations were not that close and we didn't have a great

deal of day-to-day business. But in terms of diplomacy and symbolism I was able to enjoy the fruits of that visit for most of my stay there.

*Q: Were there any particular things that we wanted to get out of the Ivory Coast government at that time?*

MILLER: We were very interested in their support in the UN and on our Southern Africa negotiations. During the time that I was there the Ivory Coast was close to the top of the Third World countries in the number of times it voted with us in the UN or at least not against us. That was a very happy situation; even though they sometimes took positions that we didn't like, they took a lot of other positions in support of our objectives.

We also wanted their support and understanding on our negotiations in Southern Africa. Every so often I would get instructions to brief either the foreign minister or the President himself on what Assistant Secretary Crocker was doing in Southern Africa. Houphouet-Boigny is one of the grand old men of Africa and is in touch with everybody. He even had quiet contacts with the South Africans and was seeing people like Jonas Savimbi and Dos Santos in Angola. Therefore he was somebody we were anxious to keep up to date on our negotiations in Southern Africa.

We wanted his support and understanding and, hopefully, his work with fellow African leaders after the President decided to attack Libyan targets. Houphouet was really very supportive of these US efforts. I use to argue that because Houphouet was so supportive we ought to pay more attention to him; that he was more useful to us and more important to us than our policy towards him would suggest, but I never got very far.

*Q: Was there very much we could do for him? What could we have done that we didn't do?*

MILLER: I think that we could have taken him more into our confidence than we did. Even though we briefed him regularly, we really didn't confide in him or consult him on moves we were about to make. I think we could have done more to bolster the Ivory Coast economy. We could have done more to recognize the support we were getting from him in the United Nations. They were conscious of the fact that we didn't pay much attention to the Ivory Coast. So I think we could have built a relationship that was more direct and closer in a number of ways without saying that it should have been based on a lot of aid.

*Q: Did you have much to do with the French ambassador? Would you use the French ambassador as an intermediary?*

MILLER: No, the relationship between the French and ourselves in parts of the world where the French have predominate interests is always a touchy one. We were very friendly, the French ambassador and I, socially. We would exchange information, but basically he wasn't very forthcoming. He never took the initiative, as I recall, to brief me on developments that he was aware of. Some of his staff were more helpful to our staff, but he was rather standoffish. The French were always, in my experience, concerned if we were too active; had we been more active in the Ivory Coast, they would have been convinced that we were doing it to supplant them, to get them out of there. That was one thing that Washington didn't want to do.

*Q: In doing these interviews it seems a constant theme in French Africa--the concern by the French that we are trying to supplant them.*

MILLER: It is indeed a constant theme. It is a sensitivity on the part of the French that is misplaced. On the other hand, if we had gotten closer to Houphouet and he had spent more of his time worrying about what Washington thought or was doing than what Paris was doing, this would have been seen as inroads in their preserve. Even though they deny that the Ivory Coast and these other countries in Africa were their preserve, in effect they were their "chasse gardee." And they wanted it to stay that way. It was hard to convince Washington that we should be more active and it was hard to be active. The French had ways of deflecting or thwarting us because they had advisers in the ministries, etc. So it is an ongoing problem that hasn't been solved and, as long as France wants to main its position in these countries, I think we will be happy because it means their resources and not ours--and basically they are allies of ours.

*Q: Were the events in Chad concerning Libya taking place at that time? There we were playing a much more active role along with the French.*

MILLER: Yes, we were pressing the French, of course, to stay out in front. We were providing them with transport for their forces, etc. and providing them equipment. That was another area in which we kept Houphouet briefed and he was pleased with what we and the French were doing in Chad. He was very much concerned about Libyan intrusion into the center of Central and West Africa if it had gone too far in Chad. So he was cooperative, sympathetic and supportive vis-a-vis other African leaders on Chad.

*Q: In Washington did you feel there wasn't a lot of attention as far as instructions from the Desk, etc.?*

MILLER: The Bureau of African affairs, of course, has a problem. It has twice as many countries to deal with as any other geographic bureau. Many of these are small countries where we don't have many interests, but just bureaucratically it is hard for one assistant secretary and his deputies to pay much attention to any one country other than a crisis country. Even the Office of West African Affairs, which was the office backstopping me in the Ivory Coast, had one office director and 16 countries and a problem--the western Sahara. I always felt that even the office director didn't have the time to pay enough attention to our problems and what we were trying to encourage Washington to do with respect to the Ivory Coast. Chet Crocker, of course, understandably, was almost totally involved with Southern Africa. He spent most of his eight years working on that problem and in the end he proved to have been able to accomplish something. There were other crises like Chad, the Horn of Africa, etc. which kept the rest of his attention. So a quiet, little, prosperous country where we assumed France was going to take the leading role, was just a country we couldn't get much attention to. And I guess I can understand that, but sometimes it was rather frustrating to try to get answers out of Washington, and favorable answers to things we were trying to do.

*Q: You left Abidjan in 1986. Is that right?*

MILLER: Yes.

**DENNIS KUX**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cote d'Ivoire (1986-1989)**

*Ambassador Dennis Kux was born in England in 1931 and emigrated to New York, New York in 1933. He graduated from Lafayette College in Pennsylvania in 1952 with a degree in history. He entered the U.S. Army in 1952, working as a prisoner of war interrogator. Ambassador Kux's Foreign Service career included positions in Germany, Pakistan, Turkey, and the Ivory Coast. He was interviewed by Thomas Stern on January 13, 1995.*

*Q: In 1986, you were appointed as US Ambassador to the Ivory Coast. How did come about?*

KUX: Ron Spiers asked me what I would like to do. I had been offered the job of chief of Foreign Building Operations [FBO] in the light of my experience as a project manager. Although it would have been a really interesting challenge, I decided against it. I told Ron about this offer, and he said: "What do you want to do?" I said: "I would like to be an Ambassador." He said: "All right, I will support you." Then it was a question of what was available.

As so often is the case in the State Department, it is a question of what is available and when an officer is available. What was available first, going through a list of posts, were Haiti and then Ivory Coast. The Ambassadorial Selection Committee at that time was composed of Ron Spiers, the Director General of the Foreign Service, the Executive Secretary of the Department and one or two other high ranking officials. I believe that the policy at the time was to nominate a State Department officer for every ambassadorial appointment. Then the nomination was sent in writing to the White House--or Ron Spiers would go to the White House and present it orally.

So I was picked to go to Haiti. That was fine with me. This was before the troubles began there. I spent about a month or so, preparing for this assignment. What apparently happened was that my name came up, and Nick Platt, who was then the Executive Secretary of the Department, also had a candidate in mind for Haiti. His candidate lost out and Ron Spiers prevailed. So I became the State Department choice for Ambassador to Haiti.

As I mentioned, the next available post on the list was Ivory Coast. Platt's candidate, Brunson McKinley, having lost out for Haiti, was then picked to go to the Ivory Coast.

I went away for about a month of leave, reading up about Haiti. One afternoon in January, 1986, I was walking down the hall at the State Department and saw Hank Cohen, who was then Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Bureau of African Affairs. Hank said: "What would you think about going to the Ivory Coast as Ambassador?" I told him that I would. I was a grade higher than McKinley, a Minister-Counselor and he was a Counselor. Ivory Coast was listed as a "Class II"

post and Haiti a Class III, so they just switched us at the next meeting of the Ambassadorial Committee. Normally, in terms of my career interests, I would have preferred one of the smaller posts in South Asia, but there was nothing available at that time. But I had no strong preference between Haiti and the Ivory Coast.

I was nominated by the President in the summer of 1986 and approved a few weeks later. The hearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was at the end of August had no problems and I was routinely confirmed.

I started learning about the Ivory Coast in the Spring. I was told that I would probably be there when the "old man," Houphouet-Boigny, died. Although it seemed that he had been President almost forever and was in his 80s, he in fact didn't pass on until my successor's successor was there in 1993.

There weren't a lot of bilateral issues between us and the Ivory Coast. My predecessor, Bob Miller, had made a considerable effort to get an aid program started there, but had not been successful. The feeling was that the Ivory Coast was too well off. At the time--and this is still the case--it was one of the success stories of Africa in economic and also political terms. It was sufficiently stable and prosperous that the U. S. government felt that economic aid wasn't really necessary.

I wrote my own instructions, working with the desk officer, who was very good junior officer. I am sorry that he subsequently left the Foreign Service. He was an impressive young fellow and we worked together very well. We concluded that the U. S. should have a higher profile and that the thrust of our efforts should be in promoting American business interests. There was already a nucleus of an American business community in Abidjan. There was an American Chamber of Commerce and 65 American companies located there. Abidjan, the capital, was a commercial hub, in the context of West Africa. I thought that the promotion of American business was a natural thing for us to be doing. So I recommended this, and Chet Crocker said, "Fine." That became our the main emphasis.

There wasn't an enormous amount of interest in Washington for the Ivory Coast. The only other issue concerned cocoa, and there the U. S. Government wasn't much involved. The Ivory Coast was the "Saudi Arabia" of the cocoa trade. We had differences on commodity policy with the Ivorians. However, the State Department was not much involved in that. We didn't approve of the International Cocoa Agreement, but we were not a participant. An organization had been set up in London under the International Cocoa Agreement, which was in effect a cartel. It wasn't a price setting arrangement. It was a buffer stock and production quota arrangement. The market was free, but the buffer stock played a role. If there was overproduction, in theory, the producing countries would hold down production for a while. The price could be stabilized in that way. Eventually, this arrangement failed, creating a problem for the cocoa producers, especially for the Ivory Coast.

My Washington briefings were good and therefore, except cocoa I was not surprised by anything that I found in the Ivory Coast. The major event when I got there was the anticipated visit of Secretary Shultz to Africa. Assistant Secretary of State Crocker prevailed on him to travel there,

and Ivory Coast was one of the places where he was going to visit. So there was a hurry to get me out to Ivory Coast. Then, at the last minute, Secretary Shultz postponed his trip. Eventually--three months later--he came. The main surprise in the visit was Houphouet's making a plea for economic help because the crumbling cocoa market was eroding the viability of the Ivoirian economy. All of us were caught by surprise by his plea. This later led to Chet Crocker helping us get a top notch economic officer which ensured that the Embassy was much better plugged into this key issue. But we certainly weren't when Shultz came.

Administratively, the American Embassy in Abidjan is a very unusual place, in that, in effect, it is a regional embassy. It houses a lot of "regional" people who live there and serve a much larger area--communications and other activities in the administrative area. Consequently, we had a fairly large Embassy staff with about 150 Americans assigned there. However, the State Department component and the bilateral U. S. and Ivory Coast element was really quite small--about 30 people. Of the total number of 150 Americans, roughly 100 were assigned to "regional" responsibilities, but some of the people who were "regional" also dealt with the Ivory Coast. The "regional" people did not report to me. However, if there was a serious problem, then I became involved in it.

Abidjan had 25,000 French living there. So a couple of hundred Americans were not a problem. Nevertheless, I felt that we had too many people and tried to reduce the size of the staffs--the regional aid program, for example. I eliminated a position by using the system established under NSC 38 [National Security Council Memorandum No. 38]. I made myself unpopular. There were two positions that I tried to cut. One was under DOD [Department of Defense], and the other one was under AID. In the case of DOD, I think that it involved the assignment of an Assistant Attaché. The Attaché covered about a half dozen countries. They complained to me, and I finally gave up. In the case of the AID position, they screamed and yelled, but I didn't give up. This question actually went to the Secretary of State, who backed me up and cut the position. I thought that it was an extraordinarily wasteful and time-consuming exercise. The Ambassador should have had the authority to make the decision in that case. We shouldn't have had to go through all of the bureaucratic "rigmarole."

It turned out that we were able to get a assistance program in the Ivory Coast, after all, which was a bit of a surprise. AID had two regional programs in West Africa--the regular aid program and another program called "Housing Guarantees." The "Housing Guarantee" program was separate from the regular aid program. There were two, separate offices and didn't get along with each other. The regular AID people didn't like the "loan guarantee" people, because their work didn't involve "traditional" aid. It was bizarre. What the "Housing Guarantee" people were basically doing was guaranteeing loans to municipalities throughout West Africa. Their biggest program was in the Ivory Coast. They were extending something like \$10-\$20 million worth of loan guarantees per year. The "loan guarantees" enabled municipalities to borrow money and this program was a major source of funds for local government construction activity, such as markets, local roads, etc.

I found the program one of the most effective that we had in the Ivory Coast. The people assigned to this office were excellent. They knew the local customs and personalities. They had been in the Ivory Coast for a number of years. They lived in Abidjan but worked primarily

outside of Abidjan--all around the country. So I discovered that one of the easiest ways to publicize the United States was to cut ribbons when these projects started or were completed. There were quite a lot of them--four, five, or six a year. They were wonderful projects in terms of helping to develop a democratic culture. The cities and towns in Ivory Coast had never had any experience in urban planning--where to put a street, or a park or a recreational facility, etc. The "Housing Guarantee" program helped them; the program went beyond simple guarantees. The AID people had discovered, over the years, that you have to provide help in the form of training, if a housing construction program is to have any chance of success. They had funds for this, from a self funded " pool". The Ivorians had to deposit guaranteed money in American banks, where it earned interest and over a number of years the "pool" had grown, so the U. S. taxpayer wasn't paying for this technical assistance. AID paid the salaries of the American advisors, and the U. S. government role was to provide the "loan guarantee." The risk was that the loan would be lost by default which would have required the outlay of US funds. It was a wonderful program which was essentially funded outside the normal government appropriations process.

What I found bizarre was that the "traditional" aid people didn't like it. Organizationally, they buried the "housing guarantee" office off in the private enterprise sector. It didn't show up on the radar scope. The two elements of the AID mission in Abidjan were constantly fighting with each other.

For someone who was just coming into the country and whose goal was to raise the US profile, this was a wonderful way of doing it--and also doing good at the same time. In fact, we got so much publicity that the French became concerned. They thought that we were trying to "steal their thunder."

Franco-American relations in Abidjan were alright, but cool--"correct," but cool. The French are always wary of the Americans in an area that they considered their "chasse gardee,"--their private hunting ground. They were nervous because of the growing American business presence in Ivory Coast, plus the fact that an American oil company, Phillips Petroleum, was a major player there. Phillips Petroleum was fairly substantial; it wasn't a French company that was developing the oil in the Ivory Coast. In 1979 oil was found just offshore from Abidjan. People thought that it was going to be a major field--a major discovery. It turned out that it was a minor discovery. It was enough to meet Ivorian domestic requirements, but that was about it.

Phillips continued to develop the oil field. Dealing with the Phillips Petroleum contract became a problem. In fact, Phillips Petroleum closed down its operations in the Ivory Coast while I was there. There was a problem between Phillips and the Ivory Coast. We did not become involved, although the Embassy followed the dispute. Phillips didn't want the Embassy to be involved. Neither they nor the Ivorians handled the dispute very well, the Ivoireans made a costly mistake. They had a lawyer in the United States who handled petroleum negotiations, who I think did not give them good advice. By the time that I arrived in Abidjan, there was already trouble between Phillips and the Ivorian Government. It was a question of renegotiating the contract. The Ivorians didn't offer enough and Phillips decided to pull out. The oil field was closed down and the Ivoireans had to import their petroleum for a number of years. This was costly and not necessary.

During the whole time that I was there, from 1986 to 1989, the Ivory Coast was economically on a downward glide. They went from solvency to insolvency. A lot of the things that President Houphouet-Boigny, who was a great builder, did went sour during that period. He was really a rather unusual person. He had developed a good enough infrastructure and made enough investments over a 25-year period that the Ivory Coast could absorb the downward trend. It hit rather suddenly.

In the fall of 1986 we were rather unaware of the troubles. They surfaced when Secretary of State Shultz visited the country. Abidjan when I got there in 1986 was a combination of a bustling, modern city with a skyline that was rather astounding, including 20 or 30 story buildings. These stood right next to Africa. One could travel just a few miles outside the center city and you were in traditional African mud hut and thatched roof villages. It was a combination of the traditional and the modern.

I traveled around the country a lot and found that very interesting. The villages were traditional, African villages.

Not much progress seems to have been made. President Houphouet-Boigny had built an excellent road system and electricity was available around the country. The roads weren't great everywhere, but they were very good in 75 percent of the country. They still didn't have a road along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, to the West. However, you could go north, east, and northwest easily. There was a lateral road in the north. There was even a super highway for over 100 miles north of Abidjan. For Africa, the transportation network was excellent.

We also had the Air Attaché plane. What I would often do would be to fly one way somewhere and be picked up there by car. It was a bit of a luxury, but it was nice to fly one-way. The country was about the size of New Mexico. It was about 400-500 miles from north to south and maybe 300 miles from east to west. You could drive off for the weekend. It was not a problem. The French had built a network of hotels in the major towns, but that was beginning to fade. You could find things to buy all around.

It was always an occasion when the US Ambassador visited a village. The "chef du village" puts on a traditional welcome. In fact, there was a photograph in the "Department of State Newsletter" of me, dancing in some village. I ended up with a trunk full of African robes. The people were enormously hospitable. They would make a major occasion of my visit. The American Ambassador was a personality. The public relation aspects were a very important part of the job of ambassador there, in fact, along with promoting US business interests, the most important.

You could see signs of development activity. There were schools with thatch roofs, which was not bad. In terms of the hot sticky climate, it was better than concrete, which could get very hot. Generally, the villages had electricity, but usually no sewage systems. Unfortunately, with the economic downturn, development activity stopped, and things were beginning to slip. The economic deterioration became quite visible. The one thing that we tried to get--and finally did get--was a little U. S. help. I made the point to Washington, and this was a political argument, that Ivory Coast had always been with the West and had always been a friend of the United States. President Houphouet-Boigny needed help, and we should try to do something for him. He

was very much for private enterprise and was doing all of the things that were "right" by U. S. standards. Now he had problems. I felt that we should be there; fortunately, Crocker felt the same way.

Eventually, Washington responded positively. It took a fair amount of pushing. There was a fight between AID-Washington and the Africa Bureau of the State Department. The State Africa Bureau wanted to be helpful. The AID-Washington bureaucrats seemed to have an almost visceral dislike for the Ivory Coast. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Chet Crocker once said that this was because Ivory Coast had been successful, and AID only likes "losers."

I am not exactly sure what the problem was, but we had a tough time getting U. S. aid for Ivory Coast. It seemed to me that, with limited resources, we didn't need to do a lot, but we needed to be visible. Finally, we were able to cobble together what amounted to, I think, a \$20-25 million aid program. Here the team in the field was very effective. The regional AID Director at the time, Art Feld, was very inventive and knew how to work the Washington scene. Had he not been very helpful, we would not have been able to do get a program approved. The Department of Agriculture people were also helpful.

We had a full panoply of attachés in Abidjan--Agriculture, Commerce, Defense. We had help from the U. S. rice industry in getting a Public Law 480 program for the Ivory Coast. Crudely put, the US rice exporters, who were politically well connected, were trying to get into the Ivory Coast market. Through mismanagement the Ivory Coast had become a rice importer. The way the system worked, arrangements were made that rice came from Thailand, despite the fact that American rice was cheaper. There were "kick backs" in Ivory Coast. Eventually our exporters broke into the rice market. I spent a lot of time trying to get the Ivorians to agree to imports of U. S. rice. I think that, in the end, we were able to work out a satisfactory arrangement. It involved my going to the Secretary General of the Ivoirian Government, bargaining with him, laying out the problem, and then bargaining some more. An agreement was finally reached. It is interesting how these things are done. Back in Washington a number of people did not want to set up a PL 480 program for Ivory Coast. However, we were able to get a program approved. In effect, there was an unwritten understanding that if the Ivorians purchased a certain amount of American rice, the US would also sponsor a PL 480 program. The US rice people were very blunt, saying that if the Ivorians didn't buy some American rice, this would be the end of any consideration of an PL 480 program. This whole thing was done politically. I think that there were staffer in a couple of Senators' office involved. We were told one day that OMB [the Office of Management and Budget] had said, "No," and the next day that the OMB agreed once the Senators got involved. The rice lobby has its own power levers. However, it seemed to me that it was a legitimate way to use the aid program as a way of showing Africans, in a policy sense, while the Cold War was still on, that the US was a country which would try to help its friends when they were in trouble. This transaction also helped American exporters and American farmers. About the time that I left, in 1989, the Ivorians had gotten into more trouble. The first World Bank assistance "Consortium" meeting was held in late 1989 and we were able to put together a presentable "package." The "Consortium" was composed of the World Bank, the French, who were the major players, the U. S., and the Japanese. We were prepared to contribute \$20-25 million, a lot of which was made up of "smoke and mirrors" and some creative counting. People were so eager to get the United States involved that even the French, in this case, were quite happy to have us do

this. They wanted to get the Japanese involved and to get the Germans more deeply committed. Our being in the "Consortium" was an important catalyst in getting others involved. I felt very pleased by events because I thought that it would have been a shame to "walk away" from the Ivoreans.

Furthermore, these programs did good. They mainly consisted of the housing program, the PL 480 program, and a few others. [We had] some medical and health programs. None of them was a bad program. I was satisfied that they were being well managed.

After the economy turned sour, the Ivorians agreed that they would put together a new program of economic reforms with the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and in turn the World Bank agreed that it would organize a "Consortium", which it did in late 1989. But some of the economic problems were due to mismanagement and corruption, which foreign assistance can not correct. It is true that the Ivory Coast was hurt badly by falling commodity prices on the world market, but there was also much mismanagement on their part.

Houphouet-Boigny was a wonderful man, but he stayed on in office too long. He should have retired in about 1980. His view of the world commodity market was a little bit like that of William Jennings Bryan--He loved to complain about "the speculators on Wall Street." Bryan used to say that they were manipulating the Middle Western farmer and ensuring that all of the profits went to Wall Street, while the farmer didn't get anything. Houphouet-Boigny would regularly lecture you that the price of cocoa and chocolate bars had gone up, but that he producer never shared in that increase. Who got the difference? He blamed the speculator. He really had a "Third World" outlook on that subject. His view was a little surprising since he was a believer in the free market but also was, in effect, a cocoa speculator himself. He lost the Ivory Coast over a half billion dollars by trying to "corner" the cocoa market in association with one of the major French commodity brokers.

Furthermore, Houphouet-Boigny continued to do business as usual in the 1980s, when the Ivory Coast was short of money; he didn't seem to understand or care about that. His lack of appreciation of the Ivory Coast's economic plight was best illustrated by the construction of the Catholic basilica at Yamoussoukro. It was the last of many impressive public buildings that he had built. He had an "edifice" complex. However, most of the time--until the last few years--he had sufficient cash to afford the new construction. He felt that Africans could build large projects, too--things that people could be proud of. There was a positive side to this "complex." Things that he arranged to have built included Yamoussoukro, a new capital city. This was an act of extravagance. However, Houphouet-Boigny arranged to have three universities or technical schools built there. One of them was for agriculture, one for teacher training, and one for engineering. "Lavish" is the word [to describe them]; they were built as if they were in the United States or in France. But at the time the Ivory Coast had the money for it. It was relatively wealthy until the late 1980s.

Then, in Yamoussoukro, the village where Houphouet-Boigny was born, he built a palace that was very lavish. It was a multi-millionaire's place of marble and gold just at the edge of "bad taste." Houphouet-Boigny himself was a relatively modest man. He was not like Mobutu of Zaire. And until the last few years he had the money to do these things.

Then he first built a mosque, the largest mosque in the country. Ivory Coast was 40% Christian and 40% Muslim. The people in the northern part of the country were Muslim. He, himself, was a Catholic. He then built the world's largest church--the basilica. It was called "Notre Dame de la Paix". It was enormous, looming up over the palm trees and scrub growth around it. In fact, the basilica is a copy of St. Peter's in Rome. I got to know the architect quite well, a Lebanese named Fakhouri, who lived in Abidjan. There were a lot of Lebanese who lived there. The builder was a Frenchman named Cesario who was from North Africa but worked in the Ivory Coast for many years and was in charge of construction projects. The last year or so I was in Ivory Coast he became the economic "czar." He made no bones about the fact that Houphouet valued him because he was totally honest and a tough bargainer.

I think that Cesario "sold" Houphouet-Boigny on the idea that the basilica was something unique. It is simply enormous--bigger than St. Peter's. The courtyard in front of it has room for 300,000 people. Inside, it can seat 16,000 people. When you look at it up close, it unfortunately seems like a Cecil B. De Mille movie set and a bad copy of St. Peters. I had left by the time it was consecrated, but watched it being constructed. It went up very fast: in three years. It didn't cost all that much. My recollection is that Cesario said that it cost \$170 million. All things considered, particularly given its size, it was not enormously expensive. There were some interesting architectural things about it. They used an enormous amount of different types of concrete and a certain type of stone which is not discolored by rain. The air conditioning was necessary, though they didn't air condition the whole dome. They pumped up the cooled air from below--it rises up to about 12 feet. They put in many stained glass windows. In effect, they put a couple of French villages back to work turning out stained glass exactly in the way it was done in the Middle Ages. As in the Middle Ages, the windows includes faces of contemporary people. Houphouet-Boigny is in one of the glass windows. Cesario is in another.

What struck me as sad about the Basilica was that it wasn't African. It was nothing like the Kenyatta Center in Nairobi [Kenya]--nothing original about the design. However, it is striking, and the whole town of Yamoussoukro, in a way, is striking. This is the capital that Houphouet-Boigny arranged to have built. It is a little unfair to say that it's a "ghost town", as some have done. In fact, it is a town with a population of about 100,000 people. Houphouet-Boigny built an enormous seat of government, which could house the UN. It's been tastefully but expensively furnished. There is a political party headquarters, a fancy hotel, a fancy golf course, the three technical universities, the basilica, the mosque, and Houphouet-Boigny's home, but not the US or anyone else's embassy.

The French colonial system was a source of strength and weakness at the same time for the Ivory Coast. At the time of independence the Ivory Coast was quite poor, one of the poorer countries among the French colonies. However, it produced cocoa, coffee and had lots of forests. Houphouet-Boigny was a political realist. He was an African nationalist who led the political movement for independence in West Africa as the head of the "Rassemblement Democratique Africain" [African Democratic Rally]. Under the French system the French colonies could send deputies to the French Parliament and in 1946 he was elected to the French Parliament, where he served for about a dozen years. In fact, he was a cabinet minister in five French governments. He only came back to Africa when the French allowed "home rule" in the Ivory Coast in 1958.

While he was a nationalist, he wasn't just an agitator, although he had been that as a young man. He organized the African cocoa planters, who had been discriminated against and did not have equal status with the French planters. His plan for economic development was to import technicians and stress agriculture and education. He used to say: "We don't have the brains or the trained people." So he brought in a lot of French after independence. They developed a system of what they called "technical counselors." The minister would be an African, but he would have a French adviser. Houphouet-Boigny used to say: "We hire the whites." He also brought in a lot of people from Burkina-Faso [former Upper Volta] as laborers. He said: "The white tribe gives us the brains, and the black tribe gives us the manpower, and we have the money," through the production of cocoa.

During the early years after independence in 1960 he spent a lot of money on education and training, so that the Africans would then have the brains and be able to replace the French. Unfortunately, by the 1980s, when they had a lot of trained people, they had come to rely on the whites to make the decisions. It was a lot easier and safer to have a Frenchman take the responsibility, instead of assuming the responsibility themselves. Houphouet-Boigny never really got out of that practice. He never really bridged that gap where he felt comfortable relying exclusively on his own countrymen. There was some resentment among the well-trained Ivorians.

At the time I was there--1986-89-- it was a period of transition. The government was staffed totally by Ivory Coast people who were quite competent. There were French advisers here and there--not everywhere. There were fewer than before. The Ivorian government ran pretty well. There was some corruption, but Houphouet-Boigny reminded me a little bit of Mayor Richard J. Daley of Chicago. He "passed the goodies around." One of Houphouet's techniques, which was very important in forging a nation, was to mix together the various ethnic groups. Although he was from the major ethnic group, the Baoule, they were only about 20% of the population. There were a lot of other, ethnic groups--Bete, Senoufo, Malinke, Agni--tribal groups. He tried to make sure that everybody got part of the "pie."

There was a traditional cultural view in Africa that the tribal chief, and Houphouet was like the tribal chief, gives out "goodies." That is expected of the chief and not considered a bad thing. It was the normal way. This is one of the reasons why there is so much of what we call "corruption" in Africa. In Houphouet's case, as opposed to some others, he took care of his own tribe but he also took care of everybody else. He also wasn't mean or cruel. He made the point, and I believe that this is true, that nobody was ever killed or murdered by his government--as opposed to a lot of other places in Africa.

The Ivory Coast was a one-party state. Houphouet was a benevolent dictator. His argument--and he was very frank about it--was that if they had a multi party democracy, there would be 60 parties, one for each of the 60 ethnic groups in the country. He said that wouldn't work in Ivory Coast. They needed a period of one-party rule and then, hopefully, it would evolve into a more democratic system later. The only problem was that he forgot to allow it to evolve.

If anybody stuck his head up, it would be cut it off--figuratively speaking. He moved him out of power. Houphouet's version of the African "democracy" was to have consultations or "dialogue," which was the word he used. You don't just take a vote, with the parties split 51-49, and the party with 51% wins and can do whatever it wants. You try to reach a consensus. He really worked on the idea of reaching a consensus. Doing that within a one-party structure wasn't necessarily bad. In fact, it worked, although Houphouet had the final say. The country was small enough that he could have the final say.

During the early period of his power he had very good helpers, a very good staff. They were usually "metisse"--half African and half European so they had weak tribal links. He had a team of four or five people who worked with him during the whole 30 years that he was in power. The Secretary General of the Government and one of his advisers were two former French civil servants. They were part French and part African in ancestry. They were not part of any Ivorian tribal system. Houphouet didn't mind that. There were no racial feelings involved. The French colonial system, as opposed to the British one, didn't have racial tensions.

As an American I found that it was very strange for me to be in a black country and not to think of the color of the skin of people you met. The whole question of racial consciousness was never a factor in the Ivory Coast. There were a lot of intermarriages. So Houphouet's key staff members were with him for 30 years. They functioned relatively efficiently. There was corruption, but the system worked reasonably well. There were different types of corruption. Bribes by bidders for government contracts were one type of corruption. Another type of corruption involved the electricity company, where people didn't pay their bills and just stole the money out of the till. There were payoffs. A lot of the French were involved in that. Government officials would get percentages from government contracts.

By the late 1980s, it worked out that the French Ambassador--Michel DuPuch--had been in Ivory Coast by the time I got there for 10 years. He was very close to Houphouet, who often asked his views on various subjects. There were so many French citizens there that the French knew everything that was going on. Ambassador DuPuch did not see himself as a "viceroy." People misunderstood that. Houphouet was always the boss. He was always his own man. He "used" the French as much as the French used him. The French had a battalion of troops stationed at the airport in the Ivory Coast, as they had in several countries in Africa. It was stationed there so that it could control the airport. The way Houphouet put it, the French battalion was like an umbrella. If it rains, it is nice to be able to go to the closet and pull out an umbrella. However, the umbrella was his. I think that this was true.

During the last year I was in Ivory Coast Houphouet basically named Cesario as de facto Prime Minister. It was very clear that the "old man" was the boss. You had to be very careful in dealing with him. DuPuch was quite frank in saying how stubborn Houphouet was on certain economic issues. The French were trying to get him to limit his expenditure of money and to be more reasonable about that.

When I arrived, I called on the other ambassadors. They all returned the calls, but not the French Ambassador. This was his way of telling me: "You need me more than I need you." I thought about this and decided that he was right. So about once a month I would call on DuPuch and

discuss what was going on. I think that we established a good personal relationship. It was useful in terms of U. S. interests in the Ivory Coast.

It is true by the late 1980s, people were getting tired of Houphouet. Still he was such a "father figure." He was the George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson of Ivory Coast. Also, in the African sense, if you are the chief, you are accepted. People had been used to having him in office for so long that they just accepted having the "old man" around, despite the follies which he committed.

He could be stubborn. I sometimes got into arguments with him on commodity questions. We also tried to get his support on a couple of policy issues such as the situation in Liberia. He was a gentle person in one sense but also a very strong personality. He almost bit my hand off when we asked for his help with Sgt. Doe in Liberia. That man has blood on his hands (In taking power Doe had murdered Houphouet's son-in-law among others) and will die for it. I won't help, he said angrily when I pressed our request that he become Doe's Dutch uncle.

I should say that I found Secretary Shultz' visit very useful. It was a good way of showing American interest in the Ivory Coast. It was appreciated by the Ivorians. Immediately after the Shultz visit there was a visit by half a dozen Congressmen. Then, immediately after that, there was a visit by Tom Bradley, the Mayor of Los Angeles, and a delegation from that city. So we had more American visitors to the Ivory Coast in a period of three weeks than we had in 20 years. It had the effect of being "USA Month."

There was something about the Shultz visit that was somewhat unusual. Substantively, the Shultz visit involved just an exchange of views. However, one thing that I learned from this visit was that Houphouet didn't follow the American system of taking up one subject after another. Instead, he said his whole piece. I told Secretary Shultz about Houphouet's practice when he went in--that he would speak first and go through his whole brief. The Secretary said: "Ambassador, are you sure that is right?" I said: "I believe so, sir." Shultz followed my advice just to listen, which was just as well. When Houphouet started talking, he went on for an hour and a half.

When Secretary Shultz and party met with him, he announced the Ivoirean economy was in terrible shape because of a likely fall in commodity prices and asked our help. He caught me by surprise; he caught Chet Crocker by surprise; he caught Peter McPherson--the AID Director--by surprise. Houphouet said: "We have a terrible problem with commodity prices." The financial situation in the Ivory Coast had deteriorated very rapidly in the space of a month. Actually, since I had only recently arrived, I was not all that familiar with the situation. Nobody on the American side at this meeting knew the facts.

Later, Crocker then suggested that we get a really good economist assigned to our Embassy staff. So, as a result, we got ourselves somebody who was really terrific. She was a big help to me over the next two years in understanding what was going on. We did have an Agricultural Attaché, but he was mainly involved in pushing sales of American agricultural commodities and not an economist.

Another interesting part of the Shultz visit was arranging a meeting with Jonas Savimbi. The Ivory Coast was a place where Jonas Savimbi--the rebel leader in Angola--who was a protégé of Houphouët's and of course supported by us through the CIA, would come to visit frequently and hold private talks.

Arranging that meeting was interesting, since it had to be done quietly. I worked it out with Houphouët's chief of protocol, another one of his veterans. Secretary Shultz was in Abidjan for one day and two nights. The schedule included a meeting with President Houphouët in the morning, followed by a lunch and observing local dances after the lunch. As Abidjan was also the headquarters of the African Development Bank--the major regional international organization there, he went there in the afternoon and then held a press conference. There were about 15 newspapermen with him. We arranged for the meeting with Savimbi after the press conference.

When time ran short because the morning session and lunch ran late, Shultz wanted to scrub the African Development Bank meeting, but agreed to my suggestion that he just put in an appearance. What happened was that the President of the African Development Bank made a short introduction and Secretary Shultz began to talk. The schedule called for an hour long discussion. However, after five minutes Shultz said: "It has been a wonderful opportunity to meet with you," and got up and walked out, shaking hands with everybody as he exited. The US rep and the ABD President, whom I couldn't warn about the timing problem, were pretty unhappy, but they would have been even unhappier had Shultz had skipped the Bank entirely.

Then Shultz had the press conference, which went well for about 40 minutes or so at the Hotel Ivoire, a big modern showcase hotel Houphouët had built in the 1960s. Following that, the Secretary went out to his car and drove to Houphouët's home a mile or so away. Houphouët used to meet people there more often than in his downtown office. Crocker and I were asked to come along for the meeting with Savimbi. Houphouët was not expected to attend, but he just continued to sit there. When Savimbi came in, Houphouët just remained. He obviously was curious about what was going to happen. In fact, not much happened. My recollection was that Secretary Shultz said that we supported Savimbi and that was about it except for an exchange of pleasantries.

Afterwards, perhaps on half a dozen occasions, I was involved in a number of private meetings with Savimbi, Crocker, and then with Assistant Secretary Hank Cohen, after he replaced Crocker. On about four occasions I dealt directly and alone with Savimbi. Savimbi had a representative in Abidjan, who was part of Houphouët's inner entourage. I didn't realize it at first but gradually I got to know the cast of characters in the court around Houphouët. Substantively, it was interesting. Some difficult issues came up. We wanted Savimbi to do certain things, which he wouldn't do. Houphouët also created some difficulties from time to time.

Apart from [Assistant Secretary] Crocker, there was not much interest in the State Department in what was going on in Africa during this 1986-1989 period. There was also a community of people in AID [Agency for International Development] and elsewhere who were interested in development in Africa. But in general, Crocker ran his own fiefdom--pretty much as he wished, although there were clearly differences between him and AID. Assistant Secretary Hank Cohen continued the same pattern.

Before ending this discussion of my tour as Ambassador to the Ivory Coast, I would like to return to the job of promoting American business, which was really a major task there. We had the first American trade fair in West Africa in 1987, which was a big success. We had a second fair in 1989. About 100 American companies participated. Unfortunately, as the economic situation in the Ivory Coast deteriorated, American companies in Abidjan started shutting down. Phillips Petroleum pulled out of the country, as I mentioned, as well as others.

We had a messy situation with an oil company that I got in the middle of. I felt that this was a situation where only the Ambassador could open doors. Actually, it was kind of a "racket," a good example of corruption. In the Ivory Coast you could import fuel products "ex Customs" with no duty paid, provided that they were used for the Ivorian fishing fleet. The "racket" was that practically all of the companies were bringing in lots of petroleum products, supposedly for the fishing fleet, but in fact for use throughout the country. The Ivory Coast was losing the duties payable on these products which were sold on the black market. In some cases senior officials of the oil companies were involved. In other cases the Customs officials and low level employees were involved.

An American oil company was accused in connection with this "racket". The senior officials of the company who were clean realized that something was wrong when they saw so much petroleum product going to the fishing fleet. After they investigated, internally within their company, they discovered what was happening. Then they discovered that it affected a large part of the industry. The Ivorians officials, whom the company then refused to pay off, retaliated and levied an enormous fine. Presumably the senior officials in the Ministry of Finance or whatever government office were involved in the racket and went after the American company because they had refused to pay off and threatened to blow the whistle. The Ivorians said they were going to prosecute the American company, and levy an enormous fine. The company said while some of its employees were involved, and they were fired, it was innocent and refused to pay any fine. I raised this unsuccessfully with the Finance Minister who had refused to deal with the company. I struck out with him and decided the only thing that I could do was to go and see the "old man" [I. e., Houphouet-Boigny]. So the company flew in a vice president and he and I went to the "old man" and laid it all out before him. We said that if he thought that the American company was really guilty, it would pay. We asked him to decide. Houphouet was rather shaken by this matter and said he would look into it.

I don't think he knew what was going on. He was getting old and losing some of his control on his officials. You could never be sure what reached his ears. There were people who were trustworthy and who would talk with Houphouet, but not very many people had access to him--mostly those who had been with him for 30 years, even though some of them were crooks. When I wanted to make sure that a message was delivered, I would see him personally.

Anyway, he looked into the matter. A week or two later his representative came to us and said: "The American company is innocent." And that is the last we heard of it. Other companies paid the fine, but the US company refused to do so. They said that they would pull out of Ivory Coast, rather than pay an improper fine. If I hadn't been willing to intervene, this outcome probably would have been different. The key was having the US Ambassador stand by the company and

help it get to see the old man. Without the ambassador, the oil company would probably not have been able to see Houphouet.

During the last six months that I was in Ivory Coast, we worked very hard--and this continued after I left--to break the French telecommunications monopoly and to get "COMSAT" a contract to put in a better telephone system. The French were very hard nosed. They tried everything to torpedo us. The French Ambassador was candid about this. DuPuch said: "We cooperate politically," but about the telecommunications matter, he said: "Well, that is a commercial problem, that is business, that is different, that is war".

When the COMSAT president came to Ivory Coast, he wanted to give Houphouet a little gift. It was a attractive piece of Steuben glass with a map of the Ivory Coast. As he presented it to Houphouet, the glass shattered! The President had a sense of humor, and he said: "In Africa, that means good luck!" It was a real tussle to settle this telecommunications deal but it was my job to be as helpful as possible. I made this a top priority.

There were also a couple of administrative matters worth mentioning. When I first arrived in Abidjan, I ran into a long standing fight" with the person who owned the American Chancery building, a dreadful building. The dispute went back about 10 years. It had been leased from the owner in the 1960s, under a "lease-purchase" option. When real estate prices went way up, we exercised the option to purchase it. Then the owner didn't want to sell. We then went to the courts to try to get a judgment in our favor. I think that it was not a wise decision since I don't think that the US Government should normally go to court in a foreign country.

The case was finally settled while I was there, and it said something about how business was done in the Ivory Coast. The owner of the property was a Lebanese who was close to the court around Houphouet. As this issue dragged on in the court, we felt that we had the law on our side, and we stopped paying rent for five or six years. The rental money was held in escrow. Finally, right after I got there, we lost the court case. We had thought that we were going to win it. I am sure that what happened was that the issue was presented to Houphouet on the basis that: "Those nasty Americans are squeezing poor Mr. Charbine, who is going bankrupt because they won't pay him any rent." Houphouet probably felt that kind of behavior was not acceptable. So the court ruled against us.

We paid the outstanding rent immediately. But then Charbine the owner overreached himself and sued us for damages. He not only sued us for damages, which we rejected, but he also served us with legal notice to vacate the premises. He tried to throw us out. We ignored the order, but I got into the matter because it was only the Ambassador who could deal with the problem by this time. The Foreign Minister pressed us to pay what Charbine wanted. We refused. The owner was asking for a lot of money from the US for damages--it would have amounted to a couple of million dollars. We were paying the rent again. We had no lease, as the original lease had expired. I said: "We want a lease." The Foreign Minister said: "All right, but you have to settle this suit for damages to get the lease." I wouldn't agree with that.

Meanwhile, I had some advice from Cesario that the landlord was a "crook." He had been paying off the court. He had bought everybody off. Cesario said that the only way we could settle the

matter would be to take it to Houphouet. If he felt the US was the injured party and that the landlord was being unfair, he would come down in our favor. To back this up, I thought that we should make a bilateral issue by raising the problem in Washington.

The State Department called in the Ivorian Ambassador in Washington to complain. I raised the issue with Houphouet. He was very surprised. He didn't know that we had been sued for damages. Nobody had told him that. He said: "But I thought that this problem was settled." I said: "No, it isn't settled." I made the case that we had been very reasonable and had paid the outstanding rent immediately, but the landlord was still suing us-- for several million dollars. Houphouet said: "Ah." I was careful not to threaten anything. I just laid out the facts for the old man.

We had continued with the court case because we wanted to be sure that we were on solid legal ground and were making as strong a case as we could. I am sure, however, that what happened next was that the word came down from Houphouet: "Enough is enough, Mr. Charbine." The court then decided in our favor and rejected Charbine's claims. So the matter was finally resolved. I think that the lesson is that the United States should not routinely get involved in a local court. We're on somebody else's territory, playing someone else's game in their own backyard and you have to play by their rules.

The other issue involved getting land for the American School. One of the big problems in Abidjan was that it was a large post, in a big city, but with a miserable English language school. There were not only American kids in the school, but also English-speaking students from the African Development Bank, who, I think, were more numerous than the Americans. We had a rented school building, which was quite inadequate.

So, during the second year that I was in Ivory Coast, the authorities decided to acquire some land and build a school. The school board, which was elected, scouted around, found a site and developed an architectural plan. Then school asked if I could try to get some land free of charge from the Ivorian Government. The school board had found a good site, but they didn't have the money to buy the land, which was worth a couple of million dollars.

I took the plans for the school to Cesario who was in charge of all Ivorian Government property and contracts. I knew him well enough so that I could ask him what his honest reaction was. He looked at the plans and said: "This is a country club, not a school!" The plans, in fact, were fancy, providing for a swimming pool, air conditioning, and other amenities not usually available in Ivorian schools. He said, "You'll never get anywhere with this." Meanwhile, we had gotten a new Administrative Counselor. She agreed with me we needed to get the overseas school people in the State Department involved and to do a better planning job. So the school board hired some planners and Department's school experts came to Abidjan. They did a proper, professional survey and designed a school which would cost a minimum amount of money. We went back to Cesario with the revised plan, which cost about \$1 million and was barebones. He agreed that the plan was acceptable. Then my task was to get Houphouet to give us the land for free. I mistakenly thought that Cesario was going to take care of this. He said: "Oh, no. That is your job."

An additional complication was that the State Department said that it would give us \$250,000 of the \$1.0 million needed to build the school--local banks would cover the rest--only if the Embassy got control the school board. This was understandable, but to do that, we had to change the school's constitution to have three of nine members appointed by the Embassy. We figured that if the Embassy appointed three members that should ensure effective control.

When I presented the plan to Houphouet, he said: "Ah, the rich are begging from the poor!" He had a sense of humor. Finally, he agreed. So I came back and told Cesario: "Well, it is all set." He said: "I have to confirm it with him." It took him months and months and nothing happened. Finally, he said: "If I tell you 'Yes,' and you go ahead without my getting permission from Houphouet, he will chop my head off!" Cesario wanted to make sure that Houphouet didn't change his mind and wasn't just being diplomatic with me. However, Cesario never seemed to find the occasion to raise the problem with the old man.

I was beginning to sweat, because the clock was running out. The Administrative Counselor said: "We really need to deliver on the free land, which amounted to five acres and would make project viable and enable us to "win" on voting the new constitution for the school board. Otherwise the project would founder. Without the free land, there was no new school. We wouldn't have enough money and the school would not vote to change to constitution; official Americans were in a minority in the school.

Just about a week before the final School meeting for the year, Assistant Secretary Crocker came through Abidjan on a trip. As a gimmick, I got Crocker to thank Houphouet for his "generous gesture" of giving free land for the American School. Crocker did that and Houphouet bit: "That was nothing! I wasn't just helping you. I was helping Abidjan, because it needs a good English school. This will be good for everybody. I am delighted to do it." So I went back to Cesario and told him what had happened. He finally caved: "All right, you win." He just didn't want to take the issue with Houphouet and was stringing me along. He was a bit of a bastard about things like this. He had his own problems.

He said: "Tomorrow morning at 10:00 AM you go see Monsieur X," for the title to the land. X was a Frenchman who controlled all Ivorian Government property." The question came up as to whom the Ivorian Government would be deeding the property of five acres. The Administrative Counselor said: "It should be given to the American School." As I thought about it, I said, "That's crazy. Why not take it for the Embassy? If we are worried about controlling the school, why not take title to the property?" But the Administrative Counselor said: "You can't do that. You would need to have FBO [Office of Foreign Building Operations in the State Department] permission. You can't accept property abroad without the agreement of FBO."

Well, anyway, we went to the office of Monsieur X. He had all of the forms ready. It was all computerized. When he asked: "To whom is this property to be deeded?" I answered, "To the American Embassy." So I got the piece of paper giving the Embassy title to the land. It was "a gift" from the head of state. A few days later the school voted to change its constitution and a year later the new school was built and up and running. As it has made a big difference for Abidjan, I felt very good that we were able to achieve this. FBO grouched about the title but we still kept it.

What was also interesting was that Houphouet put a non-Ivorian official in control of government property. This was part of the way he maintained control over corruption. Monsieur X had a dinky little office, but the land records were all computerized. It took just 15 minutes, and we had a land title.

Another administrative issue was less pleasant. It was a combination of incompetence and a race problem. I mentioned earlier that Abidjan was a "regional" Embassy. Because it was a transportation hub, Abidjan provided administrative support for other Embassies, particularly in the General Services area. There had been a history of trouble--mismanagement and alleged corruption--in our General Services Unit. One of the two preceding GSO's had been allowed to retire, and another was fired. The problems had supposedly been cleaned up or were in the process of being cleaned up when I got to the Ivory Coast. But the Department then assigned an incompetent General Services officer, who happened to be black, and the problems resurfaced. These problems rumbled along during the first year I was at post until "efficiency report" time. Then the General Services Officer got an "unsatisfactory" report from the Administrative Officer, who also happen to be African-American. When I heard about the mess, I was surprised. I should have known, but didn't. I assumed wrongly that the Administrative Counselor and the DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], who had an administrative background, were on top of things. When I asked the DCM what he thought I should do, he said since the GSO job was a very difficult and very responsible, if the GSO was incompetent, I ought to send her back to the States.

Before taking such an extreme step, I decided to talk to relevant people and get a much better appreciation of the problem. So on my own I interviewed the senior members of the Embassy staff and also all the senior black officers. Everybody agreed that I should transfer the GSO back to the Department. They were unanimous that she was incompetent and the source of much trouble for the admin operation.

Then, after carefully following the regulations and alerting George Vest, who was the Director General of the Foreign Service, I advised the GSO of my decision. She took it badly, claimed I was ruining her career. All hell broke loose. She stirred up a protest among a number of black Americans and Ivoireans who worked at the Embassy, charging my action was racist and an act of "imperialists." It was a messy scene.

A few days later, when I was back in Washington for a Chiefs of Mission conference, Ron Spiers, the Under Secretary for Management, pulled me aside and wanted to know what was going on in connection with the GSO. I had an argument with the head of the EEO office who disputed my finding of incompetence. The EEO people then came out from the Department to investigate Abidjan. They claimed it was a mess of racism and 25 black Americans--a good portion of those assigned to the Embassy--signed a protest petition.

I remember receiving a letter from Mary Ryan, Spiers' aide, telling me that EEO had sent the problem over to the Foreign Service Inspector General's office. Mary Ryan wrote: "You probably haven't heard the last of this." As it turned out, it was the last of it. The whole issue petered out and I heard nothing more. When we did have an inspection, they had plenty of

suggestions on embassy management, but never formally touched on the GSO issue. They did agree informally that the Department should never have assigned an incompetent to manage a major GSO operation. I found it a very unpleasant situation because it was really the Department's fault. Then, of course, when the situation blew up, the people in the Department who should have dealt with it, simply ran away from it. In effect, nobody did anything about it. I felt that the EEO Office in Washington not only was of no help, but made matters worse in this particular case by taking a partisan and biased stand. As it turned out, the former General Services Officer filed an EEO complaint--not against me but against the DCM and the Administrative Counselor, who had been her "rating" officers. [The Administrative Counselor prepared the "efficiency report" and the DCM prepared the "reviewing statement."] But I was really the person that took the action.

Sometimes, you are really faced with a hard choice. You have to decide what is best for the organization even if there are racial questions to consider. If a person has a job of importance and is incompetent, you have to do something about it. It's not a pleasure. The whole episode was nasty, but I needed to take action on the issue. It was an unpleasant part of being an Ambassador.

In any case, the Embassy staff reshuffled during the summer, and we had a new cast of characters in the second and third year of my assignment as Ambassador to the Ivory Coast. They were much better qualified and the whole situation and Embassy atmosphere changed for the better. About the GSO problem, a couple of the people most directly involved left the post, and the problem went away.

In terms of being an Ambassador, in Abidjan, the commercial role was the most important part of the job. The USIS [United States Information Service] role--showing the flag and PR--was also important. I often gave talks and frequently appeared on television and felt that this was a major part of the job. The American community was also big enough--about 350 people--that I was, in effect, the "mayor" of the town, dealing with community issues and having people over to the residence. That was not something that I cherished but I felt that it was important to do this--to ensure that people felt "at home."

Abidjan was a post that was comfortable, but it had a reputation as having low morale. Some of the neighboring posts in less pleasant surroundings had small American communities and everybody pulled together. Abidjan was big enough and had enough facilities that the American community didn't have to worry about itself constantly, which was all right.

There were two main problems. You needed to be able to speak French in Abidjan, and a lot of the Americans didn't. That was particularly true of the so-called "regional" staff who were dealing not just with French-speaking Africa but English-speaking Africa as well. They often felt lost in Abidjan. To make matters worse for the families, the employee was often on the road, traveling to other posts. The families were just left to fend for themselves in Abidjan.

**ROBERT B. PETERSEN**  
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### **Abidjan (1989-1992)**

*Mr. Petersen was born and raised in Ohio and educated at Oberlin College. He entered the USIA Foreign Service in 1965 and served as Public and Cultural Affairs Office in Embassies or Consulates in Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Mauritius, Israel, Morocco and Cote d'Ivoire. He also served in several senior USIA positions in Washington, DC. Mr. Peterson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: Was he a deputy?*

PETERSEN: I've forgotten what position he had.

*Q: But he was part of the government.*

PETERSEN: Yes, he was. He was the founding father of Cote d'Ivoire. He had some wonderful ideas, including a very liberal attitude towards countries around Cote d'Ivoire -- providing economic opportunities and refuge for people to come to Cote d'Ivoire. He presided over a good economy in the early years of independence based on cocoa and coffee. But he was a man who stayed too long. He never could find the opportunity to step down, a terrible flaw. Unfortunately, it outweighs or certainly significantly diminishes so much of what the man did.

*Q: You were there towards the end of his rule.*

PETERSEN: He died late in '93, about a year after I left. I had the honor to meet with him a couple of times and spend some time with him. When Ambassador Ken Brown paid his farewell call on the president, I was the one who accompanied him. The three of us sat together. It was a tête-à-tête between Houphouet and the ambassador, but I got to sit there and be the third pair of ears to our conversation. That was kind of thrilling. Houphouet-Boigny was a towering, great figure. It's just unfortunate that he couldn't step down. Quite justly, he could never be judged solely on the good things he did. The bad was kind of bad.

*Q: What were you doing there?*

PETERSEN: I was the PAO. The big thing going on while I was in Cote d'Ivoire was the war in Liberia. Charles Taylor went into Liberia on Christmas Eve of 1989, a little over a month after I got there. The Liberian war got underway. I forget when they got into Monrovia, but by June of '90, the Taylor forces had forced us to evacuate the Americans from our VOA (Voice of America) relay station in Liberia. By August, we were off the air. Our FSN staff had kept the relay station operating, on the air, for a couple of months after the Americans had been forced to depart. Our embassy in Abidjan got involved very early in 1990 in trying to help some of the refugees who started streaming over the border into Cote d'Ivoire. Early in 1990, we arranged to get a planeload of medicine flown down from USEUCOM (United States European Command). We arranged for some immediate support to go to the Ivorian Red Cross and other organizations that were involved in aiding the refugees -- including vehicles, some cash, and other things. I remember the sense of commitment and urgency. We had a mini-country team meeting. On a

Friday, the ambassador and four or five of his senior people were there about the need to provide some help to the Ivorians to deal with the refugees who were coming in. Someone at the meeting had suggested there wasn't anything that could be done with the weekend approaching, but come Monday we really had to get on this. The head of the political section, Tom Pryce, became very upset and said, "We're dealing with people's lives here. We'll work through the weekend. We'll get this done." Sure enough, on a Saturday, the next day, we had some of the donations already going into Ivorian hands. It was the Foreign Service at its best.

By spring of 1990, we were arranging for evacuation flights for Americans. They would be brought in from Monrovia to Abidjan, transferred and then flown out from there to the U.S. Over a period of weeks, we had a number of flights of people who were brought in to spend part of the day with us getting ready for the long flight to the U.S. and get them on board. It was horrible to hear about what was going on in Liberia and to see these people streaming out.

To get back to the relay station, the FSNs at the relay station were told that if they could get to Abidjan, get overland into Abidjan, to report in to me and then I would try to assist them. When they got there, I felt a particular concern, responsibility for the relay station personnel. I didn't know any of them individually or personally, but the fact that they had kept the relay station going after the Americans had departed I felt was a rather noble and important thing. I was very frustrated about the way I perceived we weren't doing enough to help them, but in truth, what could be done? The relay station was not in Monrovia. Some of the personnel from the relay station did indeed get to Abidjan over the month after the station was closed. They had gotten my name, were told to come to me. When they would come in, we'd try to arrange what we could for them in terms of support, everything from cooking material to a place to stay and some clothing and so forth. There were some real horror stories of what people had endured, the threats they had lived through, the attacks. A lot of people arrived distraught. Eventually, there was an effort made to set up a special visa program, where appropriate, to provide some visas to go to the U.S. Later on, both while I was still in Cote d'Ivoire and later when I was in Morocco, I remember getting a few letters from some of the people from the relay station who had gotten into the U.S. Some of them had relatives that were the lever that got them a visa. Others got in on special programs where they were entitled to some benefits until they could get a job and so forth. I got a few letters that touched me deeply, people just letting me know how they had ended up.

*Q: In Cote d'Ivoire, the French influence has always been very strong. Did you find yourself in competition or in cooperation?*

PETERSEN: In terms of the programs that I was directly involved in, I wouldn't call it cooperation. We did have meetings where we would meet some counterparts from the French government, share some information about what we were trying to do in terms of providing training for journalists, that type of thing, and see where there were complementary programs. But by and large, competition is the wrong word, but also we didn't cooperate in the sense that I would tailor my programs and they would tailor their programs or that we would make significant adjustments. When I was in Borneo, I had worked with the British consul and I would arrange through the British consul some of their grantees that they were sending to Britain, we would take on a visit over the Atlantic so that people could come to the U.S. and also I would

arrange so that they could pick up some of our grantees for a stay in Britain when we were sending somebody all the way to the U.S. I don't recall anything like that.

*Q: What about the press? Were you trying to get America treated well? How did you find the Cote d'Ivoirian press?*

PETERSEN: The issue wasn't being treated well; it was being treated fairly. Our concern was for accuracy.

The concern was to try to bring more accuracy to portraying what the U.S. interests were in Cote d'Ivoire and in West Africa and what our contributions were. We were seeking fairness in the press. Some Ivorian journalists were also concerned with seeing that the press operated according to good journalistic standards, with accuracy and not overly editorializing in describing what was going on. The press was a very important part of our concern there. That was seen as a real building block for a freer, more open political system.

*Q: What were we trying to do there?*

PETERSEN: First of all, we had a good relationship with the Ivorian government, which was supporting us in endeavors elsewhere in Africa. We had overflight arrangements and some landing rights and so forth that were important for us. One time, it was described at a country team meeting that what Washington expected was for us to push the Ivorians to be more democratic and to do it at the same time without interfering with this very good relationship that was so important for other interests elsewhere. That was a real tightrope. The ambassador had a real challenge in trying to carry out what Washington was after with Cote d'Ivoire. The country in some senses was in a bad situation during the time I was there. Violent crime was an important and significant factor in our daily lives. The Italian ambassador was killed one evening in a shootout involving a crime in a restaurant. There were other instances of diplomatic personnel getting shot, car hijackings and robberies with threat of violence and so forth, not to mention the threat against Ivorians and other foreigners, non-diplomatic personnel living in the country. So, this was a problem. I've forgotten the rating system that was used, but if I have it correctly, Abidjan and maybe Rio de Janeiro were the two cities in the world that were on the security watch list, given the highest priority because of the danger of crime to personnel assigned there. This was a problem.

So, this was indicative of the problem that the Ivorians were facing -- the government, the business community, and so forth. The economy was in a bad way. Cote d'Ivoire had been one of the most prosperous West African countries up into the 1980s based on cocoa, coffee, and so forth. By the time I got there, there had been significant reversals. The coffee industry was no longer as competitive as it once had been. The type of coffee grown there is the Robusta, not the Arabica that has become the preferred coffee bean around the world. On top of that, the marketing strategy that the Ivorians had tried to use didn't work out as well as they had hoped. The quality of their crops had gone down. A lot of the money income from coffee sales and cocoa sales got siphoned off, and didn't get back to the growers who could reinvest it in improving the crop. That was a problem. Much of that siphoning off was putting hands in the till.

Much of the forest had been logged out so the great, hardwood forests for future generations were not going to be there. This nation that had started out so well was mired down. The embassy was trying to assist economically with better approaches for the development of infrastructure, use of crops, marketing strategies, and so forth. To deal with the problem of deforestation, one of the things the embassy was trying to do was help come up with alternatives to just logging the forests into oblivion. One idea was to develop ecotourism, maybe get livelihood for the people in and around the forests from looking after tourists. In order to do that, you had to preserve the forest itself. I remember one trip I took up to the Tai forest in Cote d'Ivoire and met with some people from the World Wildlife Fund and looked at the possibilities for developing ecotourism. But by and large, the country had a lot of challenges, a lot of problems. It was still, comparatively in West Africa, an attractive place to be and to visit but it was going downhill from its economic and political heights of a few years before. And then there was the concern about Cote d'Ivoire's political evolution. We had elections while I was there. I remember going out on election day and being part of the embassy's monitoring team, traveling to polling place and reporting on what we saw. Someone once summed it up again at one of our country team meetings as saying that the government, Houphouet's government, had really taken to heart and truly believed in democracy and the need for a very strong and good opposition. The one last step they couldn't possibly take in their own minds was that the opposition could ever take over as the government. That's been a failure of so many governments around the world. It seemed to be true there.

*Q: There is now a war that doesn't seem to be able to wind down.*

PETERSEN: Yes. They've got talks in Paris this week. They're bringing some of the leaders in for that.

*Q: How did you find the Ivorians socially and all that?*

PETERSEN: Interesting, fascinating. Culturally, everything from the designs that one would see on... Cote d'Ivoire is famous for the *pagne*, the wax cloth that is produced there. Ivorian women who can afford to be are very fashion conscious and wear the beautiful cloth. People were very social, very open. One thing I did find off-putting was – and I hesitate to say it – but a certain lack of confidence in dealing without outsiders. When I would be in an Ivorian's house for an Ivorian meal, I had a sense that the host had gone all out to entertain me, to make the meal really special, beyond what he could afford and beyond what really was appropriate to entertain someone. I had a sense over the years I was there that this belied a lack of confidence in one's own ability. I don't know how to express it really accurately but it used to make me very uncomfortable.

*Q: Did you have the feeling that the French influence had anything to do with it, that the French culture was the culture and that any African culture was secondary?*

PETERSEN: I don't know. I do know that you'd hear snide remarks about some of the leadership in Cote d'Ivoire being more French than the French themselves. Certainly there was a veneer of an adoption of French culture. I'm not sure. I do recall, and it was refreshing when it would happen, that there were instances of Ivorians who would take great pride in showing me

something that was Ivorian and not French, something of the country, maybe a food. Instead of serving just a French meal, sometimes they introduced something else that the host would explain was Ivorian. I was looking for those kinds of things because I wanted to see them. There weren't that many instances but they were refreshing when they occurred. And I heard a lot of complaints from a lot of sources about the French and how they had stultified the development of something more indigenous in terms of a culture, but I don't want to engage in French bashing because I certainly heard the remarks and the complaints and the vilification of the French, but I don't share in it per se. And I'm not a Francophile either.

**FREDERICK E. GILBERT**  
**Director, USAID, REDSO**  
**Abidjan (1990-1993)**

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

GILBERT: To the REDSO for West and Central Africa in Abidjan.

*Q: And what year was this?*

GILBERT: This was summer of 1990.

*Q: Well, for those who don't understand, describe a little bit about what REDSO is or was when you joined it.*

GILBERT: The REDSO idea arose back in the early 1970s when David Shear was at the Senior Seminar. As part of his work there he wrote a "think piece" on how a regional office in West Africa could strengthen AID project management in the field. This led to the establishment of the first REDSO in Abidjan, and he was its first Director beginning in about 1974. REDSO stands for Regional Economic Development Services Office. It had two classic field office support functions.

One was to provide technical support both to large and fully delegated posts (or missions) and to smaller posts without full delegations. For the missions, the support usually consisted of lawyers and other highly specialized experts who are not numerous enough, or needed often enough, to be in every mission. For the smaller posts REDSO provided a much broader array of technical staff support.

The other function had to do with the non-fully-delegated posts. Posts that don't have full delegations of authority are usually headed by AID Representatives or AID Affairs Officers. In

these cases, REDSO participated in major project planning and management decisions. So, when these missions had thought through what they wanted to do (often with the help of REDSO staff), the REDSO Director had to concur in the required decision. During my time in REDSO and for at least the previous ten years, approval authority for most projects was included among those authorities delegated to full missions. The principle officers of the non-fully-delegated posts could exercise the authorities delegated to full missions only with the concurrence of the REDSO Director.

A third, nonstandard function that fell to both REDSOs (the other is in Nairobi for East and Southern Africa) was direct program management. This mostly involved responsibility for regional projects until REDSO/WCA became responsible for management of an Ivory Coast bilateral program inaugurated in FY1990.

After the phase-down in Sudan, REDSO/WCA was the largest AID management unit in Sub-Saharan Africa. I felt blessed among REDSO Directors because of my responsibility for the Ivory Coast bilateral program. This was unprecedented, and it greatly enriched my years in Abidjan.

When I arrived, I found that the REDSO wasn't performing any of its assigned functions to my satisfaction. My main concern was that there was no clear distinction between the staff responsible for supporting client posts as opposed to those responsible for direct program management. Many units and staff had responsibility for a little of each function. So, figuratively, on Tuesdays and Thursdays these people felt they were too occupied with direct program management to meet their client post support responsibilities. And on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays they couldn't do program management because they were too busy with client post support. The upshot was that nobody was really accountable for either thing. This caused us to look fickle to our client posts and sometimes we were.

Of course, some of the best staff managed somehow to meet both kinds of responsibilities. For these folks the problem was to prevent them from working themselves half to death or neglecting their families too much because of travel. But there was an essential conflict of interest in having people constantly torn between tending their own patches versus those of our clients, and I decided to resolve it.

The other thing that worried me was that, unlike REDSO/ECA (East and Southern Africa) in Nairobi, REDSO/WCA was not regarded as a particularly superior resource within its region. Others and I had observed that East and Southern Africa Missions vied with one another to secure involvement by the best REDSO/ESA staff in their program and sector strategy development work. This added strength to these functions and paid off in program quality. Although certain staff of REDSO/WCA had been in great demand from time to time, their work had been overwhelmingly project-focused and there hadn't been the kind of partnership in program conceptualization that existed between REDSO/ESA and its client bilateral posts. It seemed clear to me that we needed to recruit staff who were leaders in their fields or had the ability to achieve such standing. This problem had come up in my discussions with the Africa Bureau leadership during my pre-departure briefings, and they wanted to see REDSO/WCA's relationship with its clients evolve in the ESA direction. The recruitment of higher-powered staff in certain functions may not have arisen because that need wasn't apparent to me until I had been

in Abidjan for a while.

To resolve the conflict of interest and lack of accountability problems, I got Washington's agreement to a restructuring that gave us a program management division, which was functionally like an AID Rep's office. It had responsibility for coordinating the design and implementation of all programs that REDSO was directly responsible for. Like client posts, our Program Management Office didn't have all the staff needed for all of its functions. They were required to bid for REDSO services and were treated pretty much like the client posts at the annual scheduling conferences that we held in the fall of each year. After a few teething problems it worked quite well.

*Q: Was this for Ivory Coast?*

GILBERT: Yes. For the Ivory Coast bilateral program and a fairly large regional project that provided technical and institution-building assistance to the African Development Bank. We also had some responsibility for field coordination of one or two regional projects managed in Washington, and I can't remember for sure whether I left these responsibilities in the technical divisions. I think I did.

Another thing I did was to change some position descriptions and merge some functions into a single unit for synergy's sake. We combined the agriculture, environmental, Food for Peace, private sector development and economics staffs into an Office of Productive Sector Development headed by a very strong and energetic agricultural economist. This made sense to me because the vast bulk of our non-project assistance was driven by agriculture sector, agricultural and non-traditional export, private sector development and environmental policy reform agendas. We grouped the health and human resources staff into one division called the Health, Population and Human Resources Office. We also beefed up the Project Development Office and moved into that office the engineers who had previously been located in a large General Development Office.

And then, in order to get the agricultural economist mentioned above as well as other superior staff, I devoted an hour or two a day for a year or more to working with Washington colleagues in identifying strong candidates and recruiting them. There had been quite a number of vacancies when I arrived. And some of the restructuring decisions I made created new vacancies. With a good deal of help from colleagues in Washington (Merle Mukai in AFR/MGT and Cynthia Rozell, the Deputy Director of AFR/WA) we gradually brought the staff of REDSO up to full strength. I think almost anybody who knew the situation would agree that, for the most part, the new people were superior resources in their field. As a result we began to get involved more and more in the early analysis and conceptualization work that underlay sector strategy development and project selection. This meant that the quality of project ideas began to improve, and we were less often required to help make "silk purses out of sows' ears."

This was, in itself, quite satisfying. However, I never got more than backhanded praise from my "elders and betters" in Washington (who, within six months of my arrival in Abidjan, were no longer those who had selected me for the job and given me guidance). On one hand I remember mention in my EERs that I was "a total quality manager." On the other hand, I got signals that I

was not paying enough attention to EEO considerations in my recruitment efforts.

*Q: What was the geographic coverage?*

GILBERT: REDSO/WCA's geographic coverage extends from Mauritania down to Zaire along the coast of West and Central Africa and inward to the Sahel countries, including Chad and the Central African Republic.

*Q: Including some countries with little or no program, I guess.*

GILBERT: Yes. And you know there are about six or seven full missions and roughly an equal number of non-fully delegated posts. That picture changed, of course, during my three plus years. The programs in Cameroon and Mauritania were phased out. And towards the end of my time, the Ivory Coast program had to be phased out beginning about when I left.

*Q: Why was that?*

GILBERT: There are two levels of answers to that question. The real answer, I think, is that the Ivorians were on the U.N. Security Council beginning somewhat before my arrival in Abidjan and ending about when I left. If the end of Ivory Coast's term on the Security Council wasn't enough to cause phase-out of the bilateral program, it certainly made the program vulnerable. And that's where the second level answer to your question comes in. Sometime during 1993 the new administration of AID decided that the number of country programs had to be reduced by phasing out field posts. Ivory Coast was put on that list. I frankly don't recall that any coherent, explicit reasons were given. I seem to recall that the stated reasons always pertained to the affected countries as a group. Some things that were mentioned were the desire to reduce the number of AID presence countries, to work in countries where human rights as well as democracy and governance issues were being addressed and where policy reforms were empowering and energizing the private sector. I didn't put too much credence in these rationales' explanatory power concerning the Ivory Coast decision because programs were being continued in countries where the picture in each of these areas was less positive than in Ivory Coast. The fact of Ivory Coast's relatively high per capita income was not mentioned. Another factor that wasn't mentioned was that this was yet another country that was slipping in and out of Brooke status. And there was little prospect of their staying out of Brooke without non-project assistance from the U.S. roughly equal to the annual cost of servicing their debts to the U.S. government.

*Q: What about Mauritania and Cameroon?*

GILBERT: Well, in Cameroon it had a lot to do with the fact that neither human rights nor democracy and governance were faring well. And, those who were close to the situation agreed that it probably had a lot to do with the fact that Brian Atwood was snubbed by the Cameroonians when he was Director of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and that body was trying to get that Government to run free and fair elections. Again, except for having the bad judgment to stiff the NDI, Cameroon was not worse in democracy-governance than a number of other African countries that continued to receive U.S. assistance. Moreover, as a development partner, it deserved quite high marks for seriousness.

*Q: And Mauritania?*

GILBERT: As for the Mauritania phase-out, I think that wasn't a bad decision. Mauritania is not a real country by twentieth century standards. It's just so damn hard to do anything there. And nothing stays done for more than three weeks before it falls apart. We had a number of programs there that were good in terms of their own internal logic, but they seemed to get engulfed in the pervading futility. Implementation dragged because counterpart personnel and government priorities constantly changed. The government suffered from an organizational attention deficit disorder. In individual human beings that condition is often aggravated by hyperactivity, but the Government of Mauritania suffers from the opposite problem, "hypoactivity." So even when its attention straggled back to a particular project, action was not the likely result. Government is more or less suspended for a few weeks every year during a traditional festival of the "new dates" when most of the Moors drift back to their oases.

But our tolerance of the way things "work" in Mauritania might have gone on indefinitely if the Mauritians hadn't shot themselves in the foot during the run-up to the Gulf War by allowing Saddam Hussein to park a large part of his national air fleet there for the duration.

*Q: Were there projects that you were involved in or that REDSO had a major role in during your time there?*

GILBERT: Well, we were involved all across the region in providing technical and program management support to the whole gamut of the programs that the smaller posts were conducting and to a large part of the full Missions' programs. But there was significant variation among the full missions in their reliance on REDSO. The Senegal mission tended not to wish much REDSO involvement. They even contrived to get their own lawyer. Mali, Niger, Guinea and, to a lesser extent, Ghana made considerable use of REDSO services. Cameroon also did so to some extent. These larger, fully-delegated, "Schedule A" posts mainly called on us for the specialized staff which they lacked such as lawyers, engineers, private sector development specialists and environmental officers.

Our best customers remained the smaller, not-fully delegated, "Schedule B" posts like Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Togo, Benin and Cape Verde. In addition to the types of staff the Schedule A countries used, they also drew heavily on our project design officers and our sector development staff. I also should record that one of our contracting officers, Steve Wisecarver, was frequently invited to participate in design exercises. The ostensible reason was that they wanted help in preparing with contract scopes-of-work (SOWs) so that implementation would start right away following project authorization. But I eventually realized that these requests also reflected client posts' desire for his participation in the design process. In working through the principal SOWs with the design team he usually helped them to improve the design.

Our main area of involvement in client posts' programs was in the agriculture and natural resources sector. The head of the Productive Sector Development group was Paul Crawford. He was an agricultural economist with excellent program strategy planning and design skills. Another member of that group, the Private Sector Development Advisor, Oren Whyche, was

extremely capable. The two of them as well as our environmental and natural resource management specialists (an American and a Senegalese) were in great demand. The demand for help with nontraditional export development projects was so great that we recruited an Israeli expert, Shaul Horan, just to help with that.

We also provided a lot of support to countries in the area of health and family planning. Our best and most sought after technical staff members in this field were people from the region. We had a Senegalese AIDS expert who I fully expect in ten or fifteen years to hear about being in a high-level job at the World Health Organization or UNICEF.

*Q: What was his name?*

GILBERT: His name is Suleiman Barry. We had regional people of almost equal caliber as economists, educationists, environmentalists, engineers, and primary health services experts. Suleiman Barry was the most sought, but the regionals were at least as sought after as their American counterparts. And the credit goes to Chuck De Bose. When he was the head of the General Development Office he spent a lot of time before my arrival identifying and recruiting these folks. We continued the process after he left, but we only had a very few positions left to fill.

*Q: Wasn't De Bose also your Health Officer?*

GILBERT: Yes. He was a Health Officer by profession, and functioned in that capacity while also heading up the General Development Office. Though he found and recruited most of the regional staff, I feel a sense of shared accomplishment regarding the key role they came to play. When they first came on board they were slow to appreciate the role we intended for them. I'm sure that Chuck or others never gave them to understand that their role was to be one of simply doing as they were told. But they acted as if this were the case. They came from professional and administrative environments where initiatives, ideas and, above all, decisions flowed down and where such things were not open to a much discussion, let alone to being questioned.

We held a lot of technical review meetings for the purpose of framing REDSO positions on project design, authorization and major implementation decisions that were submitted for my concurrence. Given the number of countries and the complexities involved there was no way we could do this responsibly without making this a staff-work process under the coordination of the head of the Project Development and Engineering Office subject to final review by the Deputy Director and myself. Full participation of the concerned technical staff was essential to reaching sound decisions. We seldom, if ever, said "No" in the end, but we often required changes in order to concur.

As you know, meetings of this type can get pretty lively and ours were no exception. We insisted that these folks attend meetings on matters in their technical areas even though at the beginning they often had little prior exposure to the specific activity under review. After discussions went back and forth for a time on the various points, we would ask them what they thought. Initially, they were almost always shocked into speechlessness. Once they knew what to expect, they were merely resigned and miserable at the prospect. In their earliest responses, they would initially

agree with what others or the senior person present had last said. But gradually they observed that everyone was more or less equal in these discussions or, at least, that staff didn't particularly hesitate to differ with their seniors, including me, on points of fact or interpretation - even outside their particular specialties. We also insisted that they join in calling us by our first names and be called by theirs (not an easy thing for Francophones). At the end of the meetings they could see that the senior person present would formulate a recommended decision that may or not be based on a consensus and that the differences in the meeting seldom affected relationships outside the meeting. They saw that the senior officers generally accepted well-reasoned recommendations of the staff, and that if we didn't we would explain why.

Finally, through a process that combined pushing and handholding we got them to function as regular members of the REDSO staff. The process of getting there was fun to watch. The underlying change in mental posture helped them to succeed in practicing their specialties on their own at client posts.

Oren Whyche, our senior private sector advisor, spoke wonderful French. She had held a number of professional positions in the U.S. banking sector, but one of her more formative experiences was working as a Zaire Airlines stewardess for some years. She had lived in Africa on and off for years. Needless to say, she knew her way around. In addition, she was a dazzlingly smart and articulate expert person with an extremely positive personality and an incredible work ethic. She became the primary media personality not only in REDSO, but in the whole U.S. Mission. She was frequently in demand to appear on television and radio to explain how private sector economies worked as well as the care and feeding they required. About every six or nine months she would become physically exhausted and have to kind of drop her frenetic schedule for a week or so. We tried to get her to take it a bit easier and succeeded to some extent, but we couldn't "just say no" for her against her will and without her cooperation. We had similar problems, but to a lesser degree, with our strongest staff members.

While REDSO Director, I was mindful of some dangerous tendencies that we had to avoid. One important one, to which REDSO had sometimes fallen prey in the past, was to consider itself mandated to micromanage or impose program decisions on the Schedule B posts. Even though it had been some years since I had witnessed or heard of a REDSO Director taking that kind of approach, I was on guard to prevent this kind of thinking from creeping into REDSO's work and communications with the client posts. The philosophy that I preached at regular intervals to my colleagues was that we were not there to ensure that each post's decisions were the same that we would make. Rather a REDSO concurrence should reflect our finding that a referred decision was defensible in light of USAID policy and regulations; of economic, social and technical soundness criteria; and of the relevant legislative framework.

We did more than apply "stink" tests. But, in our efforts to achieve high quality decisions, we bore in mind that there is usually more than one decision that a reasonable person can make on a given matter. We focused our thinking on parameters and degrees of acceptability. When we sent comments back to the client post we would explain the changes we recommended and distinguish them from those that we required in order to concur.

My concept was that REDSO's mission was both to ensure a "requisite quality" of program

decision-making and to apply our resources to raising the attained quality as high as possible. But we couldn't do the latter by constantly jerking the client posts around. Instead it had to be our aim to build partnerships with these posts so that we could make our inputs throughout the process of developing and implementing activities.

Part of that strategy was to assure that our people were leaders in their fields as well as disciplined and service-oriented in their work with the client posts. Another was to let the REDSO review process be fairly transparent so that they could see that it was a staff process rather than just me substituting my judgment for that of the client principal officer. The payoff was that we had increasingly productive working relations with the client posts. When we occasionally disagreed, the quality of our disagreements was quite high.

*Q: Were there any particular program or development policy directions that you were responsible for or were asked to pursue or promote?*

GILBERT: None, except to make sure that programs were developed and managed along sound lines. All of us in the region received the same guidance about policy and program priorities, including the new initiatives. Democratization and governance was one thrust that was getting great emphasis. Two others were nontraditional export promotion and HIV/AIDS. We added experts to our staff in each of these three areas. But I didn't see myself as some kind of Pope or Moses to serve as (and be seen as posing as) shepherd of the WCA flock. I'm sorry to say that my Deputy used to search through everything that came out of Washington for policy trends or shifts that might provide us an opportunity to "exercise leadership" on some issue or initiative. The ideas he came up with seemed pretty lame to me. I came down on that like a ton of bricks. It raises my hackles just to think about it even now. Without a compelling need, this would have amounted to role seeking or, more bluntly, posturing. It would also have impaired our working relations with our client posts.

My view was that our leadership role was to be "apostles" of USAID professionalism and that our job was to encourage and promote it through helping the client posts in the region realize their programmatic visions. This meant supplying specialized manpower and, for the Schedule B posts, participating in technical and program managerial decision-making. As the quality of our staff increased we would become increasingly involved in strategy development and project selection. But that would not happen if we were perceived as trying to make ourselves look good at our clients' expense – with us as leaders and innovators and them as less enlightened followers. Besides that would have been unfair to the leadership of the client posts. Generally, they were our equals in most ways except that they lacked staff resources and, especially, the specialized or highly experienced and trained staff that REDSO had.

But we did some things that nobody asked of us. We stuck like flypaper to the Liberian humanitarian emergency. We monitored not only the emergency but also the assistance that went to Liberia and to the refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone located in neighboring countries of Guinea and Ivory Coast. And again, even though we were occasionally asked to take certain actions in relation to those situations, we never got any encouragement to monitor that situation or thanks for doing so. But some of our staff and I had been involved in other emergency situations and knew damn well that if the Liberia emergency program and related refugee

programs went south, people would murmur their dismay that REDSO had let that happen.

*Q: What were the major issues that you had to deal with? What did you see as your biggest problems and opportunities? I guess you have touched on them to some extent.*

GILBERT: Well, one special role for REDSO was non-explicit. The concern I felt about keeping in touch with the Liberia and related emergencies was not just based on my experience in past emergencies, but also on my observation that we were just expected to be in touch with what was going on in the region both in the bilateral AID posts and in various regional institutions. So we encouraged staff to pay courtesy calls on the secretariats of these bodies. Keeping in touch with the atmosphere and organizational health of client posts was pretty easy regarding the Schedule B posts, but harder where the Schedule A posts were concerned. Doing so depended in part on my also getting around to client posts from time to time. I didn't need Washington's permission to travel but I did need post clearances. Of course, this was most difficult to get from posts with problems because these would, as often as not, be associated with a touch of paranoia on the part of a principal officer who felt "beleaguered." My approach was consistent with discussions I had with the Africa Bureau leadership that had been in place when I was en route to Abidjan. I made a point of getting around to as many posts as possible on a more or less routine basis.

*Q: Were you supposed to report back to Washington?*

GILBERT: Not formally. I would usually tie visits to something interesting and innovative that was going on at one or more posts. I would sometimes do a little report on the activity or event for Washington and the other WCA posts. I felt that this was useful because it was always nicer for the client posts if someone else tooted their horn, and weak Ambassadors are sometimes disinclined to recognize or even understand really creative contributions by AID staff. Other times I would simply write an informal letter or note either to the principal officer or the DAA giving a perspective on the work a client post was doing. I very seldom "carried tales." When I did it was about situations where a problem could result in serious consequences. At any post there is usually something to gossip about, but I don't recall learning of more than two or three untoward situations that I thought should be communicated to anyone in Washington. Part of my reasoning was that bad news travels fast and there was no particular reason for me to assume any but a very few situations would not get back to the geographic office in rather short order. However, I occasionally got calls from Washington asking me what I knew or thought about a given situation. Hopefully, I was able to offer some insights and give added perspective on those occasions.

*Q: Did you have a problem maintaining morale given that people had to be traveling so much?*

GILBERT: Morale needs attention at any Foreign Service post, but the REDSOs in both Abidjan and Nairobi had a history of problems in that area. REDSO duty is likely to be hard on all the staff involved in servicing client posts. It is particularly hard on mediocre or weak staff. A REDSO assignment requires staff to be "under the gun" much of the time. Some people thrive on deadlines and having to make written and/or verbal recommendations that realistically addressed concrete problems, but others can't do it or can't sustain it. A number of people who couldn't deal with that kind of pressure engaged in evasive behavior. One ploy was to make arrangements

for client posts to request them for well or thinly disguised routine tasks. Another was to find reasons for not traveling. Of course, some of our staff just weren't in much demand. REDSO duty was also difficult on people with fragile family situations or who didn't cope well with travel.

Client posts were asked to report on the contributions made by REDSO staff. For most of our staff, this made up the bulk of the content of their annual PERs. So morale was poor among the 10 or so percent of our staff who couldn't or wouldn't deliver. For the staff who could handle the travel, whose family situations didn't pose a problem, who performed well and who were in high demand, REDSO tours offered professional fulfillment and advanced their careers. But even for this group REDSO duty posed problems arising from scheduling pressures, the challenge of achieving a reasonable balance between their professional and family responsibilities and the need for a modicum of rest and relaxation.

Both Nairobi and Abidjan, being big cosmopolitan cities with all manner of diversions for those who could cope, were in themselves hazards to morale. The reason is that those who were comfortable with the cross-cultural setting would pretty much go their own ways. This meant that the kinds of community activities, including reciprocal home entertaining, that brought people together at more challenging posts were either absent or under-subscribed.

At the beginning, morale in some circles within REDSO was pretty low. And, as I began to clarify roles and responsibilities on one hand and break up various little unbusinesslike arrangements on the other, it got worse for a time. Some people cleared out, which was just fine if they couldn't "get with the program." But, before long, morale began to improve. I encouraged managers to stay in touch with the families of people who were traveling and would try myself to do this where I saw a need. I made a point of entertaining the staff at our house and organizing get-togethers for both employees and family members whenever the least excuse presented itself. This eventually led to more and more community activity that we didn't initiate. Jane and I made a point of never turning down invitations unless we had no choice. That could be pretty taxing sometimes, but we had both learned the art of the power nap.

We were also really fortunate that the Ambassador, Ken Brown, and his DCM, Gerry Hamilton, were determined to do everything they could to promote a sense of community within the larger U.S. Mission. A lot of Embassy staff had regional responsibilities also and faced the same challenges to morale. Apart from being extremely approachable and friendly, Brown and Hamilton communicated by every word, look and gesture that they considered all of us – direct-hires and contractors – to be part of one official family. One very concrete thing they did was insist that USAID and other agencies represented at post be given the same treatment as State Department staff in the assignment of housing and the provision of GSO services.

I mentioned the ten or twelve high-powered regional technical staff who were in such demand by client posts, but in addition to them we had lots regional professionals in the West Africa Accounting Center (WAAC) and some in the Executive Office of REDSO. We made a point of encouraging these people to attend REDSO community social events. Their lives being more complicated, they attended at a much lower rate than the U.S. staff. However, the social barrier decreased markedly through time. One thing that greatly helped was that one of the WAAC staff

ran a small establishment called “Chez Willy’s.” A lot of the singles – both American and regional – would go there for beer and snacks after work. Willy, like many in the WAAC, was a Ghanaian.

I believe that within about six months of my arrival morale was quite good and that it stayed that way throughout the remainder of my time in Abidjan.

*Q: Well, you were Mission Director, so to speak, for the Ivory Coast. What were we trying to do in Ivory Coast?*

GILBERT: The largest item was an ESF cash grant for debt repayment designed to keep them out of Brooke status. They had been on the brink of going into Brooke for some time.

*Q: You mean we were giving them a grant to pay off their debt?*

GILBERT: That's right. Much of the rationalization was based on the steps they were taking toward economic reform.

*Q: This was part of a World Bank reform program?*

GILBERT: Yes. The World Bank was working with them on rehabilitating the coffee and cocoa sectors. The program included opening up agricultural markets, de-confining input markets, etc. We were not involved in that dialogue, nor did we even track it systematically.

*Q: It was just a cash transfer? There was no commodity import or anything?*

GILBERT: No. My understanding was that (except perhaps in the most unusual circumstances, e.g. the Israel cash grant, for instance) it is important to establish for the record that the cash grant was used for something that the U.S. supports. If for no other reason, this has the benefit of dispelling possible claims by critics that the funds supported host government spending of a frivolous or repressive character. Servicing of debts to the U.S. government was what we wanted the Government to use the money for and it served a purpose – albeit a political more than an economic one, but remember these were ESF funds.

*Q: That wasn't illegal?*

GILBERT: Well, I was pretty surprised at the whole idea. I don't think I would have had the nerve to suggest it myself. But this is a reminder that dubious is one thing and illegal is another. I can't remember whether it was authorized in Washington or in Abidjan, but the lawyers were fully involved both in Washington and in Abidjan. It was notified to Congress. Negotiating it with the Government was one of the first things I did.

*Q: Did this generate counterpart?*

GILBERT: No.

*Q: You didn't even ask for counterpart?*

GILBERT: No. That was one of the first things I thought of when I heard of the idea. By then I had acquired a lot of experience in programming counterpart and U.S.-owned local currencies. We were planning to launch one or two technical assistance projects and entré into the Ivorian development budget allocation process would have been helpful. But AID/W had thought that through and was dead set against it. They wanted the cash grant to be quickly disbursed and done with. But it wasn't just a matter of their view of the Ivory Coast cash grant. There had been a rethinking of counterpart funding issues following a finding by some entity – probably GAO – that AID must take more accounting responsibility for counterpart currencies than it wanted. Also, I think AID/Washington had been exasperated to find in several cases that their intent of scaling back field operations and activities by cutting appropriated budgets had been frustrated in cases where posts had substantial U.S.-owned and counterpart currencies.)

Before going on, let me note that we planned to make additional cash grants in FYs 1991 and 1992 in amounts similar to the \$7 to 10 million that we provided in 1990. I think we did so in 1991, but I'm pretty sure we didn't in 1992.

We developed two bilateral projects also. One was a health and family planning program that was pretty ambitious. It was budgeted at something like seven or eight million dollars over a number of years. One component expanded the availability of family planning services in key locations around the country. Though typically located in health facilities, the services provided were mostly straightforward, “bare-naked” contraception. There was tacit support for doing this, but I don't believe there was an explicit family planning or population policy. We implemented this program through a grant to the premier Ivorian private family planning NGO called AIBEF (Ivorian Association for Family Well-Being). From the time we authorized that project until we could get that outfit “certified”, we spent a fair amount of money for, and devoted at least six months to, financial management technical assistance and training provided by a big eight accounting firm before their management systems and professional staffing were judged adequate to manage the funds that they would be receiving from us. Within about 90 days of our providing the certification that enabled us to begin disbursing the grant, two of their accountants ran off with a substantial pile of money (maybe \$40,000). Of course, the certification was technically correct. Adequate financial controls don't prevent embezzlement; they merely discourage it by making it difficult to hide for any length of time. But this was discouraging, and it slowed project implementation considerably. It also illustrates one of the reasons why it is difficult for AID to support local NGOs directly. Most simply can't meet financial certification requirements. That's why AID often makes grants to them through American PVOs.

*Q: Was it an effective program?*

GILBERT: Well, it was on the way to being effective. I don't think there was any question of the demand for the services, and meeting that demand was pretty straightforward business. Given the supplies, there were plenty of Ivorian doctors, nurses and midwives who were capable of delivering the services. I think it would have eventually turned out to be an effective program. But it never got fully up and running before I left at the end of 1993.

There was also an HIV/AIDS control element to this project. It operated through another local NGO called ESPOIR (Hope). It operated an HIV testing and counseling center. There was an Ivorian nurse or doctor who ran its day-to-day operations. There were also some Belgian nuns who contributed. One of the nuns was HIV positive due to a blood transfusion. These were saintly people who did a great deal of good in getting people to guard against HIV or, if they had it, to protect others from catching it from them. Another part of the combined anti-HIV/family planning project was a social marketing of condoms activity run by PSI (Population Services International). They did an excellent job of increasing the availability and use of condoms. One element of their promotion operation was a troupe of actors who put on ribald comedy skits to put their AIDS prevention message across. For this they managed to hire a dwarf who had a national following as a comedian as well as a tallish, rather plump woman who played his wife in domestic skits centering on his puffed up male vanity and his constant philandering. Their skits were side-splittingly funny.

After the comedy part the young American woman who was PSI's publicity manager give a demonstration on the proper application of a condom using a banana – which was a little funny, but definitely got the message across. This was followed by a question and answer session. The time I was there as guest of honor, one fairly wispy little man in the audience said that he agreed on the importance of safe sex, but was worried about the size of the condoms. Weren't there larger ones than the one she used in the demonstration? The reactions among the other men in the audience ranged from eye rolling to expressions of shared concern. This prompted the presenter, maintaining a perfectly straight face, to demonstrate how stretchy condoms are. Afterwards I told the American lady that the ringer in the audience was a nice touch. She said he wasn't a ringer and that they got one such questioner just about every time they put on the show. I should point out that these shows had a broad appeal, but the audiences were usually drawn more from the skilled and semiskilled urban workforce than from the middle class or the elite.

*Q: I see.*

GILBERT: It was my understanding that, following phase out of the Ivory Coast bilateral program, these family planning and the HIV/AIDS activities were to be subsumed under one or more REDSO-managed regional programs. I'm not sure how this worked out.

One of the pleasures of running the health and family planning project was working with the Minister of Health at that time. He was really a super guy. He was, of all things, a cardiologist. And this gives you an idea of how things sometimes work in that part of the world, no less - and maybe even worse - in Ivory Coast than in neighboring countries. Dr. Alain Ekra was the director of the national cardiology institute before he was appointed Minister of Health. He had superb training and was a thoroughgoing gentleman. It was said that he wept when told of his assignment as Minister of Health. He loved his work and his institute, and he had no background in public health. The word was that this seemingly illogical change came about because one of President Houphouet-Boigny's nephews was Ekra's deputy at the institute. The President wanted the nephew to be the man in charge. The President was understood to have a serious heart condition. He apparently must have supposed that it was more important to be in the care of a relative than in the care of the better qualified and more senior man. So if that was his premise, his action was quite logical.

*Q: Yes.*

GILBERT: Anyway Dr. Ekra really was a dream to work with. Early in our working relationship we presented him with a preliminary description of the activities that we thought made sense in the fields of Family Planning and HIV/AIDS control. He said that our thinking was on target, but it would be impossible to accomplish our aims by working within the government health sector. However, he was willing to sign a master project agreement that obligated funds for a broadly described set of purposes to be achieved through grants to the two Ivorian NGOs that both parties agreed were appropriate for the purposes. Based on my previous experience, this pragmatic and courageous act placed him in a class by himself among Ministers of Health. His willingness to do this may have been in large part a function of his not being part of the public health fraternity. To them, he had to be a traitor to his constituency.

We also had a regional secondary city urban development project with an Ivory Coast component. As I recall, bilateral funds were used to buy into the regional project to support the Ivory Coast component. Abidjan had for many years hosted an AID Regional Housing and Urban Development Office (RHUDO). Reduced in size, it was absorbed into REDSO about halfway through my three years in REDSO. There was a lot of bilateral donor coordination in the municipal and decentralized development field in Ivory Coast. The responsible RHUDO/REDSO staff were excellent technicians and played a leading role in developing the ideas that other donors and AID collaborated in supporting.

*Q: Wasn't there a major AID housing project in the Abidjan area?*

GILBERT: Yes. There were several that had been completed by that time. We took people to see them, but they were no longer active as AID projects.

*Q: They had worked out well?*

GILBERT: Yes. But they were big, full-blown sites and services and/or low cost housing guaranty projects.

The efforts during my time were focused on secondary cities or towns. An important contextual factor was the push in Ivory Coast and some other countries in the region to decentralize development responsibility and devolve increased financial authorities on rural districts and incorporated towns. Unfortunately, this was not done for the best of reasons – only the most necessary. The national governments' recognition of the benefits of this approach coincided with their recognition that they could no longer finance the operating costs of these entities from the center. So one of the major thrusts of the project was training municipal staff in the new thinking and the new skills that were required of them. It also provided technical assistance in tax base development. This largely involved cadastral surveys to classify land holdings and determine ownership. Another thrust involved exploring prospects for privatization of municipal services and supporting limited experiments along that line. I don't recall that we had time to proceed very far with that aspect, however. Here again, when phase-out was in clear prospect, we sought to continue the Ivory Coast activity under a continuing regional project that would extend some of its thrusts to the other countries in the region.

*Q: You were doing this throughout the region?*

GILBERT: Well, the Ivory Coast bilateral element of the program had funding for actual implementation. I believe the region-wide element was basically for training and for very little, if any, technical assistance for implementation.

*Q: What about the relations with the African Development Bank? Did you have a project with them?*

GILBERT: Yes, we did.

*Q: What were we supposed to do there?*

GILBERT: It was a very complicated project. But we were mainly providing funds for them to use for technical assistance in the development of sector programs and projects. Wayne King was the project manager until he left to become AID Affairs Officer in Kinshasa. I'm pretty sure that the AFDB did the contracting for most of the technical assistance with our concurrence and was reimbursed afterward with project funds. Decisions about technical services to be provided under the project were governed by rigorous criteria and procedures that the AFDB - or, occasionally, someone on our side - had to observe whenever they proposed to use the project's resources. The idea was to discipline the process and discourage individuals on either side from thinking of the project as a slush fund.

The African Development Bank is a serious institution in the sense that it is full of a lot of capable people, including some who are quite impressive. However, because the people and the units aren't very good at cooperating with one another, it doesn't really perform at anywhere near its potential capacity.

*Q: It is quite thoroughly Africanized, right?*

GILBERT: Yes. There were only a very few non-African (called "non-regional") staff, and they were in highly specialized functions.

Most of the staff are highly qualified and, as far as I was able to observe, quite effective at both the working and policy levels. However, the management culture leaves a good deal to be desired. In general, there is too little horizontal integration or coordination. But the really bad news is that the larger management units are vertically integrated in the extreme. I have heard more than one person associated with the AFDB say that it functions like a big African village wherein there is almost no delegation of authority and the smallest matters are referred to the chief, in council, for a decision. People may come together to discuss common problems and reach a consensus but the chief is involved in surprisingly routine matters that could be safely left to the discretion people well down in the organization.

Another reason for all the "drill" associated with implementation of the AFDB project was to assure that procurement was competitive and transparent. Many of the rules they had to follow

were dictated by U.S. procurement precepts. We regarded this both a safeguard and an element of the technical assistance provided through the project.

*Q: Did this cause much chafing?*

GILBERT: They didn't complain too much. For some, that may have reflected their recognition of its futility. But most seemed to see the value of the procedures. They saw that there was very little arbitrariness in the workings of the project and that all had to follow the same rules of the road. I imagine many kind of liked that. Every once in a while, one of the higher ups in the Bank would seek a commitment from me or my Deputy or Wayne King to move forward with something of "very special" importance, and we simply answered that there was an established process that we weren't free to suspend and that the idea would have to be handled on its merits as judged by the "committee." That did little to enhance my standing or "coziness" with the top management of the AFDB, but I have never set much store on seeking anything more than correct and mutually respectful relations with host government or cooperating institution officials. I've never found that approach to prevent development of genuinely warm friendships with the truly good people on the other side. Most of our AFDB colleagues seemed to appreciate being part of something transparent and structured enough to protect them from questions of impropriety.

However, the complexity of the project became a millstone around our neck when we received the report of a midterm evaluation that had been carried before my arrival by a Robert Nathan Associates team led by Irv Rosenthal. As I recall that report found that many of the technical assistance packages delivered under the project had too little or no connection with the outputs and end-of-project status (EOPS) indicators that had been established in the project agreement. The AFDB's response, after a very long delay, was to send a heated and very lengthy rebuttal in which they took issue with every jot and tittle of the report. Wayne sided with them, so we largely endorsed the Bank response and sent it back to Nathan Associates.

*Q: But we were financing studies?*

GILBERT: Yes, studies, technical assistance and on-site training – all carried out by consultants.

*Q: Not long-term technical assistance.*

GILBERT: There were a few American staff, and we didn't finance them. As I recall our financing was limited to technical assistance of no more than six months' duration.

The Nathan people replied in the spirit of the AFDB rejoinder. I can't remember how we settled the matter. It was a mess because Nathan Associates couldn't get their final payment until their report was accepted. Recriminations went back and forth for at least 18 months after the first draft of the AFDB's first rejoinder was received. I'm surely confessing to a failure but no one but Wayne King could get their mind around the complexities of the interchanges between the Bank and Nathan Associates. I think it was only after Wayne left Abidjan that we were able to settle the matter by paying Nathan Associates but not distributing the finalized report. When we designed a follow-on project we made sure that it focused on only two sectors: private enterprise

development and environmental management.

*Q: Well, any other dimensions? What was your sense of the region?*

GILBERT: Let me just speak about two other things that I did. One involved Nigeria and the other Mauritania. I was placed in charge of the AID programs in both countries for quite long periods because of vacancies in the top jobs. I was formally named Acting AID Representative in Mauritania for probably a year or so. For Nigeria I was only an Acting AID Affairs Officer. There is an instructive story behind the difference in the two titles. Let me say something about the Nigeria case first. It was a vivid experience. I had to go there twice.

**CHARLES O. CECIL**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Abidjan (1992-1995)**

*Ambassador Cecil was born in Kentucky into a US military family and was raised at several military bases in the US and abroad. He was educated at the University of California, Berkeley and the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS). He entered the Foreign Service in 1966. A trained Arabic Language speaker, the Ambassador served abroad in Kuwait, Dar es Salaam, Beirut, Jeddah, Bamako, Muscat, Tunis and Abidjan. He was US Ambassador to Niger from 1996 to 1999. He also had several assignments at the State Department in Washington, DC. Ambassador Cecil was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006*

*Note: Subsequently, Ambassador Cecil served as Chargé d'affaires of the US Interest Section of the Belgian Embassy in Tripoli, Libya from 2006 to 2009.*

CECIL: What did happen is that sometime in early '92 I got a call one day from Ambassador Hume Horan who asked me if I would like to be his DCM in Abidjan, Ivory Coast or Cote d'Ivoire. Since I had worked for Ambassador Horan in Jeddah in the early '70s, I knew him well. I greatly respected him as probably the best Arabist in our service. The opportunity to work for him was certainly not one I would have wanted to pass up. I quickly—immediately—just about... I probably asked my wife that night, but I'm sure the next day I told him of course.

Starting in early '92 we began to focus on going to West Africa in the summer of '92.

*Q: You were in Abidjan from when to when?*

CECIL: That was '92 to '95. That's a subject for another session. If we could wrap up the OES years, I would say from a career point of view it was a wonderful experience. It did everything really that I had hoped it would do. It gave me exposure to new subject matter. It gave me exposure to a new part of the world. It was a wonderful introduction to the world of multilateral diplomacy and gave me a lot of experience here in Washington in interagency relationships. It really helped fill out my career background.

I think the most satisfying part of the whole thing was working on the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative. The opportunity to take a new law just passed by the Congress authorizing a presidential initiative—an initiative linking debt with environmental preservation and protection. To take that Congressional initiative and actually turn it into three bilateral agreements and see something come to the point of being ready implement was very satisfying. I didn't stay around long enough to see the action, and I didn't stay long enough for the other negotiations that followed. I know there were other bilateral agreements concluded after I left OES using the same model that we developed. I don't know how many. Anyway, that was a great experience.

*Q: At the time, do you know who came up with the idea? It's a great idea.*

CECIL: Again, dept for nature swaps were as far as I know a creation of the NGO community. There were a lot of creative thinkers in the NGO community. If I had my old calling cards here, I could probably name one or two people that I know were really actively engaged in promoting it.

*Q: I would think that you would find a very mixed bag of the NGO community. There were ones who I called "realists" who understood the political world and all, and then ones that were idealists who would be very difficult for somebody in a bureaucracy to deal with. Did you find it fell out that way or not?*

CECIL: When you talk like that, what you bring to mind are organizations like Greenpeace that have the reputation for really being on the fringe out there. They'll endanger themselves to get press attention or to stop things from happening. I'll just have to say those were not the kind of people we had to deal with. How many can I remember today? Of course we dealt with the Nature Conservancy. We dealt with the World Wildlife Fund. The spin off from the Nature Conservancy... What were they called? Mittermeyer was his name. It slips my mind now. National Audubon Society, Natural Resources Defense Council. Really wonderful mainline, important NGOs. I suppose they had idealists inside, and I'm sure that the administration regarded them as a kind of nuisance from time to time because of the prodding that they did to move things forward. But all of my experiences were that these were very serious people committed to doing positive things.

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*Q: Today is the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2008. This is in 1992 when you're off to Abidjan, Ivory Coast as the deputy to Hume Horan. Is that right?*

CECIL: Right. My wife and I arrived in Abidjan about four weeks ahead of Ambassador and Mrs. Horan. I would like to put the situation in context. There are a couple of points that maybe are worth commenting on. First, as far as the country was concerned, of course it was still under the presidency of Felix Houphouet-Boigny. He was about 90 years old at that point, one of the fathers of African independence.

Hume Horan, in fact, was the last ambassador from any country to present credentials to Houphouet-Boigny. When Ambassador Horan did present his credentials, there were seven

ambassadors that day. They had I think delayed the ceremony a little bit for the arrival of the American ambassador because there were six others already waiting. Hume Horan being the newest arrival was the last to present. There was never another credentials ceremony with Houphouet-Boigny. Houphouet died in the following year, but there was a period of many months when he was ill and some of that time in Paris, so he never did receive credentials again.

Ivory Coast, or as the Ivoirians insisted on calling it, Cote d'Ivoire, had officially changed the name with United Nations to Cote d'Ivoire, so there was not supposed to be any Ivory Coast anymore although, of course, in the English speaking world it is still common to call it that. Houphouet had believed that it was foolish to try to emulate the Western developed countries by trying to build an industrial base in the country, a manufacturing base. He felt that the nation's comparative advantage, if you will (I don't know if he thought in terms of that economic concept), was in agriculture. He believed that the prosperity of the country should be built on agri-business and that's what they did focus their efforts on.

It was a country of vast agricultural exports. Coffee and cacao were the number one and two exports, but there were large plantations of bananas, and of pineapples. There were rubber plantations. In the north they grew cotton. It was a drier climate there, not so tropical, more a Sahelian climate. There was limited mineral wealth, but there was some gold in the east over near the border with Ghana, and they did allow some Western companies to come in and mine the gold. There were modest diamond deposits in the north-central part of the country around a place called Tortilla which I was told actually took its name from Steinbeck's novel Tortilla Flats. But the mineral wealth of the country was not the focus of the government's attention. It was the agricultural potential that the prosperity was based on.

Houphouet believed that Cote d'Ivoire should be what he called "un pays d'accueil", a country of welcome, using the French term. By that he meant it was open to migrant labor from all West African neighboring countries who wanted to come. In fact, it was many of the most difficult back-breaking manual labor jobs that were performed by Burkinabe from Burkina Faso, by Malians or by Nigeriens who came seeking work in Cote d'Ivoire. Houphouet even allowed them to vote in Ivorian elections. They didn't even have to be citizens to vote in Ivorian elections. One just had to establish residency.

There was a kind of second-class status or attitude toward these foreigners who came. Houphouet of course was Roman Catholic, and many of his ministers were Catholic or at least Christian. I would say that the southern Christians controlled the majority of the government and the economic influence in the country. The northerners who tended to be Muslim were less favored and in later years after Houphouet's death, of course, this did eventually result in a rebellion, a civil war, which lasted quite a few years before, maybe... Hopefully it's over now.

The country's been calm I think the last couple of years. This reflected part of that great fissure that we see across Africa from Sudan starting maybe in Darfur all the way over to Senegal where Islam coming down from the north and westward from the Arabian peninsula spreads across that area of the Sahel, and the southernmost areas tend to be Christian. The northern areas tend to be Muslim.

I've always felt that Sudan, for instance, would inevitably separate into two countries because of the great religious and cultural differences between the north and the south. There was nothing that stark in Cote d'Ivoire, but nevertheless there were the seeds of strife and civil unrest there. After Houphouet died in December of 1993 I think that was, the government under his successor Henri Konan-Bedie began to roll back the policies that welcomed the immigrants. Then when the civil war eventually broke out and the economy deteriorated, the jobs disappeared, and the foreigners were encouraged or pushed to go back to their home countries.

*Q: You were saying that Houphouet-Boigny had opted for agro-business. Who was running these plantations? These things need quite a bit of management and infrastructure to produce commodities that are acceptable externally.*

CECIL: In most cases that I know of the organizations were under French management. I failed to mention tropical timber, another very important export for Cote d'Ivoire. I visited a saw mill once. It was very much under French management, with African labor. I visited a banana plantation where it was very much the same situation: French management and African labor.

*Q: Was there any effort to... I'm familiar with Saudi Arabia where the gradual Saudi-ization of the oil business occurred. Was there an effort on the part of the government when you were there to bring Cote d'Ivorians into management?*

CECIL: You would think that there would have to be some kind of a program or an effort, but I have to say that I don't recall it being an issue. I don't recall pressure on these expatriate companies to Ivorianize their management. Perhaps there was some, but it certainly wasn't a major issue like several other countries I've been in.

The French community in Cote d'Ivoire was very large. I hesitate to say a number now for fear that my memory will lead me astray, but let's say either 25,000 or 50,000, I can't remember which, but it was quite sizeable. There was of course a French military base in Abidjan with a small French force whose real purpose was to protect the regime in power.

*Q: How would you characterize the Ivoirians because some of the countries in that area, their people are renowned as good bureaucrats or good workers of one sort, or not so good or something like that? What was the impression from our embassy at the time?*

CECIL: The opinion leaders and the government officials and the business leaders, were mostly French-educated. We often talked of them and others talked of them as being more French than the French. They loved French culture; they loved all the comforts of the good life. It was common to go to an Ivorian home for a diplomatic function and champagne would be the first thing served. As you walk in the door you're offered a glass of champagne. It was a very high standard of living that the wealthy Ivoirians enjoyed. They prided themselves on their French educations. In many ways you might say it was a caricature of French culture.

*Q: Where was the money coming from to make this group, the wealthy Ivoirians wealthy?*

CECIL: That's a good question. I'm not sure I have a good answer for you. There certainly were

many business arrangements between expatriate investors and Ivoirians. The government and the society was basically a patronage society so that people used their position for their own benefit and to benefit their families and their friends. There were contracts signed, and I think the government was probably as guilty of corruption as any other government in that part of the world might be expected to be.

Abidjan in those days, we're talking early '90s now, '92 to '95 was my period, was very much a center for business operations throughout West Africa. Lots of expatriate companies, European and some American, would make their regional headquarters in Abidjan. Also the West African Development Bank had their headquarters there. There were lots of regional offices in Abidjan, so the economy was benefiting from all of this expatriate money. Lots of houses rented. Real estate was a very profitable undertaking for Ivoirians. They would build houses and rent them to expatriates.

*Q: I take it in a way Abidjan had to a certain extent replaced Dakar as the center of the Francophone Africa.*

CECIL: Maybe. I don't know Dakar, so I can't compare, but I don't know whether Dakar suffered. Maybe it wasn't a zero sum game, but certainly Abidjan prospered from all of this foreign money. The Peace Corps volunteers in Cote d'Ivoire had a wonderful saying about Abidjan. There were only a handful of volunteers assigned to Abidjan in teaching positions, and by handful I'm guessing three or four or five at most. All the rest, another hundred or so, were in villages up-country doing various things. The volunteers had this little saying. "The nicest thing about Abidjan is it's so close to Africa." They meant by that, of course, that when they came to Abidjan it was really like going to Europe. It was a totally different standard and style of living than the rest of the country enjoyed.

*Q: What was the world of the Peace Corps like, not just necessarily the Peace Corps, but the village world? How was all this translated out of the villages?*

CECIL: It was probably as you would expect to find it. The villages were African villages that usually did not have electricity. If they were close to a main paved highway, they might have electricity, but that's only a small part of the country. Once you get very far from those paved highways where the electric lines would run, then you're really into a more, I have to say, almost primitive standard of living. Probably not as low a standard of living as one would find in Niger where, of course, I spent three years later in the '90s and in Niger as ambassador I had many opportunities to travel around Niger and visit many, many Peace Corps volunteers which was a major focus of my interest and my activity. In Cote d'Ivoire I didn't have quite as much opportunity to travel although I did travel as much as I could. I did go to a number of volunteers living in villages. Their life was very basic. Their water would come from wells, and their diet was a certainly better diet in Cote d'Ivoire than in Niger because of the ready availability of tropical fruits and a fair supply of vegetables, but nevertheless a pretty basic standard of living in those villages.

There's another point to make under the heading of putting things in context. I would like to say something about the importance of Abidjan to the U.S. government and the embassy. We were

what I would call a medium-sized embassy because of the regional nature of Abidjan. We had many U.S. government agencies with offices and representatives in Abidjan whose jobs carried them throughout West Africa. We had 11 U.S. government agencies in Abidjan. In fact, we often said there were 13 because there were three totally different and separate Defense Department offices in Abidjan.

Of course we had the defense attaché in the embassy. That was a three-officer office. We had all three services represented: air, naval, and army. They were accredited to a few of the other countries in the area. They had a small airplane, a C-12 I think it was, that allowed them to fly around the area. Then of course we had our Marine security guard detachment whose job was just to protect the embassy under the command of a gunnery sergeant.

Then there was another Marine office which really was separate from the Marine security guard detachment and tried not to interfere in the gunnery sergeant's work. That was what we called Company G, and they were a regional Marine office whose job was to travel throughout West Africa and inspect the Marine security guard detachments at all of our embassies and to make sure that they were being properly run and that there were no problems requiring their attention.

*Q: Let's put it in perspective. During this period and other periods there had been calls for Marines to come in with some forces.... I'm thinking Liberia, Sierra Leone, and maybe somewhere else. I'm sure the Marines were always looking for a real problem.*

CECIL: Yes, but that would not have been the job of Company G. Their job was just to focus on the management of the embassy Marine security guard detachments. Evacuations would have been the concern of EUCOM in Stuttgart in Europe if that was necessary, and I guess it was a couple of times, but that's where that would have been handled, really from out of Europe.

We did have an evacuation of American citizens from Liberia shortly after I arrived in Abidjan sometime in the fall of '92. I'd say September or October. There was a large evacuation of Americans through Abidjan. They flew from Monrovia to Abidjan, and then we helped them move onward from there.

To go back to the importance of Abidjan to us, I said we had 11, or if you count three DOD components separately, we had 13 U.S. government agencies. That resulted in 195 direct-hire American employees. Direct hire or contract. There were some AID contract employees in that number, so 195 Americans. That's a medium-size embassy, I guess, at least in those times.

Just to be specific, let me tell you the agencies were the State Department. AID had a large regional office called the REDSO which I think stood for Regional Economic Development Support Office. There was no bilateral AID program with Cote d'Ivoire. They were too prosperous to qualify, but there were programs in most of the other West African countries, and they were supported out of Abidjan with specialists since not every mission would need, let's say, a hydrologist or an agricultural economist, so there would be such people in Abidjan, and they would then travel to the other AID missions when needed.

Then we had USIS. We had FBIS, the Foreign Broadcast Information Service. They had a

facility there to listen to radio broadcasts from all the neighboring countries and transcribe them and get them out to government officials and the interested public and the academic communities.

*Q: This was not...*

CECIL: Clandestine. No.

*Q: This was completely open which had been going for years. A very important element of American press \_\_\_\_.*

CECIL: One of their facilities was there in Abidjan to cover West Africa. Foreign Commercial Service had an office there with two foreign commercial service officers. Peace Corps, of course, as I mentioned earlier. Treasury Department had a representative not actually in the embassy but assigned to the West African Development Bank.

*Q: West African Development Bank.*

CECIL: There were actually two Americans in the bank. One was the U.S. representative to the bank, a person who did not report through the U.S. ambassador or through the U.S. embassy; rather if she reported to anyone it would have been to the Treasury department. I don't recall at this time what her formal reporting responsibility was, but she was the U.S. representative on the bank. That was a lady named Alice Dear during my time. She had an assistant, a deputy, from the Treasury department who worked for her and with her. Their offices were in the bank. They did not have offices in the embassy, and they did not participate in country team meetings but nevertheless there was a tenuous relationship there. They had certain access to embassy support, the health unit, for instance. I suppose they had access to the commissary, that sort of thing. So anyway, Treasury.

Foreign Agricultural Service had an attaché there for West Africa. The Voice of America had a correspondent based in Abidjan who traveled a lot, and then the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta had a large program in Abidjan for conducting research on AIDS and HIV. In those days they were gathering data. They were studying the prevalence of HIV and AIDS in Cote d'Ivoire, and they did conduct some trials of treatment regimes. I don't know really anything about the medical side of that, but it was all done in cooperation with Ivorian doctors and with the Ivorian ministry of health. There was nothing secret or that we didn't share with Ivoirians on that. It was quite a mixture of U.S. government agencies. It made country team an interesting place and lots of good discussions. A good management job for a DCM, I would say.

*Q: Did you have any particular problems with any of the outfits getting off the range?*

CECIL: I don't think so. No, I don't think of anything that comes to mind. We had one basic and very important rule that Ambassador Horan laid down early on in his time, and it was never a problem as far as I could recall. Ambassador Horan was not one to insist that he was the only spokesperson for the U.S. government in Abidjan. He knew that some of these other agencies had legitimate reasons to have meetings with Ivorian officials, including ministers.

It was not unusual if the foreign agricultural attaché, for instance, would meet with the Ivorian minister of agriculture or maybe even the minister of commerce because of course we're trying to promote sales of American products. It was quite possible that the head of the Center for Disease Control would meet with the minister of health, so Ambassador Horan didn't try to say, "I want to be the spokesperson on those meetings." His rule was "if you are planning a meeting with a minister, we want to know in advance. (We the front office.) In fact, we hope there will always be time for it to be mentioned at country team so that every member of the country team knows what's coming, and if there is some other relationship with that ministry or that minister that you need to know about—either pitfalls to avoid or favors you can do for us by even such a simple thing as delivering something to the minister's office, or just adding to your talking points something else that another component of the embassy is interested in. We want to know about that meeting in advance."

I think people honored that. I wouldn't say that it was common that other members of the country team met with ministers, but it was certainly not an unusual occurrence, and we didn't worry about it. We had full confidence in the directors of the various agencies. There was just no problem that I can recall of their failing to share information with us.

That brings to mind an interesting little anecdote. We had a two-person economic section. The more senior person I can't remember if he had the rank of counselor or not, but he was probably an O1, I guess. Then we had during my time a first-tour officer, but she was a mid-level entry. We had the mid-level entry program back then, so this was a lady probably in her mid-30s, I guess, who had considerable experience in the private sector before joining the Foreign Service, also a black American and very, very competent, and also extremely good in her relationships with Ivorian counterparts.

She was there before the arrival of the econ counselor. I'll call him the counselor although I'm a little unsure if he had the title. One day after he had been there three or four weeks, the counselor came into my office. I won't use any names, but let's just call the younger officer Mary. The older officer came in and said, "Chuck, Mary's off the reservation. We've got to reel her back in." I said, "What's the matter?" He said, "She just received a call from a minister." I forget which minister it was, but probably either commerce or one of the economically-oriented ministries. "She just received a call from a minister!" I said, "Oh, okay. What's the problem there? Tell me about that." "Well, she's on her first tour. She might say something that's not policy. She might cause a misunderstanding between our governments. She just doesn't have the experience to speak for the embassy or for the government."

I said, "Well, I have a different vantage point maybe on that. I think it's absolutely fantastic if the minister picked up his phone and called the U.S. embassy to ask for something. I presume it's not a visa!" (We had ways to handle that, too.) I said, "I think that's very good that she has that kind of access and that the minister has that apparent confidence in her knowledge and her ability to answer his questions. As for whether she might misspeak, I wouldn't worry about that. I don't think anyone is going to mistake Mary for the ambassador, so if she should perhaps stray or say something that's not 100% U.S. policy, I think it'll be taken at the level it comes from. If the minister really wants an official statement of U.S. policy on something, I think he'll call the

ambassador. That doesn't worry me, and I think that's a real asset. We want to encourage that kind of access and contact."

The Econ Officer was not too happy with my opinion and as it turned out in later discussions I think maybe he thought that his job was going to be more of a managerial job that he was coming to rather than a reporting job because on another occasion I remember he said he really wanted to *manage* the economic function of the economic office. I said, "There's only two of you. You may have to do a little reporting."

I'm trying to represent a managerial attitude that we had in the front office, Hume and myself.

There are a couple of other things I could say about the ambassador and the role of the DCM. I've always thought that there were two theories of DCM selection. I called them in my own mind the "alter ego theory", and the "complementarity theory," for lack of a better word for it. Under the alter ego theory the ambassador tries to find somebody who's as close to being like him as he can be. The advantage of that is that when the ambassador is away, the DCM acting as *chargé* is not likely to create any surprises by making decisions that the ambassador might not agree with. In other words, under the alter ego theory the two people think pretty much alike and probably have more or less similar experiences. That was certainly the theory that Hume Horan followed in asking me to be his DCM. We were both Arabists. Why there should be two Arabists in West Africa at the same time I'm not sure, but I think we did develop a new dimension to embassy reporting there. We can talk about that again in a minute. To stick to my point, we were both political officers. We had served together in Saudi Arabia in the '70s, and I guess that's why he asked me to come to Cote d'Ivoire. He knew me, knew my work.

The other theory of DCM selection is what I called the "complementarity theory" where the ambassador looks for somebody who has experience and knowledge that's quite different from his own. I certainly followed that theory when I was looking for a DCM for Niger a few years later. Since I was a political officer I wanted an economic officer to be my DCM because I knew that development issues were important in Niger, economic issues extremely important, and I was not as strong in that area. I know among the list of candidates I was given by the Director General, there was at least one consular officer. In making my selection I had to give a reason for my preference, and explain why others were not acceptable. My response to that was that consular issues are not a major element in our relationship with Niger. Economic issues are. But I'm getting ahead of my assignment history here.

Hume followed the alter ego theory. I'm very glad that he did because working for Hume Horan was its own reward just like virtue is its own reward, I guess. Hume was a fantastic example of an incredible mind somewhat like Tom Pickering's but maybe even more creative and inventive. Life was a constant graduate seminar working for Hume Horan.

He was as it turned out away from the post quite a bit. For one period of five months I was *chargé*. He was called back to Washington to participate on promotion panels, another time to serve on the Bremer committee studying Department management issues, and he also had a serious illness. There were several lengthy absences. I'm glad to say Washington had enough confidence to let me be the *chargé*, and I think things pretty much went along as they had been

because he and I did tend to think alike. There were no surprises waiting for him when he got back to post.

*Q: What about our embassy relationship with the French?*

CECIL: What to say about that? Hume did meet with the French ambassador periodically. Not frequently but from time to time. That was one case where I rarely accompanied him. Hume was a great believer that the DCM should know everything that the ambassador knew so that the DCM could instantly pick up the reins and carry on in the face of any unexpected event.

When Hume would call on an Ivorian minister I was almost always with him, but in the case of the French ambassador I probably only went once in three years. I guess that's a case where Hume thought, and perhaps it was some signal that the French ambassador conveyed, I don't know, but I guess he really wanted to focus on building a close personal relationship more than an institutional one.

Our relationship was not one where we shared information and cooperated to achieve mutual objectives. I think the French saw us very much as their competitor there. If American companies made inroads into Cote d'Ivoire it was at the expense of the French. I think that was their attitude. If our political influence in the area grew that was at the expense of the French. France of course always saw itself as the spokesperson, in some ways the patron, of the former French colonies in the UN and sometimes in other international organizations, and they didn't want us getting any credit for supporting, defending, Francophone African interests. The French attitude toward us was rather similar to the British attitude toward us in Oman, except that we shared more with the Brits in Oman.

*Q: Did we ever find ourselves while you were there at cross purposes with the French?*

CECIL: I don't have an example to cite. I don't know that we did other than the general competition for economic access. We were trying to promote American business growth and access and investment, but I'm not aware that we ever really came to blows over anything.

*Q: The French are renowned for giving governmental support of one kind or another in promoting industry, French commerce and such. Did you find yourself running up against that?*

CECIL: You know, I'll bet if you had our foreign commercial officer here, she'd be able to give you a lot examples. I think I have to just say they didn't rise to our level, not that I'm aware of. I don't recall myself being involved in any strong representations to the Ivorian government. Perhaps Hume did some that have slipped my mind now, but I'm thinking one of the common areas where we sometimes run up against each other is in aircraft sales. I have to say I don't recall any efforts to sell American aircraft to the Ivorian national airline. If there were that would be a case where French influence would take the upper hand.

*Q: Oh, yes! Did you feel at all the influence of the French government in Paris and maybe even the Mitterrand son who had this French policy at the time. Was this an element that we have served or getting reports from Paris?*

CECIL: Now that you mention it, it rings a bell that Mitterrand's son was perhaps involved in business deals, but I'm afraid I can't really provide anything for the record. I don't have any memory of good examples that I'd want to cite.

I could say one or two other things about my job as DCM during that time. I was surprised that I spent so much time on personnel issues. I guess it's expected that the DCM's job is to manage the mission so the ambassador doesn't have to worry about it, but it certainly was a major component of my work. On one occasion I was placed almost in the role of a marriage counselor, I remember. Both members of a troubled couple came to me separately, neither knowing that the other had come, wanting to share their problems with me and looking for advice. It was not a role I had thought I would ever see myself in. They didn't cover that in the DCM's course.

There were other internal problems in the mission mostly of a supervisor/subordinate type of relationship. I mentioned earlier the Foreign Commercial Service office. We had an extremely capable, energetic, and talented first-tour officer working for an older, more experienced Foreign Commercial Service officer. In fact, we had two who would fit that category, two older, more experienced supervisors neither of whom were as energetic or capable as the young officer. That created some significant difficulties that I had to get into in both cases. Both of the older officers were not doing a good job of supervising the younger, and I didn't relish getting into that. In fact, in the first case I had to because the older officer left at the end of her assignment placing the performance report of the younger officer on her desk the day the older officer went to the airport with no counseling, no opportunity to discuss. It was an example of the kind of a personnel issue that sometimes DCMs have to \_\_\_\_.

*Q: How would you deal with something like that?*

CECIL: Every case, I guess, has its own traits. As Tolstoy said, "Every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." In the specific case I mentioned I wound up writing a reviewing statement for the performance report, a very long one for the Foreign Commercial Service promotion panels explaining that it had never been foreseen that I would be writing such a statement but under the circumstances there didn't seem to be any choice. In fact, I got a letter back from the Director General, I guess she was called, of the Foreign Commercial Service thanking me for the statement that I wrote which helped their panels put the issue into perspective. It may very well have, I don't know if "saved the career" of the younger officer is an overstatement, but the younger officer would certainly have suffered and not have gone on to other good jobs, and she's had a very, very fine and distinguished career in the Foreign Commercial Service in the many years after. You just have to take each one carefully and ask questions and listen. I think that's the important thing. Be a good listener and try not to rush to judgment in any case.

In another case I recall being an advocate for the officer with the Department, which was an example of short-sightedness on the part of the Department. We had a refugee affairs officer on our staff. She was part of the political section. She traveled a lot throughout West Africa dealing with refugee issues. A Foreign Service Officer, she wanted to go back to school to get her PhD. She had done lots of coursework, but she needed to do some final year of coursework, and she

needed to do her dissertation. She asked the department for two years of leave without pay. The department denied it to her. They said, “Nope. Give you a year.” No promises on anything beyond that. It’s very unlikely that we could approve a second year.

They forced the officer basically to choose between her Foreign Service career and her desire for a PhD in her field, so she left the Service. That was such a short-sighted decision, and even though I, and I’m not sure now whether I wrote this myself and signed it or whether it was something I wrote for the ambassador, but we tried to make the Director General see the short-sighted nature of this position, yet we failed, so the officer left the service, and we lost the services of a good reporting officer.

I spent a lot of time on personnel issues. I did travel around Cote d’Ivoire as I said earlier, as much as I could. I always have believed that you need not only to get out of the office but out of the capital as well. You have to get out into the countryside. I went to places like the Tai National Forest which is a biodiversity center of concern to the environmental community. That was an interesting site to visit. There’s a small research station there staffed, I believe at the time, by Swiss researchers.

I went to places like San Pedro in the west near the Liberian border. It’s Cote d’Ivoire’s second port, and I wanted to have a look. I went to the northwest up along the western side of the country up to Odienné in the far northwest. There was a program there to eradicate river blindness in West Africa. That was one of their two centers. They had helicopters that would fly along little streams and small rivers where the fly lives that carries the river blindness parasite, and they spray to eliminate that.

I went to those diamond mines in the center, in Tortilla, that I mentioned earlier. I went there twice actually to try to learn about how the diamond extraction process went and who were the buyers. I found an Israeli living in Tortilla buying the diamonds that the workers would find as they... Basically it’s like panning for gold. They go down into the ground in these deep shafts that they dig with virtually no protection, and they send buckets of earth up to the top which are then carried to small streams and sifted by literally hundreds of laborers sifting in the water and hope to find a few little diamonds. And they do find them.

I visited the gold mines over near the Ghanaian border. I visited banana plantations. I went to all the agricultural operations that I could visit. If there were Peace Corps volunteers in the area, I would try to include them in my visits. Peace Corps management in Cote d’Ivoire did not share the stand-offish attitudes of the PC Director in Mali, but it was a dozen years later. I encouraged everyone else in the embassy to get out and do the same. We had a pretty good travel program. Cote d’Ivoire had a good road system. The basic elements were there. It wasn’t too difficult to travel.

*Q: What was your impression of the government, of various personnel...?*

CECIL: Lots of petty corruption and maybe even larger corruption in cases where opportunities were there. The ministers and others probably took advantage of their situation. Compared to other West African countries, Cote d’Ivoire was rather prosperous. One would have to say so, so

there was a lot of money to be passed around. I knew an Ivorian active in the only Ivorian environmental organization. He was quite frustrated at the difficulty of protecting things like the tropical forest resources. He said, "It's cronyism. Important ministers and important businessmen are getting contracts to chop down the timber and export it, and nobody's thinking about the future timber, and nobody's planting." There was that. The police were constantly shaking down Ivorian motorists for petty or fabricated violations. You have a tail light out or your paperwork isn't quite in order. The police were notorious for trying to get money from motorists. We were pretty much immune because of our diplomatic license plates, but our FSNs in the embassy were not, and the average Ivorian citizen was victimized, so the police were not looked upon very favorably.

There were certainly problems in customs organization and in the port. Lots of private sector people had to pay bribes or they had to have arrangements. They had to have customs clearers who would get their stuff through the ports,. And that was just a very thin veil over the payment of bribes to get services that you would expect that the government is supposed to perform without having to pay them.

The country was in an early stage of political development. There was only one political party allowed until 1990 and that was Houphouet's party, RDCI it was called. The Rassemblement Democratique de la Cote d'Ivoire. That would be what, Democratic Assembly (or Rally) of Cote d'Ivoire, I guess we would translate it.

In 1990 Houphouet allowed the creation of other political parties. There was to be a parliamentary election in 1995. There were maybe as many as 40 parties that sprang up to try to participate in those 1995 elections. There was what you could call signs of incipient unrest.

In March of 1993 there was a small mutiny by what we called the republican guard. That was the small military force whose job was to protect the president. They mutinied and took over the presidential palace for a couple of days wanting either higher pay or back pay, I can't remember now. I think they were usually paid on time. That was crucial. If you want to protect the presidency, you pay them on time. Not everybody else was paid on time, but I think they were, so they wanted higher salaries. That was dealt with, but that was a sign of future problems.

When Houphouet died in December of 1993 he was in Paris. He had prostate cancer and I guess died from the effects of that or maybe complications from that. Prime Minister Alassane Ouattara had filled the role actually of acting president for several months while Houphouet was in Paris getting treatment. When Houphouet-Boigny died, Ouattara seemed to entertain the thought that he could become the president, and yet under the constitution, and if I can recall it correctly, the national assembly was supposed to choose the next president.

Henri Konan-Bedie was president of the national assembly and was considered to be the likely successor of Houphouet, the favored successor, in fact. Bedie had a reputation for being corrupt. You hear this term in many countries, "Mister 10 percent." It was certainly used in regard to Bedie. I don't know the truth of it, but certainly he was well off and probably did. I think he had been minister of the treasury or economy or something earlier in his time. Anyway, he was the legitimate successor.

There was a standoff of a few days in which Ouattara seemed to be making a play for power. In fact Ambassador Horan sent me to see Bedie with a private message from us. Bedie was in Yamoussoukro where... That was Houphouet -Boigny's hometown, and he had a kind of presidential palace compound there. Bedie was there. Hume Horan sent me to take a short message to Bedie, and the defense attaché's aircraft was used for that and flew me up to Yamoussoukro which was maybe an hour or hour and a half north of Abidjan. Our message was basically, "The U.S. government recognizes the legitimacy of your claim to the presidency, and we will not be supporting Alassane Ouattara in his effort to claim the post."

*Q: Do you have any idea whether there was any cooperation with the French on something like this?*

CECIL: It's certainly a good question.. I don't recall any consultations with the French on that. I think the consultations were with Washington, and I think Washington said we should be clear that... You see, there was some concern that we might have favored Ouattara because he was well known to us, we worked well with him, he had been many years in Washington working at the IMF. He was an economist of course. He had been the head of the Africa division of the IMF in the '80s. Houphouet made him his prime minister round about 1990 or so. As I say, all those months when Houphouet was in Paris we dealt with Ouattara basically as a kind of acting head of state. We certainly had a good working relationship with Ouattara, and we had much more contact with Ouattara than we did with Bedie.

We didn't have much business with Bedie as head of the national assembly. But when it came down to questions of stability and legitimacy and the constitution we did side with the constitution on that issue. After a few days I think Ouattara got the message, saw the handwriting on the wall. I don't know if he resigned the prime ministership or if Bedie relieved him of it, in any case that challenge was passed and Ouattara as I recall left the country for Paris. He's remained active in Ivorian politics.

He challenged Bedie in, I guess it was the '95 election, but Bedie got the national assembly to change the electoral code to require that any candidate for the presidency be born of two Ivorian parents and to be born in Cote d'Ivoire. The Bedie's people raised questions about whether Ouattara could meet those criteria. There was a dispute over where Ouattara had been born. His opponents claimed he had been born in Burkina Faso, and they claimed that one of his parents, I forget which one, was Burkinabe, but Ouattara claimed that no, indeed he had been born in Cote d'Ivoire and that both of his parents were Ivorian.

When Ouattara had been working at IMF, I think it was, he had had a Burkinabe passport, we were told. At some time in his earlier life he had had a Burkinabe passport. I may be wrong on the exact timing of that. It could have been that when he went to university he was on a Burkinabe passport. The point was that at some point in his past he had had a Burkinabe passport and his opponents in Cote d'Ivoire seized on that to cast doubt on his Ivorian citizenship, so he was basically disqualified from running in '95. I think much the same thing happened later in 2000, but I wasn't following Ivorian politics so closely then. I do know now though that they're going to have an election. I think it's scheduled for November of this year, and my understanding

is that Ouattara will be a candidate as will Bedie against Laurent Gbagbo who became president after Bedie was ousted in a coup.

That's a long history and outside of my three years. I will say that that was one of the divisions of labor during our time there. Laurent Gbagbo was the leader of the opposition once Houphouet allowed parties to form. Hume Horan's division of labor there was that Hume would deal with the president and the prime minister in most cases but not with the opposition, and I would deal with the opposition as DCM. I and our political officer would keep contact with Gbagbo from time to time. I guess there's nothing special to be said there. That's just how we divided up the work.

When Houphouet died there was of course a massive funeral in Yamoussoukro at the basilica that he had had built during his time.

*Q: How did we feel about that basilica? From what I understand it's St. Peter's a little bit bigger or something.*

CECIL: The dome I think is taller than St. Peter's. I think that's it. It's an incredible facility to find there in this small African town. There's a story. Pope John Paul came for the, I guess it was probably the consecration of the basilica. He made two visits to Cote d'Ivoire during his papacy which is evidence of Felix Houphouet-Boigny's closeness to the catholic church and his cultivation of his church as part of the evidence of his own legitimacy.

There's a story which I read at the time. I guess it's true, but I can't vouch for it personally. Some reporter said to President Houphouet-Boigny, "Mr. President, your country has many needs for health care and education and improvements in its infrastructure. How could you justify spending government money on this basilica?" The president said, "We didn't spend any government money on it. I paid for it all myself."

Houphouet had wanted the church to take over responsibility for it, and Pope John Paul I'm told insisted that the church would only do so once an endowment fund was established to ensure the future maintenance costs would be covered. Houphouet was supposed to have established such a fund. I don't know any of the details of it. I don't know if it's still today covering the maintenance costs or not. They must be incredible, but the pope was very reluctant to assume any responsibility for the ongoing care of that facility.

The funeral was an incredible funeral. World leaders came from everywhere. We were very slow to designate who would attend, and it irritated the Ivorian government greatly including the chief of protocol, a man named George Ouegnin. I remember him calling me in exasperation saying, "I don't know how many seats to reserve for the American delegation. I don't know how to place you because I don't know who's heading your delegation. Is it the president? Is it the vice president? Is it someone else? Who's coming?" In the end we sent the secretary of energy. Why that choice was made I couldn't begin to explain to you. That was a lady named O'Leary. I think Frances O'Leary. Anyway, we sent a modest delegation, and Secretary O'Leary headed that delegation.

The only possible link I can think of didn't materialize for another year or two. The funeral was December of '93. The death was December 7, 1993. I guess the funeral was soon after, but I'm not sure. In fact, they have the habit in those cultures of preserving the body until it's auspicious to have a funeral, so it's quite possible that the funeral was later by some weeks or even a couple of months. The point that comes to mind is another event that happened during my time, but this was in April of 1995.

April 28, 1995 I attended a ceremony for the first export of oil from Cote d'Ivoire. Cote d'Ivoire had off-shore deposits, and they were developed by a number of companies. There was certainly competition with French there for concessions. I don't know any of the details of it, but there were American companies that were successful in gaining some concessions, and on April 28, 1995 a tanker called the Red Teal loaded and shipped the first shipment of Ivorian crude. I haven't kept up with their exports over the years. I hope that it's still a modest source of revenue for the country. Of course we don't read about it or hear about it the way we know Nigeria's oil exports, so I presume that they've remained rather modest. In any case the secretary of energy headed our delegation to the funeral.

Something else that happened five weeks after Houphouet's death was the devaluation of the French West African franc, what we called the CFA, What did that stand for? I don't know what it stood for.

*Q: Currency French Africa?*

CECIL: Something like that. It was devalued by 50% after being pegged to the French franc for 45 years. There had been 50 CFA francs to the French franc for 45 years, but the exchange rate had grown so artificial that, I don't know if the French were waiting for Houphouet to die or if they just finally said, "We can't support this anymore," so overnight with no warning the rate was adjusted to 100 CFA to the franc and, of course, that had immediate repercussions throughout the economy.

I have just two or three other what I'll call vignettes I'd like maybe to share with you, and I'll pretty much have exhausted the memories I was able dredge up. One little story I recall perhaps is a slight indicator of the personality of Henri Konan-Bedie. When he became president after Houphouet's death, as I said earlier, we had not had a lot of contact with him in the national assembly, so we made efforts to get to know him better. Hume and I did call on him several times in his office in the presidency to discuss various issues. At one point Hume decided to invite him to his residence to lunch. He said, "Why not? The U.S.-Ivorian relationship is important, and the president himself maybe has an interest in demonstrating his esteem for the United States."

He invited the president and what I'll call I guess his personal secretary, a gentleman whose name at the moment slips my mind. Hume said, "It'll just be you, Mr. President, and your personal secretary, and me and my DCM. The four of us." The president accepted.

The two of them came. We had a very nice lunch at the residence, nice casual discussion. I don't think we solved any state problems or anything, but it was a nice occasion for everyone to relax

and get to know each other a little bit better. Then at the end Hume and I were walking the two to the door, and Hume shook President Bedie's hand and said, "Thank you so much for coming, Mr. President." This is all in French, of course. "It was such an honor to have you for lunch today at the residence." Bedie said, "Yes, it was." I don't know if he meant it that way, but he took deference naturally.

Another little thing I would put into the record. I suppose when I get the transcript I can type this. I don't want to read it to you, but I considered this to be the best letter to any editor that I wrote during my foreign service career, and State Magazine published it in November 1994. It had to do with a liberalization in travel regulations that effected the eligibility of children who were in boarding school to go to relatives or friends for vacations. Up until 1994 if your child was in a boarding school and if you had, say, Christmas vacation or Easter vacation, you could bring them back to post. You had an overall dollar allowance, and you could apply that if you brought them back to post. But if you wanted to send them to a relative, for less money, you couldn't use any portion of the allowance for that. Finally these regulations were liberalized.

I inquired for the post when they were going to go into effect. I got an answer back saying well, they hadn't yet developed all the criteria. They had to determine whether it would be feasible to go to a designated relative. The letter I have here pretty much speaks for itself. Maybe I can type it into the record when we get to that point unless you have a scanner that you want to scan it.

*Q: Why don't you type it in.*

CECIL: The other thing for the record is an example of dealing with CODELs—Congressional Delegations—and some of the pitfalls that one must avoid. I was chargé in May of '94 when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as president in South Africa. Mrs. Clinton went to attend the inauguration in her own plane, and a CODEL led by Congressman Stokes went. Quite a few congressmen went in that plane.

On their way back to Washington they needed to refuel, and so they chose Abidjan as their refueling stop at three in the morning. Mrs. Clinton's plane arrived first. We had all kinds of security, of course, laid on with the Ivorian authorities. We had the airport virtually to ourselves, and Mrs. Clinton's plane landed and taxied to the military portion of the airport. The CODEL plane which arrived about 30 minutes later landed and was held at the civilian side not very far away. You could see the two.

The CODEL when it was still in South Africa had asked us to please have handicraft vendors available at the airport so the CODEL could buy souvenirs during their stop. As I said, this is at three in the morning. The airport was virtually closed down, and we had already stressed with the Ivorian security authorities the need for tight security because of Mrs. Clinton. When we inquired about the possibility of having handicraft vendors there first of all the Ivorian authorities had to stop laughing before they even considered it a serious request.

Then we considered some of the practical difficulties at the airport. Normally it had just a couple of little shops that had airport art, that sort of thing, wood carvings, stuff like that but of course they were not open in the night. The idea of bringing the owners out or bringing other vendors...

There were lots of vendors in town. We concluded that it was not feasible to select certain vendors and ask them to bring their stuff to the airport, and the little shops were hardly worth speaking about.

We decided at a control officers meeting to tell the delegation in South Africa that we wouldn't be able to arrange for souvenir vendors, but they didn't get the message. They arrived expecting the vendors, and I had an inquisition on the tarmac by CODEL Stokes and his senior administrative person, really taking me to task and accusing me of being disrespectful of the Congress by not arranging to have those vendors there. They said if they had only known that there weren't going to be any vendors, they would have arranged to depart from South Africa a couple of hours later so that their members could have done their shopping in South Africa. They were very unhappy with me.

Under Secretary for Management Richard Moose was traveling with Mrs. Clinton. I think he was on the Clinton plane. In any case, he walked up during the discussion, and he listened. He didn't really intervene, but he heard the Congressman and his assistant accusing me of being disrespectful of the Congress and of the members. He took it all in. He asked me after they had finished speaking and gone back to their plane, he asked me to send him a full report on how this happened and why, particularly about that message they didn't get. I had told our administrative officer to send a cable down to South Africa telling them it wouldn't be able to arrange what they asked for. As it turned out the admin officer was too busy, and it had slipped his mind so the cable was not sent.

Dick Moose wanted a full report. I even got a call from Washington while his plane was still in the air before it even landed in Washington. Then I got a call from his staff in Washington asking me how I was doing on that report. Was it on its way? I wrote a memo for the file giving my account of what happened, and I also received a cable back from Under Secretary Moose on May 14 copying me on the letter of apology he wrote to Congressman Stokes which I considered one of the worst cases I have ever seen of a senior department official failing to support the Foreign Service in trying to do what we thought was the right thing.

So the warning for future DCMs is: "Remember, if the Congressman says he wants to buy souvenirs, you've got to find time in the program even if it's three o'clock in the morning in an airport under tight security because the first lady is also there. Never mind. Create that shopping opportunity."

*Q: A question about going back to the time you were there. Did the dividing line between Muslim and Christian play much role while you were there?*

CECIL: There were certainly lots of signs of the growing tensions, yes. No doubt about it. One of the most visible and tangible—or maybe the word is intangible—evidence of this is that in downtown Abidjan—what was called Plateau, the center of the downtown commercial district—there was no mosque, yet there was a beautiful cathedral. I think it was called St. Peter and St. Paul. A very modernesque design with beautiful stained glass windows inside by an African artist. It was of course the main Catholic cathedral of Abidjan. There were many other churches around the town.

On Fridays the Muslims gathered in a parking lot for Friday prayers. Hundreds of them, maybe even thousands. I've been there. No doubt hundreds and hundreds of Muslims, and they would have pray out in the open in this parking lot come rain or shine. The desire to build a mosque in downtown Abidjan was a sore point. The government finally came around to granting a piece of land. They did that about the time I left in 1995, and I understand a mosque was later constructed so that all of those Muslims who worked in the downtown area would have a place to go for Friday prayers.

I mentioned earlier the fact that the majority of the power, the important ministerial positions, were in the hands of southern Christians. Fewer positions were given to northern Muslims, so there was that. One of the advantages of Hume Horan being there was he probably learned more about Islam in Cote d'Ivoire than any previous American ambassador and I suppose any subsequent American ambassador. He met with the Muslim leaders. He could speak to them in Arabic if they could. His Arabic was better than theirs in quite a few cases. That certainly conveyed to the Ivorian Muslim leadership the fact that, "My goodness, here's an American ambassador who knows our religion and who speaks the language of our religion," something they had never seen before. I think it had helped convey the impression of a diverse America and an America that was perhaps more open and accepting of Islam than they had known up to that time. I don't know what they think today.

*Q: Were we concerned about Islam as being a potential force? Not necessarily because of the religion but politically.*

CECIL: We knew where the numbers were. The government of Cote d'Ivoire would not admit that it had a Muslim majority. They did not want to have a census. It's like Lebanon.

*Q: Lebanon is still working on making a census.*

CECIL: Our data, which I think probably relied mostly on UN sources, led us to believe that Muslims are probably between 52 to 55% of the country. Nowadays it's hard for me to say, "Did that include all those migrants from the northern countries: Mali, Niger, and so on?" It probably did, I'm not sure. But in any case we could see the demographics, and it was pretty clear to us that Islam was clearly spreading. When I was a graduate student at SAIS in 1962 to '64, I was studying Islam in Black Africa, and I wrote my masters thesis on the influence of Islam on Nigeria. It was clear to me 30 years later that the visible presence of Islam was much greater than it had been even in the '60s. There were mosques everywhere. It was just clear that the Muslim faith was spreading. We did not regard it in Cote d'Ivoire as a source of any fundamentalist threat. It's hard to generalize, but I would say that my experience in Cote d'Ivoire and even later in Niger a few years later showed me that by and large West African Islam is a very tolerant Islam. It's very syncretic. It incorporates a lot of indigenous beliefs into practices, even into the architecture. I have a color slide of a little tiny minaret on the road between Abidjan and Grand-Bassam, a little town where foreigners go to go to the beach on weekends. There was a row of handicraft vendors along the road at that time, and this was their mosque. Around the minaret was a little railing made out of cement, concrete, and the railing consisted of the stools of Akan chiefs or Baulé chiefs. The stool is the seat of authority and maybe even the soul. It's a

wonderful example of the incorporation of an African traditional belief into the architecture of an Islamic religious building.

The other side of that is certainly in northern Nigeria there has been a lot of evidence of fundamentalist Islam and riots between the Christians and Muslims, so you can't generalize and say it's tolerant everywhere. Ivorian Muslims certainly seemed to me at the time to be very tolerant and not at all dogmatic about their beliefs.

*Q: Were the Libyans messing around? Where was Qadhafi? Was he messing around at all?*

CECIL: I don't recall any Libyan presence in Cote d'Ivoire. I never came across it. I don't know if they were even represented. Houphouet was very conservative. He was very slow, very late in opening relations with the Soviet Union. It was the '80s before they established relations, and then they broke relations two years later. There was a period when they didn't have them, and then they again reestablished relations.

*Q: By that time things had pretty much gone from bad to worse in the Soviet Union.*

CECIL: Yes, maybe. I'm not sure, but his general conservatism and his general alignment with the West might have led him not to have relations with Libya. I don't recall any Libyan presence. In Niger of course it was obvious the Libyan presence, but I don't remember it in Cote d'Ivoire.

*Q: Chuck, I guess this is maybe a good place to stop. We'll pick this up, and what will we talk about next?*

CECIL: What happened was I left Abidjan in the summer of '95. I think it was probably July. Yes, July 17, 1995 we left. The Horans left 11 days earlier on July 6. I came back to Washington, and after a brief home leave I went to the Freedom of Information Office at my request because I was seriously thinking about retirement, and I thought that would be a nice place, not very demanding yet interesting. I looked at it as a place maybe to recoup my energies after three years of a lot of work in Abidjan and a chance to take stock.

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CECIL: Just a postscript. I noted that Ambassador Horan left on July 6, 1995, and I left on July 17. As I noted at the beginning, we had arrived within four weeks of each other in 1992. I remember looking into the question of the arrival and departure of ambassadors and DCMs in Abidjan during my time there.

Both the ambassador and the DCM had left in '92 within a very short time. They had arrived in '89 virtually together. They had arrived in '86 together. I just thought there was a bad pattern there. On the one hand it's really good that the Department allows ambassadors to choose their DCM, and that's certainly a valued prerogative. On the other hand, there's a high institutional cost when both the ambassador and the DCM leave together. A lot of knowledge goes out the door with them. I have often thought maybe it's a bad policy. Maybe there should be more of an effort made to have the DCM stay a year beyond the ambassador's departure to ensure an orderly

transition as the new ambassador arrives. It wasn't observed in Abidjan, and there are many other cases where it isn't observed. I think where that happens at posts there's a little hiccup in operations.

Hopefully, political, management, economic and consular officers, some of them will remain to carry over some of the institutional memory, but it may be less smooth than it could be. I was asked by Ambassador Lannon Walker who succeeded Hume Horan, if I would stay a year to be his DCM, but I declined that. I said, "Thank you, but first of all three years here is quite enough, I think. I've learned a lot, and I'm ready to move on." I thought Lannon Walker should have his own DCM, somebody other than me. I declined that offer, and he didn't press it.

*Q: You mentioned that Jimmy Carter, former president, had stopped off there.*

CECIL: Carter had been in Liberia in some effort to mediate part of the Liberian civil conflict, but he had to change planes in Abidjan because only a very small plane could take him to Monrovia. He had come into Abidjan on something larger, I forget what. He asked to take advantage of his airport stop to meet with the Ivorian minister of Health to discuss Cote d'Ivoire's effort to eradicate Guinea worm. President Carter had gotten quite interested in Guinea worm and the problem. It's a terrible parasite. He was trying to support World Health Organization efforts to eradicate it from the world. He had gotten promises from DuPont Chemical to provide the pesticide that kills the larvae of the guinea worm in ponds where it grows and where humans contact it. I think it was also DuPont who provided free of charge a very thin plastic membrane that people can use in villages to filter their water. That's actually all it takes to eliminate the Guinea worm parasite from the drinking water. It's so large it can be seen with the human eye. If you hold a glass of water up to the light, you can see these little things floating in the water. He was able to get this plastic membrane free to provide to governments to distribute to their people.

Cote d'Ivoire was not making the progress that one would expect in this program. Several other countries were doing much better in eliminating the parasite, so he wanted to give a push to the Ivorian efforts. The Ivorian minister of health came out to the airport, had a room set aside. Rosalynn Carter was traveling with her husband. She was the note taker. I was able to sit in. I think Ambassador Horan was there. Anyway, I was in the room.

The story I like is that President Carter said to the minister, "You know, Mr. Minister, there's no longer any Guinea worm in Guinea. The government of Guinea has totally eradicated the parasite in Guinea." He said, "There's a discussion in WHO circles and elsewhere that maybe we need to change the name of this parasite." He said, "There's even been proposal that we name it for the last country in the world to eradicate the parasite. Mr. Minister," he said, "I really hope we don't have to call it the Cote d'Ivoire worm." The minister took note, and we can say that they actually probably did increase their efforts.

One thing we did to help them was the Peace Corps found a volunteer with a degree in, I think it was, microbiology, but it was certainly in some relevant scientific field. They assigned her to the ministry of health in Abidjan, one of the very few volunteers to live in Abidjan. Her job was to

help manage the Ivorian effort. I think she was still there when I left, but I think that probably did give a boost. I don't know if they've totally eliminated it today, but certainly Jimmy Carter performed a very useful function in goosing the minister there. Get on with the effort!

**HUME HORAN**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cote d'Ivoire (1992-1995)**

*Ambassador Hume A. Horan was born on August 13th 1934 in the District of Columbia. Horan served in the US Army from 1954-1956 and graduated from Harvard University in 1958. In 1960, Horan entered the Foreign Service. Ambassador Hume's overseas career includes posts in Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Jordan and as Ambassador to Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Cote d'Ivoire. The interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy 2000 – 2001.*

HORAN: From 1991 to 1992. Then I went out to Cote D'Ivoire. Before, it had been convenient for us to use the English term, "Ivory Coast." But the story goes that President Houphouet-Boigny objected to hearing his country's name rendered many different ways, varying with the nationality of the speaker. And one day, upon hearing Germans refer to his country as "Die Elfenbein Koeste," he decided enough was enough. It should henceforth be referred to by all only as "La Côte d'Ivoire."

I served in Abidjan from 1992-1995. Cote d'Ivoire was the most prosperous, most stable country in the sub-region. The credit goes mainly to one of the few positive "Big Men" in post-colonial Africa. Felix Houphouet-Boigny. Houphouet was a traditional chief, and also founder and leader of a more-or-less modern style political party. He used both sources of power firmly, wisely, and moderately. He was seen as legitimate. He would often make the point: "I've never shed blood. It is a great mistake to start down that road. The bonds that link individuals and ethnic groups together dissolve. As a consequence, still more violence is needed to restore stability...and all the while your power base shrinks, and the economy suffers." Houphouet would add: "Our African countries are not cobbled together as firmly as European countries are, so you have to take them over our African roads carefully and gently." He was a master of inclusion, Muslims, Animists, Christians, people from all regions all had places (differing ones, to be sure) at his table.

When you see what has happened to that country since, you can appreciate the merit of Houphouet's forbearance, self control, manipulativeness, his wile and his guile. People understood that if you were his opponent, you would not die. You might get sent off to the boonies, but your salary would be paid. It was sort of like setting up a boat with a crew. You always try to keep it more or less on an even keel.

It was a happy, comfortable three years.

*Q: You were there from when to when?*

HORAN: From '92-'95. I had a very good time. I liked the Ivorians, and the issues we dealt with were not as hopeless, or meretricious as some of those in nearby African countries. I had some positive work to do. It wasn't as if I looked out onto socio-economic battlefield.

I was in Abidjan when Houphouet died. For much of a year, he had been increasingly enfeebled by prostate cancer. He'd delegated the running of the government to Alassane Ouattara, an extremely able Prime Minister. Ouattara has a Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania. He had been in the IMF, and years later returned to that organization, before an unsuccessful run for the Ivorian Presidency.

Houphouet's death was instructive: it taught me something of *raison d'etat* as seen from American eyes. Throughout decades of radical African socialism, Houphouet had stood firmly for the West, the private sector, a degree of democracy, and the rule of law. He had consistently opposed communists and other radicals. He allowed us to use Cote d'Ivoire as a staging area for our activities in other parts of Africa. When we were favoring Jonas Savimbi, and Savimbi needed help, Cote d'Ivoire was chosen as the transit point for air-lifts to him. Cote d'Ivoire voted reliably with us in the United Nations. For a generation, moreover, Houphouet had run his country in such a way, that despite few natural resources, Cote d'Ivoire had become the region's most prosperous and socially developed nation. He was unquestionably the doyen of West African presidents. He was a firm friend of the Free World over a time when this was uncommon.

Was there corruption? There was quite a bit, mostly spilling out of the government's monopoly of cocoa and coffee marketing. Conspicuous consumption? Lots. Consider the Ivoire Hotel, with its vast pools and a skating rink, *patinoire*, on the roof. Foreigners also complained about the colossal basilica Houphouet built in Yamoussoukro, his home town. The largest religious building in the world! On its behalf, though, one can observe that it was well built, future maintenance costs were provided for, and that Ivorians - even Muslims - were oddly proud to have in their country a religious monument bigger than the Vatican. One Muslim asked me was it fair to praise Europe's great cathedrals-built from the sweat of Europe's poor, and deny the same right to Africans. "Isn't it anyway better than building a huge palace in Belgium a la Mobutu?" I thought Yamoussoukro was magnificent.

But no development is possible without a lot of waste and corruption. The final result of Ivorian development - corruption included - compared well with what one observed in other parts of Africa.

Houphouet's death, was of course the occasion of a major funeral. Some 50 nations announced they would attend, either at the Chief of State or Prime Minister level, or both. The Ivorians were eager to know who would the United States send? The countdown to the funeral moved along, and with each day, the silence from Washington became more mortifying. Early on we'd heard that there was no chance of Vice-President Gore coming. "He doesn't do funerals." Then the Secretary of State was out. Finally, Palace Protocol could delay no longer. They printed a schedule of events, and the list of delegations. After the

“United States of America” there was only a large, blank page. We were the only nation so dishonored. In the event, a dollar short and a day late, we did send Hazel O'Leary, who was a very good representative.

*Q: Who was she?*

HORAN: She was the Secretary of Energy. She was an African American. Did not speak French, but was elegant and personable. But still, I cringed at the start of the funeral mass, as the representatives of various nations took their places, including Hazel. Then, last of all, in a single file, came the delegation of France. At its head was President Mitterrand, behind him former President Giscard, and behind them five former Prime Ministers. Last of all came the current Foreign Minister! They were all seated in the front row.

We should learn from this. If you don't stick with your friends, they won't stick with you. The French passed a clear message that they will stand by you even after you're dead. Whereas Uncle Sam, in the past so prompt to ask one favor or another of Houphouet, was just a big blank in the schedule. I thought, “Was American policy driven only by ‘What can you do for me today?’ If we don't have the politeness to take time and say ‘sorry’ when a friend has died, it shows a certain, inward-looking, selfish view of the world - and despite Washington's continual protestations - something approaching contempt for Africa.” I was disappointed in how my government handled the death of one of the most decent and constructive African leaders in modern times.

*Q: How did you feel the French, during the time when he was alive and running the country, what was the role of France?*

HORAN: Very great. Don't forget that in the De Gaulle regime, Houphouet had been Minister of Health for France! The French, their Ambassador had been there for 17 years. Through his own family he was one of the major landholders in Cote D'Ivoire. The French stood athwart much of the private sector. They were making a lot of money out of Cote D'Ivoire, but Houphouet emphasized to us he wanted to open up his country for its own benefit, and not just for that of France. He saw the U.S. as offering many advantages to Cote d'Ivoire as a market and a trading partner.

*Q: We are talking about a region where rebellions and extra-judicial killings are common.*

HORAN: Yes, if you live in Africa, you see the fragility of what is good and stable and progressive...how easily it can be disrupted by bad leadership, bad decisions. I'd say to Ivorians, “Africa can not afford the luxury of instability. Europeans, they are rich so they can have wars. They can even have world wars, but they are rich and can afford them. But Africa is so poor that even some instability, some violence is going to send you into the abyss.”

*Q: How long were you there after he died?*

HORAN: About a year, yes.

*Q: What did you see in developments at that point?*

HORAN: The number two man, Joseph Bedie, took over. Great men don't like to have as their immediate successors equally great men. They want a court jester. When I first called on President Bedie, after Houphouet's death, he commented ruefully, "It was not an easy thing to be the number two man to Houphouet. He found lots of small ways to keep you in your place and keep you humiliated." Bedie spoke with a rancor, that showed how his years as Houphouet's DCM, had gotten under his skin.

Poor Bedie did not have presence. He was unfortunately configured. He was short and fat. At meetings he'd sit in this enormous, overstuffed leather chair. His feet would barely reach the ground. The scene had a kind of "Ubuesque," tragi-comic quality. Also, Bedie could not manage politics and economics as Houphouet had. Bedie was much more "straight-out" Catholic, less comfortable with other religions and ethnicities. Witness the brouhaha that ensued about Ouattara's "Ivorianess." Bedie right away began pouring money into his home town, a *pauvre bled paume*, near Abidjan, Corruption got out of control. There was certainly corruption with Houphouet, but he always knew who was getting what, when. It was regulated corruption. By watching the little dials and meters, so to speak, Houphouet always knew what was going on under the hood. But Bedie lacked Houphouet's leadership, his guile, good judgment, and inclusiveness.

Houphouet was very good at keeping Muslims on board. Ouattara was a northerner. Under Bedie, the country lurched towards the south, toward Catholics and Christians. Northerners felt themselves more and more dispossessed and disenfranchised, and we now see the country teetering on the brink. What kind of a brink? I think if you look across a few African borders, you can see the brink they are teetering on.

**HAYWOOD RANKIN**  
**Counselor for Political, Economic and Refugee Affairs**  
**Abidjan (1996-1998)**

*Haywood Rankin was born in the District of Columbia in 1946. He received both his bachelor's degree and law degree from the University of North Carolina in 1968 and 1971, respectively. His career has included positions in Tangier, Algiers, Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Muscat, and Abidjan. Haywood Rankin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 24, 1998.*

*Q: Let's sort of again skip; should we just touch the Ivory Coast? You were in the Ivory Coast from when to when?*

RANKIN: I was deputy director and director of the INR office for the Near East from '94 to '96. It was an incredibly interesting period (I even got to Israel and Lebanon, thanks to INR.), but we

can skip over that.

My last assignment was on direct transfer from Washington to Abidjan. I was the counselor for political, economic, and refugee affairs from 1996 to just now, 1998. My one and only assignment in sub-Saharan Africa was an assignment that I really loved. Now in retrospect, I would advise a young officer to serve in a second bureau sooner than I did. I arrived in the midst of some pretty severe downsizing at the large embassy in Abidjan, and that is true everywhere I am sure. I replaced both a political and an economic counselor. I had an economic hat and the refugees coordinator was also in my section.

I had all of those under me, but I in fact, one of the things I particularly valued about my Abidjan years was I was able for the first time since Baghdad to get back to writing and not be in the business of managing. Frankly, being a State Department manager and especially being a DCM where you have neither the glory of being the ambassador nor the time really to think and write, is a tough job. If I were to address the DCM class I would have words to that effect.

Here I was back for two years doing what I love best which is getting out, making contacts, and writing. Côte d'Ivoire, Ivory Coast, is a particularly satisfying country in that regard. It is a country in transition from absolutist rule to somewhat less than absolutist rule. It is a country which is remarkably open. It was a pleasure, I have to say, after all those years dealing with Middle Eastern affairs to have the burden of the Israel question lifted from my shoulders. Half the population of Côte d'Ivoire is Muslim, but I hardly ever heard Israel mentioned.

I traveled extensively in West Africa all the way from Senegal to Benin, but I am not an Africa expert. What I really know is Côte d'Ivoire. I was particularly struck by how the Ivorians (and West Africans resident in Côte d'Ivoire, of which there are many millions), are so open and have very little chip on their shoulder. I was able to travel to all parts of the country and was received with a simplicity and a warmth which surprised me. I think that is also true of our French colleagues. Of course France is far and away the most important external country in regards to Côte d'Ivoire. You might think there would be something of an anti-colonial attitude, but there is very little of that in Côte d'Ivoire. I have often tried to explain that to myself, but I have no good explanation.

*Q: Who was the president there?*

RANKIN: Houphouët-Boigny was the president from independence in 1960 (and had been the great power on the scenes since long before independence), until he died as a very old man in December 1993. When I came in 1996, the president was Bédié. Bédié is a lackluster, noncharismatic leader, whose choice as successor to Houphouët-Boigny can only be explained by this greater-than-life father figure wanting to ensure that no luster would be removed from his shining memory after his death by the presence at the top of anyone with any charisma. The many times I met Bédié, I was struck by his corpulence and his high-pitched whining.

The fundamental issue that I had to deal with in my two years there was this: is this country, which was dominated for so long by a single man, and by a single party which he created as his instrumentality for maintaining absolute power, going to open up or not? In his last days

beginning in 1990, Houphouët-Boigny himself had had to open up. For the first time, he allowed opposition parties, opposition newspapers, and opposition trade unions. You saw a truly monolithic system until 1990 and then suddenly in 1990 there were some important changes. From that period, there was not much further change. Were we going to see any further positive change? Or were we in fact going to see retrogression?

I remember the day after I arrived, Ambassador Lannon Walker, a very great ambassador, and I had a long chat. He set out for me his benchmarks and concerns. At that time, the summer of 1996, he was concerned that Bédié would actually put the opposition leaders in jail, suppress the newspapers, and essentially go back to the Houphouëtist monolithic model. Those negative things did not happen and I believe that Lannon Walker played a role in stemming those worst instincts of Bédié and of the hard-line PDCI, the dominant party in the country.

*Q: How could he do this?*

RANKIN: Lannon Walker? I think that the tools that the United States had to bring to bear, the direct tools were limited, so we had to rely on acute diplomacy. We don't have a large developmental program, a magnificent aid program on the scale of Egypt, or anything like it. We only have small pots of money. However, Bédié and his men have, I think, always had their eye on the United States. The United States of course plays a key role in the IMF and the World Bank. We do continue to have an influence even in countries like Côte d'Ivoire where we do not have large aid programs, but having influence requires a deft diplomatic practitioner.

In Lannon Walker, we had an extraordinarily able ambassador, indeed our most able serving African expert. He had been ambassador in Nigeria and Senegal, he'd served as deputy assistant secretary, and earlier times had taken him to central and southern Africa during extremely difficult times. Lannon Walker knows Africa I think better than anybody else actually functioning in the State Department today. Of course, now we have a 34-year-old woman who has become Assistant Secretary who has never served in Africa. This gives you the sense of the direction in which things are moving.

It took a great diplomat of the stature of Lannon Walker to help an autocrat like Bédié suppress his natural autocratic tendencies. Bédié and his minions didn't understand the United States despite the fact that Bédié had been ambassador to the United States back in 1960. Here is a case where an ambassador who speaks perfect French and who had a deep immersion in Africa could penetrate an African potentate's stubbornness and meanness. I don't want to overemphasize these things because there is in fact much more that Walker would have hoped to see Bédié do, but I believe things would have turned very sour in Côte d'Ivoire but for Walker.

Côte d'Ivoire is an African country, above all others, certainly in West Africa, that could really go places. It has severe constraints, enough to justify great pessimism. This includes, first of all, tremendous population growth on account of both immigration and the high birth rate. It has limited resources and it has potentially explosive ethnic and religious divisions. But it has had many these years of stability. It is the one country that has had neither a military coup d'état nor a civil war of any kind. There has been strife all around its borders. It is a country which would have a hope for prosperity if it moved towards a more open and democratic political and

economic system. Alas, I don't think it is going to happen despite our best efforts. I don't think that Bédié has the right instincts, and no amount of cajoling on our part is going to persuade him to do the right thing even if we had much greater influence. He may not backpedal, but he won't go forward.

The elections in the year 2000 I predict are going to be very difficult. Bédié's main opponent is the deputy director of the IMF, Alassane Ouattara. Ouattara is still here in Washington, but he has let the entire world know that he is going to return to his country in 1999. Fearing this return, fearing Ouattara as the person who can most stand up to him and gain a national following, Bédié and his minions in the PDCI have manipulated the laws to make it more difficult or impossible for Ouattara to run, on grounds of nationality and residence, and they have made it difficult in any number of other ways. They have given themselves a way out to call off the elections at the last minute "legally." Bédié is manipulating the constitution and seizing none of the opportunities that were available for constructive dialogue to ensure that elections would be above board. He has shunned every chance to create a fair electoral system. Instead, it is basically business as usual: a highly corrupt system, rampant pay-offs, pervasive irresponsibility. You can say Côte d'Ivoire is the least bad example on the block but it is unfortunately still pretty bad and a long way from what it could and ought to be.

I left my last assignment in Côte d'Ivoire sad at failed potential in the West African country that ought to have been the most successful.

**LEON WINTRAUB**  
**Deputy Director, Western African Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (2000-2002)**

*Mr Weintraub was born and raised in New York City, educated at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and the Universities of Pittsburgh and Wisconsin. After service in Liberia with the Peace Corps he entered government service, first with the Navy Department and then with the State Department Foreign Service. His service in Washington and abroad involved him with a variety of countries and issues including African Affairs, International Organizations, Narcotics and Peace-Keeping operations in Africa. His foreign posts were Bogotá, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Quito and Geneva. Mr. Weintraub was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.*

WEINTRAUB: Well, when I was onboard it was still reasonably stable. The founding president, Felix Houphouët-Boigny, had died a number of years ago; there were some problems with the elected government in power which was strongly favored by a different ethnic group than the Houphouët-Boigny government had been composed of for many years. Through no fault of its own, and also owing to the fact that there had been an electoral commission that we felt did not do a proper job -- of vetting candidates for election, of deciding who would be allowed to vote and who would not be allowed to vote -- the election that resulted in the government of President Gbagbo coming into power was in fact an uncontestedly flawed election. But it wasn't Gbagbo's

fault, he didn't set the rules. It wasn't like he gerrymandered anything or he had his own electoral commission; it was a separate body before him that did that. But since it was obviously not considered to be a free and fair election, we were restricted by the amount of assistance we could offer them and what we could do with that government. Nevertheless he was governing in a reasonably democratic fashion. But those who had lost that election were obviously in no mood to be conciliatory because they felt they had been frozen out unfairly, as in fact they had been. So it was not the most stable of situations.

At this time, through this period, we had announced this new initiative, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, or AGOA, and we hoped the government of Cote d'Ivoire would be able to take advantage of it. It would allow the United States to open our markets, to get a lot of imports from Cote d'Ivoire -- typically in the light manufacturing area, in textiles and everything of this nature. So, as a matter of fact, in January of 2002, I was a member of a fairly good-sized delegation that went to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire for three to four days. We had the African specialist from the office of USTR, the U.S. Trade Representative. We had our deputy assistant secretary for African Affairs from the State Department. We had a senior official from the Department of Commerce, some other official from the Department of Labor. We also had people from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. We had a sizeable group of about eight people, I guess, and we were trying to see if we could nudge the Ivorians, if you will, over the hump, over the last of the remaining barriers that were keeping them from the potential gains available under AGOA. These barriers, or conditions, concerned, among other things, free operations of labor unions, what kind of a code they had in encouraging fair investor conditions, would the legal system be respected in case of there were breaches of contract or commercial disputes, and so on.

So this delegation went there in January 2002, and things were on track, but obviously this entire process was subject to negotiations, and eventual approval by the Senate, and the parliament in Cote d'Ivoire. I left that office in the summer of 2002, and things were somewhat on track, but I think it was in October or maybe November of that year, when a strong rebel movement emerged and I believe the country is still somewhat divided along a roughly horizontal line running roughly halfway through the country. The government itself was in control of the southern half of the country, where the government and population were predominantly Christian or pagan/animists and the northern half was led by a predominantly Muslim movement. This was not exclusively so, but these two camps did have those general characteristics for the most part. And that's been going off and on since -- there seems to be skirmishes every so often. I don't follow it actively, but every once in awhile something's in the newspaper about that. And so it's kind of a rough stalemate there. And that country had been for many years the stability, the anchor of stability in the region. For many years there had been large French investments in Cote d'Ivoire. There had not been a coup in Cote d'Ivoire all through the period of independence from 1960, while there had been coups in Ghana, in Nigeria, in Liberia, in Sierra Leone, in Guinea, in other countries, in Mali.

*Q: Lots of French there.*

WEINTRAUB: Yes, there were lots of French living there, many of them providing good expertise. In fact, they were probably getting fairly high subsidies from the French government

to support -- probably underwrite -- the national budgets in support of the school system, the military; there were French armed forces stationed in several of the countries there. But even that system broke down eventually. You know, it was very unfortunate; this was our one, so to speak, anchor of stability. Just when Liberia or Sierra Leone are emerging, if you will, from their long nightmare of civil war, then we've got one starting in Cote d'Ivoire but at least it wasn't at the same time in Cote d'Ivoire as it was in Nigeria or somewhere else. So that was really sad and unfortunate.

**AUBREY HOOKS**  
**Ambassador**  
**Cote d'Ivoire (2004-2007)**

*Ambassador Hooks was born and raised in South Carolina and educated at Brevard College and the University of South Carolina. He entered the Foreign Service in 1971 and served abroad in Tel Aviv, Warsaw, Ankara, Port au Prince, Tel Aviv, Rome, Helsinki and Harare. He also had several assignments at the State Department in Washington, DC. In 1995 he was named United States Ambassador to the Republic of Congo at Brazzaville and served there until 1999. He subsequently served as Ambassador to Democratic Republic of the Congo (2001-2004); and as Ambassador to Cote d'Ivoire from 2004 to 2007. Ambassador Hooks was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.*

*Q: And then you immediately went to the Ivory Coast?*

HOOKS: I did.

*Q: How did this appointment come about?*

HOOKS: It came about in April of 2002 when Walter Kansteiner, the Assistant Secretary of State, called me and asked, "Where would you like to go next?" It is a year long process. I discussed my wish list and then he said, "I'd like you to go to the Ivory Coast. Would you be willing to go there?" I said, "Yes" because Ivory Coast in fact had been my first choice instead of going to Congo in 2001.

The personnel process itself is a very interesting one when it comes to ambassadors. I think in that particular year it was unique in the sense that the process did not work as it usually does. Normally, when the bureau selects someone, the process moves forward. It is not automatic because at every stage people have the option to say no, but this was a unique year in which my name went to the 'D Committee' which changed assignments. I recall the P/DAS called me and said, "I have good news and bad news for you. You have been named, you do have a post, but it is not Ivory Coast." The D Committee decided to switch my name and send me to another country and send the person the bureau had chosen for another post to Ivory Coast. Clearly a mistake was made, but unfortunately it wasn't easy to turn around. Walter Kansteiner had to go to the Undersecretary to get that turned around. Then I went off to Ivory Coast.

*Q: You were in Ivory Coast from when to when?*

HOOKS: 2004 to 2007.

*Q: 2004 you are getting ready. You have been an African hand for a long time so what had you known about the Ivory Coast and how stood the Ivory Coast when you went out there?*

HOOKS: I think the reason Walter wanted me to go was because of my experience in Brazzaville during the civil war. I had been in the Central African Republic at the time we reopened the embassy. I had been with the African Crisis Response Initiative which was the program to train African military peacekeeping skills. I had been in Kinshasa dealing with the large UN contingent there, dealing with various rebel groups, trying to move them back to an agreement of some type to lead to elections. I think Walter wanted someone with experience in dealing with crises to go to Ivory Coast.

What was the situation in Ivory Coast at the time? Ivory Coast, as you recall, was traditionally the most Francophone country in Africa. Abidjan was called the 'Paris of Africa'. Houphouët-Boigny, the first president of Ivory Coast, had been a minister in the French government. He was really the anchor of French policy in Africa because he was very pro-French. He was in office from 1960 to 1993 when he died. He stayed much too long in power. Starting in the 1980s, Ivory Coast began to have serious economic problems. It did not have a lot of natural resources and oil had not yet been discovered off-shore. It was primarily an agricultural country, principally cocoa beans. Ivory Coast still provides about 40% of all cocoa exports in the world.

But starting in the 1980s, the Government had so taxed that product that production was stagnating, even slightly declining. Houphouët-Boigny was trying to build up a middle class in Ivory Coast, but it came at the expense of the rural poor. Many people talk about how the educated youth were spoiled. Houphouët-Boigny gave scholarships to young Ivorians to study in France, then brought them back and provided them with apartments and cars. How are you going to pay for all that? You have to increase taxes so the gap between the government bureaucracy and the population began to widen. It was an unsustainable budget deficit. So in the 1980s Ivory Coast started having serious difficulties.

Houphouët-Boigny maintained a one-party system for a period of time. In 1990 he made it legal for other political parties to form. The elections of 1990 were closely controlled. His first opponent was as a matter of fact Gbagbo, the current president. Houphouët-Boigny was in power for 33 years. Because he dominated politics for so long, he left a vacuum in his wake. Houphouët-Boigny was a highly respected leader in Africa. Having spent quite some time in Ivory Coast, I see you him in a different light. He was a very talented politician in some respects, but he was too imbued with the cultural background of Africa that once you are the chief, you are the chief for life. So he stayed there until the end of his life. He could have been regarded as a great leader had he left after 10 years, 20 years max, but he stayed for 33. At the end he was not governing very well.

Secondly, he chose as his successor Henri Konan Bédié, who was not a talented politician. He is

a man without much of a vision. He loved money. He seemed also to have a serious problem with alcohol. There were lots of rumors as to why Houphouët-Boigny chose him to be his successor. Bédié did not have the charisma of Houphouët-Boigny. He was not an intellectual. He was not decisive. State institutions were too weak to sustain the transition. He controlled the elections in 1995 and was reelected, in part by disqualifying Ouattara, the current president.

Ouattara came to the United States on a scholarship but with a passport from Upper Volta, now called Burkina Faso. He later worked at the IMF. In the early 1990s Houphouët-Boigny brought him to Ivory Coast and made him prime minister. When H-B died in 1993, Ouattara tried to make himself president, but under the constitution, it was the head of the National Assembly who becomes president. H-B put Bédié in that position expressly for that purpose.

So when H-B died in 1993, there was arm wrestling over the succession. Bédié came out on top. Unfortunately the 1990s was also bad economically for Ivory Coast and the world was changing in a political sense. Bédié disqualified Ouattara in the 1995 elections on the basis that Ouattara was not Ivorian. Ouattara maintains that he is Ivorian as both his parents are from Ivory Coast. But borders in Africa are somewhat artificial and people go back and forth and have relatives on both sides. It is sometimes difficult to establish where people are from.

Let me backtrack slightly. When I was in Brazzaville, Congo President Lissouba published his autobiography in 1997, and he started off by saying he is one of the few Africans of his generation who knew exactly the date of his birth because he was born on the day the explosion occurred in a factory close by. He could therefore pinpoint exactly the date of his birth. In our society, we are very precise. We were born on a specific date and a specific place. That degree of specificity does not always exist in certain cultures. It's sort of more over there, you know, near the border. It was sometime after the death of your grandmother and before the death of your uncle. That's sort of a loose timeframe and so it is not always so precise. So the question was where was Ouattara born? This became a major issue and still haunts the country to this day.

I first went to Cote d'Ivoire in early December of 1999. This was the first training program with ACRI. We were training Ivorian military in peacekeeping skills. The concern we had in training the military in Africa was the same the School of Americas had in Georgia. We did not want to train military that would get involved in a coup. I met with the American Embassy, with the French embassy and with Ivorian authorities to talk about the military in Cote d'Ivoire. Everyone was absolutely unanimous and very categorical: A coup d'état in Cote d'Ivoire is unthinkable and cannot happen. There is no tradition, there is no precedent, and there is no military culture here. The armed forces are very small. They are controlled by civilians, which was true and therefore unlike other countries in West Africa, a coup was simply unthinkable.

Two weeks later there was a coup. It did not start that way, however. There were simply unhappy soldiers. It was December 24, Christmas Eve. There were soldiers who were unhappy that had not been paid their bonuses. In the barracks as they were thinking about the holidays, they began to get a little riled up. A few of them went over to the Presidential Palace and insisted that they be paid for the Holidays. President Bédié, according to all the reports I have, including from the French, was in a high state of inebriation and basically dismissed them as "les petits" meaning the boys. Basically, he told the soldiers to get out. That did not set too well with the military, and

they basically said, “You get out of here.” Bédié, not being a very strong character, simply opened up the door of the tunnel from his residence to the French Embassy and took off running to the French Embassy. He announced to the French Ambassador: “They’ve thrown me out.”

The French were in the process of changing their policies in Africa. They had intervened in Bangui in 1996. They decided not to intervene in Brazzaville when I was there in 1997. They decided they no longer wanted to play the gendarme in Africa. However, they had a defense agreement with Ivory Coast and suddenly they were facing a coup. The French were facing a quandary.

It is a tragedy because it has disrupted the political evolution of Ivory Coast, but it is almost comical in that it could so easily have been turned around. If Bédié had been even the least bit clever, he would have said: “Ok, guys, here’s \$20,000. Go have fun. That would have resolved it, but instead he condescendingly ordered them out of his palace. Then when they said, “We’re not going. You’re going.” He just took off for the French Embassy. It was incredible.

Once that process got started, the situation turned into a coup d’état. The soldiers were all sergeants and corporals. They thought they needed a known officer as a face for the new situation, so they called General Guéi and put him in charge. You notice in the first press interview that was done, every time a question was posed to General Guéi, he looked over his shoulder at the soldiers behind him before replying. General Guéi was unsure of his position and wanted to make sure that the soldiers were in total agreement. At that time he was not in control. Later on he got rid of those soldiers and that led to a second coup in 2002.

Let’s come back to the coup that occurred in 1999. There were regularly scheduled elections in the year 2000. General Guéi tried to control them and stopped the counting process and declared himself victor. The international community and Gbagbo, who was the only serious candidate that was allowed to run because others were disqualified including Ouattara, refused to accept that turn of events. Bédié was also disqualified from running. Guéi thought he could easily beat Gbagbo.

People took to the streets. Some were Gbagbo supporters, others just citizens who wanted to register their rejection of Guéi’s tactics. Guéi was not of strong character and caved in. It is interesting that the Supreme Court made a quick ruling and announced that Gbagbo won. I don’t think that the votes were ever counted. Some people have suggested that there were interesting discussions between Gbagbo and the head of the Constitutional Court.

There was a new paradigm in place and Gbagbo came to power. However, the international community did not think the elections were legitimate. Even President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa called for new elections in Ivory Coast. Gbagbo said: “No. We had elections. I am not the one who controlled the elections. I am not responsible for the fraud.” He was obviously involved in fraud to some degree but he said, “I didn’t control the elections. I am not responsible for the fraud. I am the president of the country. No new elections for five years.”

That immediately raised questions of legitimacy of the Gbagbo Administration. We still maintain sanctions on Ivory Coast based on the first coup of 1999. We did not accept the elections of 2000

as legitimate elections and therefore we did not lift the sanctions. That remained an element of contention in our relationship with the Gbagbo Administration.

Then in 2002 many of the same soldiers who had been involved in the coup in 1999 tried a coup again. It was the worst possible coup. There are generally three outcomes for coups. The first is to fail, in which case the coup is over. The results are generally not very good for the rebel leaders. The second option is to succeed, in which case the coup leaders come into power and there is a resolution, not for those in power but there is a resolution of the crisis. The worst situation is when you had a semi-successful coup. There is no resolution of the crisis, and power is divided between two warring factions. That is what happened in Cote d'Ivoire. Again, the French hesitated. The Ivory Coast was too important to let go down the drain, but President Chirac was not interested in saving Gbagbo's hide. Gbagbo never forgave Chirac for not intervening. Neither did the rebels, who claimed the French did interfere in the process, and without French intervention, they could have overthrown Gbagbo.

*Q: Cote d'Ivoire is the main foothold of France in Africa.*

HOOKS: Correct. And so the French hesitated. As a result, Cote d'Ivoire faced a semi-successful coup. Cote d'Ivoire is shaped roughly like this book, from the coast up to the north. The country was divided in the middle, which is also the fault line by and large between the Muslim part of the country and the southern Christian and Animist populations. Gbagbo controlled the southern part. He did not recognize the rebels and initially refused to negotiate with them. Who is the rebel leader? The rebels choose Guillaume Soro, the current prime minister. Who was Soro? He had been head of the FSCI student organization sponsored by Gbagbo at the university. Gbagbo had set up FSCI as an opposition movement to the official student organization, and one of the first heads of that organization was Soro. The former professor and his student protégée found themselves in opposite camps. Now they made up and were working closely together as president and prime minister. Bear in mind that political alliances in Cote d'Ivoire are generally very flexible as they are based on shared interests in a given situation, and as the situation changes, the coalition evolves.

This was the situation. The country was divided. We still have sanctions. Legitimacy was a major issue when I arrived there in 2004.

*Q: Before you went out to Cote d'Ivoire, did you talk to the French Embassy or did you stop in Paris to sort of see how they stood on things?*

HOOKS: I stopped in Paris for consultations. That is traditional when you go to a Francophone country except Kinshasa, in which case you go through Brussels. The new American ambassador traditionally stops in Paris to brief with the French because the French are in most cases the largest embassy on the ground and certainly the most influential in many respects, although that is changing. One of the problems in Cote d'Ivoire was the frosty relationship between Gbagbo and the French. The French did not have a coherent policy in Africa. Their policy was evolving, but it had not yet solidified. Gbagbo blamed the French for not stopping the coup d'etat. In fact, the French were in an impossible situation. Gbagbo blamed the French because, during the coup in 2002, the French hesitated instead of stopping the coup right away, and then they got

involved, which led the rebels to maintain that they could have taken over if the French hadn't interfered. So the French were the scapegoat for both sides.

When I arrived in Abidjan in August, 2004, that was the situation. Washington wanted me to work toward the reunification of the country and to bring the country to elections, which would reestablish legitimacy, put the country back on the rails and start the country moving forward. So that was the mandate I had.

*Q: Back to the picture when you were getting there. The French had had this very large expatriate community and troops. How stood these? Had they all gone to the southern side of the line or what?*

HOOKS: In most countries in Africa the capital is the largest city and the largest business center. Most of the French community was in Abidjan, although not exclusively. There were some who had been there for many generations, some were married to Ivorians, and there were a lot of small business people. They were all over the country. In fact there were over 9,000 when I arrived, much below the 20,000 plus in years immediately after independence. There was also a large Lebanese community.

I faced an interesting situation when I arrived in Abidjan in 2004. I knew that a government in trouble always wants to co-opt the American ambassador because we are the only superpower. We are also a P-5 country. There is always a desire to cozy up to the American ambassador in an effort to have a harmonious relationship with Washington. When I arrived, the cultural attaché was a unique woman. She was originally from Eritrea and spoke abysmal French, but she had gotten to know a lot of people in the government, including President and Mrs. Gbagbo.

*Q: Who was the culture attaché?*

HOOKS: Ergibe Boyd. She was in touch with President Gbagbo, who agreed to delay the next ceremony to receive credentials until I arrived. Every two or three months he would receive new ambassadors in batches of two to five. I arrived on a Thursday evening, and on Friday morning I had a 9 o'clock appointment to present my credentials to the Foreign Minister and at 11 o'clock to see the President. That's really unique. Sometimes you have to wait months. In fact, the Congolese ambassador had waited almost a year.

Until you present your credentials to the foreign minister you cannot be involved in activity outside the Embassy, and until you present credentials to the president you cannot be involved in too much official activity. You have to be very careful because countries are generally sensitive about protocol. If the American ambassador were to start meeting people before presenting credentials, it would be regarded as a slight to the government. You have to wait in your embassy and not do much other than deal with your own staff. I was very fortunate I was able to start working officially right away.

President Gbagbo received me very warmly. I know that he wanted co-opt me. Indeed, shortly after I got there one of his counselors came to see me. She wanted to know what my policy agenda looked like. I explained our policies, which was to foster conditions that would lead to

elections and the reunification of Cote d'Ivoire. I explained that there would be no major change during my time. I would continue more or less as my predecessor had done. There will be a difference in style, probably, but the substance would not change dramatically.

She said, "We did not like your predecessor. In fact she was very much in favor of the rebels." I remarked that I did not think that was the case. I think she simply had contacts with the rebels as all American ambassadors have contact with everybody. That's often an issue in countries with weak democratic traditions. I told her that I intended to have contact with the rebels. After all, I am ambassador to all of Cote d'Ivoire. I need to have contact with all these groups. I intend to do so. I want to work with this president. I want to help you get to elections, but I have to do it my way. I cannot do it your way because the only thing I have is credibility, and if I become seen as a Gbagbo supporter, I will have no credibility and therefore I would be useless. I think she was a little taken aback by that.

The president and I seemed to strike it off very well. I saw him quite regularly, at least once a month. About three months after I arrived in Abidjan, President Gbagbo decided that this business of having the country divided in half was simply unacceptable. His policy had been that the international community needed to disarm the rebels and that would solve the rebellion and the country would move on. I told him that the situation was not that simple. The international community was not going to send a military force to disarm the rebels.

Gbagbo was quite unhappy. He decided he had had enough of it. He decided to attack the rebels. He said, "I know you would never have approved of my action here, but I have decided this is what I need to do." I said, "Mr. President, you are absolutely right. If you had consulted me I would not have counseled and advised you to launch an attack against the rebels. In fact, just the opposite; I would have advised and counseled you not to attack the rebels because I think this is a disastrous decision and could have serious consequences."

He said, "You will see. In the next 24 hours it will be over. We're going up to Bouaké and we are going to get rid of this rebellion. Then they will sit down at the table."

I said, "Mr. President, I don't understand your strategy. You are bombarding the rebels now, and after you have bombarded them, you think that they are going to sit down at a table and negotiate an agreement?"

He said, "Yes."

I said, "Mr. President, that doesn't sound quite logical to me. When you start bombing areas, there is always the danger that you are going to bomb civilians." He quickly responded: "No, I gave very strict instructions. They are all military targets and no civilians will be hurt and this rebellion will be over in 24 hours."

I said, "Mr. President, my experience is somewhat different. I am not a military strategist, but I have been in this business for a long time. Murphy's Law has not been repealed here in Cote d'Ivoire as far as I know. Things can go wrong, they will go wrong. I think you have to be very careful."

We chatted for a while and he said, “You’ll see.” I said, “Well, I have no options at this point but to see, but I want to say I think it is really a serious mistake. I am really concerned about how it is going to evolve.”

Well, during the course of the day, flights were going out of Abidjan to Bouaké, the capital of the rebel-held area, to bomb the rebels. Early in the afternoon I got a phone call from the French Ambassador, who told me that Gbagbo’s planes had just bombed a French base in Bouaké. Some soldiers had been killed and one American citizen. There was an American who had just arrived two or three days before to work for an NGO, and when the bombing started, he took refuge at the French base. The American citizen and eight French soldiers were killed instantaneously, another soldier died later of his injuries.

The bombing of the French base changed the whole equation. The French maintained it was deliberate, that President Gbagbo wanted to get the French involved, one way or the other. The President, of course, maintained it was an accident. The French actually arrested the Ukrainian pilot flying the aircraft that bombed the base, but released him. The bombing occurred early in the afternoon.

I went to see the French ambassador in his office. That was about 2:30 or so. While we are talking about the possible fall-out from the bombing, President Gbagbo called the French ambassador, who told Gbagbo that I was in his office. Gbagbo wanted to see the two of us, and we agreed to meet the president at 4 o’clock.

We met at the president’s residence at 4 o’clock. I arrived first. The President and I started talking; the French ambassador arrived a few minutes later. This is where it really got interesting. Normally when I went to see the president. I would leave my phone in the car or I would shut my cell phone off. However, given the circumstances, I took it with me as did the French ambassador, and of course the president had his phone.

Then things begin to unravel completely. French President Chirac decided this was a deliberate attack by the Ivorian Air Force on the French military. Chirac ordered his troops to wipe out the Ivorian Air Force. The French military went to the airport and destroyed all the military aircraft except training aircraft and a couple of helicopters. They put explosives in the cockpits of the aircraft. Within a matter of minutes, the Ivorian Air Force existed only on paper; it had lost its small contingent of aircraft.

The Air Force is an institution of the state and this was occurring while we were in a meeting with the president. We each were receiving phone calls every few minutes, with updates of what was happening. The French ambassador was on the phone, the president was on the phone, I was on the phone, and we are talking in between telephone conversations and updating the others.

*Q: Who were you talking to? Were you talking to your embassy or were you talking with Washington?*

HOOKS: Mostly to my embassy but I don’t recall if I had a conversation with Washington right

at that particular point. I had already told Washington that I was going to see the president and to alert them to the fact that an American citizen had been killed. I don't recall getting a phone call from Washington at the time because I was so caught up with the French ambassador and the President.

While we were in the meeting, the French ambassador informed the President that the French military had just bombed the Air Force, something the President didn't want to hear at that time. The French Ambassador, -- and I thought this was very unusual -- made it very clear that Paris had not consulted him about the bombing. In fact, you should never say you have not been consulted. After all, it makes it appear you are not part of the process. He said that President Chirac had made the decisions himself.

President Gbagbo was very unhappy about this turn of events. Word was getting out on the street very quickly about what is going on. The president was very unhappy because the bombing came against the backdrop of French inaction in 2002 when the French did not fulfill their commitments within the frame of the defense agreement with Cote d'Ivoire. The President blamed the French for the mess that Cote d'Ivoire was in.

The French ambassador was trying to respond to Gbagbo by explaining what French official policy was. Now he was informing the President that France had just attacked the Air Force of Cote d'Ivoire. The situation was getting more serious by the minute. We moved a quantum leap here. The meeting went on for some time. The French Ambassador received another phone call, and he informed the President that French forces had taken over the airport. The military and civilian airports in Abidjan are side by side. The French now controlled both sides of the airport. The situation was escalating very rapidly.

President Gbagbo was also getting reports of what was going on. I was getting reports from our defense attaché and others. The situation were quickly escalating. I reminded the President that clearly things were getting out of hand. We needed to walk back from the situation and try to find a way to deescalate and to bring about some sort of ceasefire in terms of firing. The question now was whether the rebels would decide to march toward Abidjan? This was an open question because the rebels had not yet reacted to the attack of Government forces. The rebels had simply dug in their positions in Bouaké.

The government had also sent troops by land in the direction of Bouaké, but there were UN military along the way. One of the issues in the background was how the UN would react when faced with government troops. Would UN troops allow Government troops to pass or would the UN troops try to halt them? The UN troops were not in the position to do much; they didn't have enough troops along the way to deal with a serious confrontation. So this was also in the air at that time. The issue was also under discussion at UN headquarters in Abidjan. President Gbagbo still maintained that he could take Bouaké within 24 hours and the conflict would be over.

President Gbagbo was becoming more and more unhappy. The French ambassador was uncomfortable, to say the least. We agreed to bring the meeting to a close and to keep in touch throughout the evening as we tried to find a way out of the situation.

As we stood up the French ambassador said to me, “Don’t leave me here. Let me go first.” I said, “I understand” because we knew what would happen when we got outside, something that had happened to the French Ambassador once before.

The area in front of the entrance to the Presidential Palace is not very big, and there is very limited parking there. Normally, drivers drop off an ambassador and park beyond the guard house in another parking area. As soon as we arrived outside, my car pulled up, having been summoned by Presidential Protocol. I told Protocol that I would allow my French colleague to go first. Actually, he arrived in Abidjan two years before I did, so he did have precedence. Protocol insisted that I get in my car. They assured me that the French Ambassador’s car would be arriving shortly. I declined, and told Protocol that I would not leave until the French Ambassador left.

As we walked outside the palace, the President’s sister accosted the French Ambassador. She was very emotional. She proceeded to share her unhappiness with the Ambassador in very blunt French. No one said a word to me, but you can imagine the situation I faced. A crowd of soldiers was beginning to build up outside in the courtyard. They were making noises and showing signs of anger, although no one was saying a word to me except the Protocol representative who was trying to get me in my car.

The president’s sister was accompanied by several women. She was screaming at Ambassador Gildas Le Lidec. “How could you do this? You French” and all sorts of things about the ambassador personally and the French in general. I was on the sidelines listening. The French Ambassador was trying vainly to explain his side of the story, but no one wanted to hear it. They just wanted to vent their anger. The French ambassador’s car was no where in sight. The situation was building up in tension.

At some point, maybe about 15 minutes later, the Protocol representative informed us: “The President wants to see you again.” We went inside to see the President. As soon as we came into his office, he said to the French Ambassador, “I understand there is a problem with your car.” The French ambassador said, “Yes, they won’t let my car in.” At that point, President Gbagbo through up his hands and said: “You see, it has already started” and walked out of the room.

The president obviously wanted to get his dig in to the French ambassador, and he called the Ambassador back in to tell him as much. I was simply a witness to all this. We went back outside. My car was still there, waiting for me. The president’s sister was still there and she was getting more and more worked up.

Then the courtyard became packed with military. I would say 150 military filled the small space there. They were making comments and hand signs to express their anger. The president’s sister was continuing to yell and scream at the French ambassador. He was trying to calm her down. He was very uncomfortable. I think if I had not been there, the military would have lynched the French Ambassador, which would have created a disaster between France and Cote d’Ivoire.

Finally his car pulled up and he got inside. As he did so, the soldiers in the courtyard became more agitated. Then the guards opened up the gates and brought in an anti- aircraft gun, which

looks like a small cannon. I was right behind his car. I knew they were not going to fire on his car. It was pure intimidation. The military were yelling and banging on the French ambassador's car. From my perspective, it was like watching a movie, except that this was the real thing. No training at FSI ever prepared me for this sort of thing.

*Q: Did you really know the soldiers would not fire on the French Ambassador?*

HOOKS: I was fairly certain that they would not. This was pre-planned theater to intimidate the French Ambassador and to send a message to his Government. It was the desperate act of people who felt helpless in the face of superior force. I don't know what the French ambassador thought, although he told me later that he was sure they would have lynched him had I not been present. After a few minutes the soldiers pulled the anti-aircraft gun to the side to let the French Ambassador's car pass.

I might add at this point, just to set the stage, that we all had bodyguards. Mine were Ivorian, but his were French. The Ivorian military and forced his bodyguard to strip completely to humiliate him. When the Ivorians finally let the car into the courtyard, the poor body guard was still putting his clothes back on. He had gone through a complete body search.

We slowly pulled away from the president's palace under the eyes of soldiers spread around the street outside the palace. The French ambassador was in front with his flag, and I was behind with my flag. This had been a very harrowing experience for him, and one that left a deep imprint in my mind. I realized at the time that this could easily have led to a serious incident if they had lynched the French ambassador.

The French Ambassador was quite shaken up. We went to his residence which is very close by, literally right beside the Presidential Palace, with a tunnel under the street connecting the two. Meantime, both sides have welded the tunnel shut, as both have confirmed to me. The French ambassador's wife greeted us anxiously when we arrived. We did a quick analysis of the situation and of our meeting before I left. My Residence was only a few blocks away, and the roads were open, although there were many people milling around in the streets. I called the French Ambassador to let him know that the road in our area was open, and he decided to return to his embassy. He was almost lynched in the process because he stopped by soldiers and was barely able to talk his way out of a difficult situation.

In the meantime, people had taken to the streets, not only people who were supportive of Gbagbo, but also Ivorians who felt a sense of patriotism because the country had been attacked. The air force had been destroyed by the French and people were very angry. They felt humiliated. The crowds in the streets reached tens of thousands. By this time, it was already dark.

It is important to say that Abidjan is built on a lagoon and there are two bridges that go from the center of the city in the direction of the airport. The president's office and residence are on one side of the bridges, and the airport is on the other side. The French determined that they could not allow the crowds to move in the direction of the airport. That would lead to a confrontation with the French military, and they didn't want to end up killing a lot of Ivorians which would

further inflame the situation. Given the limited number of troops the French had in Abidjan at the time, they decided that the way to control the bridges was to have helicopters flying over them while firing automatic weapons continuously. They started about 9 o'clock that evening, and the helicopters kept circling overhead and firing automatic weapons all night long. It made a heck of a noise and kept the crowds at bay at one end of the bridge.

*Q: Were they firing at people?*

HOOKS: Not at people, but directly on the bridge because the people were at the other end of the bridge and the bullets popping on the bridge kept the people from coming across. Every time a bullet hit metal, it would spark and it would dig up part of the asphalt, but it held the crowds back. This went on from about 9 o'clock at night until early the next morning. I couldn't sleep that night because of all that was going on, plus there were phone calls constantly.

At that point the situation had clearly deteriorated and we started evacuating. Washington, of course, always wants to reduce the Embassy footprint very quickly. Clearly the situation in the streets was becoming very dangerous. Looters were attacking houses or businesses belonging to the French, and the French decided they needed to evacuate their citizens under military escort. A number of French were attacked; a number of women were raped, probably by Ivorian military. They didn't kill the French, but they attacked the women. This created more panic and hastened the evacuation. Within five days the French evacuated 9,000 people on special flights that they organized. They controlled the airport, after all.

The French were sending military escorts around town to pick up people and take them to the airport. Washington, of course, got very excited about the French evacuation. One of the things you learn, as I mentioned earlier, is that you have to be responsive to Washington, and you have to tell them why you are not just closing down the embassy right away. The first thing you do is send out minor dependents, followed by all dependents. We then moved to evacuating non-essential personnel within the Embassy. As I mentioned earlier, sometimes spouses are working and actually in those circumstances you need those spouses more than you need some employees of your embassy because certain activities have stopped, such as cultural activities. We were not issuing visas anymore, but we needed consuls to help evacuate people. I had one situation where two spouses were working and I really needed them, but I had to make a decision, I knew if I kept those dependents at post, the staff that I declared non-essential and evacuated would be resentful. How can you let her stay when she's a spouse and I am an employee? You get serious problems of morale. I made the decision that all dependents had to go, regardless of how badly I needed their services.

I decided not to ask Washington for an aircraft to evacuate people because Washington's aircraft is a onetime deal, and everybody goes at one time and that's it. That does not always reflect the reality on the ground. The Germans, the Italians, the Spanish and the French sent special planes to evacuate their citizens. The Germans and the Italians, particularly the Italians, gave us seats on their aircraft. They were doing training missions basically. This was training for them in addition to evacuating their few citizens. They were flying into Abidjan everyday and flying people to Accra, Ghana. Generally they had extra seats, which they allowed us to fill. Each day they told us the number of seats they could make available to us.

One of the things you learn about American communities overseas is how diverse they are. The missionaries have sometimes been there for generations; some of our business people just arrived over the weekend. Some know the country, some don't. Some people want to leave right away and some don't. Some people demand immediate evacuation when there is violence in their area. Once the violence subsides, they decide that they will stay and weather the storm. If violence breaks out later in their area, they call the Embassy in a panic. Some people ask the Embassy to pick them up, and when the Embassy convoy gets to their house, they announce that they have changed their mind. That's very frustrating when you are trying to respond to the needs of many people with very limited resources. We didn't have a large American community, but we evacuated 444 people, if I recall. We sent Embassy cars flying the American flag. We didn't have a military escort. While maintaining solidarity with the French in an overall political sense, we didn't want to associate the French with our evacuation on the ground because of the animosity towards the French. A French military escort would have been more of a liability than an asset under those circumstances. An Embassy car with the American flag was sufficient to get through roadblocks. Each day there was a trickle of people wanting to leave.

*Q: What kind of Americans did we have there?*

HOOKS: We had missionaries, business people, people married to Ivorians, and people working for various international organizations.

*Q: Did they feel threatened? Were they willing to go?*

HOOKS: As I was just saying, some people want to leave right away. Some people felt that they had lived in the country a long time and felt comfortable in staying. Not everybody evacuated ultimately. One of the most difficult situations to deal with are children of Ivorians born in the United States and therefore American citizens, but who are living with their grandparents in Cote d'Ivoire. When we had town hall meetings for American citizens, we divided the agenda into two parts. The citizens were all combined into one meeting, but the first part of the agenda was in English aimed at Americans who grew up in America for the most part. The second half was in French and aimed at the relatives of the US citizen children who oftentimes didn't speak English and who had a misconception of what an evacuation is. An American evacuation for the most part is to move people out of harm's way. So moving people to Accra is out of harm's way.

Relatives often had the idea that we were evacuating people to the continental United States where the US Government provided housing as not all of them had relatives in the United States. We had to explain at every town hall meeting that the US Government did not provide housing. Furthermore, we could not evacuate a minor child without an adult accompanying the child, but the accompanying adult must have a US visa. And generally the 25 year old unemployed cousin would not be able to qualify for a visa during an evacuation, although clearly it makes more sense for the family to send an unemployed cousin to accompany a child than the major breadwinner in the family.

We were evacuating members of the American community -- the business community, missionaries and others -- at the rate of 30, 40, 50, a day and finding seats for them on the various

aircraft. This approach worked perfectly because it gave us flexibility in dealing with citizens who changed their minds almost on a daily basis. We never had anyone at the airport that wanted to leave that we could not find a seat for. We were left with a very small community that remained behind. Very few of the Ivorian children who held American passports were evacuated.

We were living in a very tense situation as violence took over the streets. I might say that President Gbagbo and his group had always been associated somewhat with violence. After the attempted coup of 2002, the Young Patriots, Gbagbo supporters lead by former members of the FSCI student organization, took over the streets. They took over the radio station; they began to loot systematically the homes of ministers of the opposition and French-owned businesses and homes.

We were under tremendous pressure from Washington to reduce our footprint even faster than we were. I had to provide a very convincing evacuation plan to Washington explaining why we were evacuating certain people and not other people. I had gone through this in Brazzaville. I cannot evacuate consuls until I evacuate the American community. I need the defense attaché here in the meantime and I need the DCM and the communicators and so on. We were reducing our staff, but Washington was relentless in putting pressure on me to evacuate even more. I was asked what about this and what about that. I said, "Nope, I need this person for the following reasons."

A lot depends on how much confidence Washington has in you. If Washington has a lot of confidence in you, you get to call the shots as long as you convince Washington you know what you are doing. However, if the Department loses confidence in you, the decision-making authority moves to Washington and they make decisions, not you. As long as you keep your embassy open, you control it. The minute you close your embassy, you no longer control it. I had gone through that in Brazzaville. Our Embassy in Abidjan was still under construction. We hadn't moved into it yet, and we wanted to continue construction. We only lost one work day during this time. I kept this building going during the whole conflict because I knew if we closed everything down, it would be looted even though we were not targeted politically. We were able to move around the city with the American flag because we were not targeted. This is one of the things you have to bear in mind; when you are in a conflict area in any part of the world, you have to look at it in context. You know the situation on a particular street: you may have heavy fighting and shooting in the morning at 9 o'clock. At 3 o'clock in the afternoon you can take a stroll on that street. In this case the French were being targeted, we were not. As long as people were able to identify us, we were not being targeted. We could get through street blockades on the strength of the American flag.

But as the conflict moves along, tempers rise, people get tired, hungry, angry and panicky. The security situation begins to deteriorate, so even though we were somewhat secure initially, that level of security began to erode.

We evacuated over half the personnel at the embassy, which is always a tragedy because an evacuation is open ended. You leave post until conditions are appropriate for you to return. That could be days, weeks, months or never. When you are back in Washington, particularly if you have children, do you put them in school for a week, for a month or do you go back to Ohio

where you are from and leave your kids there with the grandparents, assuming you have such an option? In Washington, do you take a lease or stay in a hotel? In Washington, the Department gives you 30 days in a hotel. Thereafter the per diem drops dramatically and you can't afford a hotel, so you have to find an apartment or something. Then 30 days later Washington says, "OK, now you are going back to post" so you have to break the lease. Every evacuee faces many difficult decisions.

Once people return to post, a new set of problems arises. Unfortunately, your staff is now divided into two groups: the indispensable who stayed throughout the crisis, and the dispensable who were sent back to Washington. People are offended, it hurts. When they come back to post, you have a serious morale problem. The problem is only resolved through time as people are reassigned and new people who have no association with the evacuation arrive at Post.

To continue with the story of this conflict, the streets were becoming very dangerous and there were roadblocks all over town. In fact, on any major thoroughfare, there was a roadblock every few blocks. Any French citizen was in great danger.

I recall the times the president wanted to see me at the height of the crisis. The first time I went to see him, it was really like a movie. By this point there were probably 10,000 Gbagbo supporters around the Palace. My house was not too far from the Presidential Palace, but I was not on the same street, fortunately. Some of the people wandered over to my area, but the main force was a few blocks away. To get to his house, I had to get through a crowd of 10,000 people, mostly young people.

In Abidjan I had four body guards, all of whom had previously worked at the Presidency. I had an armored car, with a second car following behind. I arrived in the black Cadillac with flags flying. It was just like one of those movies you've seen with Clint Eastwood. As we rolled through the crowd, it was like the Red Sea parting. I could see the movie, the Ten Commandments, in my mind. The young people were waving at me, and yelling, America, America, America. The guards had to keep pushing the people away from the car. It was like a movie set. It was incredible.

The President wanted to vent about the crisis, and it was fascinating listening to him. He was particularly unhappy with the French. I tried to persuade him that confrontation with the French would only aggravate an already bad situation. He had greatly inflated expectations of what the international community would do. He insisted that the UN forces should stop the rebellion and disarm the rebels. The UN was there but did not have a mandate to do this. For him, the solution was just that simple: disarm the rebels. He had no plans beyond that for reconciliation, power-sharing, or economic development.

I went to see him several times during this period of time. The crowds around the Palace began to diminish, but even for weeks they were still hundreds of people milling around the Palace. Each trip to the Palace was an experience, but never quite as dramatic as the first one.

The situation in the streets continued to deteriorate. It was basically people power as Gbagbo supporters took over the streets. When they saw a white foreigner, they did not know whether he

was French or American, and they did not always ask to see the passport. They were sometimes hostile and began to make demands: I need water, I need money and so on. That is quite intimidating.

Periodically thereafter, whenever there was a political crisis, the president would send his Young Patriots into the streets to play the role of thugs. This became a very dangerous situation each time it occurred. It occurred regularly every few months thereafter. They frequently took over the radio station to broadcast ugly propaganda. Gbagbo tried to deny that he was behind it. He referred to it as the will of the people.

The president tends to downplay a situation when he is uncomfortable with questions, or he tries to dismiss it as not being important. Gbagbo frequently said, "They are just supporting me, I had nothing to do with all that." I would reply to him: "Mr. President, you and I have a relationship. You know that I know that you organized them and you financed them." He insisted: "No, no." I would not let him off the hook: "Mr. President, we are having a serious discussion here. You have to face the facts. I know that the presidency pays these people, and you can leave them in the streets or you can send them home. You allowed them to take over the state radio; that's really pushing your luck. That's beyond the pale, and having them loot systematically the homes of the opposition and the opposition newspapers is unacceptable." Gbagbo replied that the people were angry. I pointed out to him that systematic looting of selective targets suggests a degree of organization that leads back to the presidency, and that was not a good image for him.

I could talk quite frankly with President Gbagbo when we were alone. I had a good relationship with him. I could tell him quite directly that I knew that the Presidency was not only organizing but also financing the street activity. Later on I told him they were armed, with weapons from the Presidency, something which he denied.

Months later we got into the business of disarming these groups. His groups also wanted to be disarmed. I could not resist the temptation to poke him a bit, and I said, "Mr. President, how can you disarm people who are not armed?" He said, "Well, they have also fought for the country. They are entitled to the benefits of disarmament."

I had a good relationship with President Gbagbo the whole time I was there. I still see him when I go back to Abidjan in a private capacity, and I have been back several times since I left the Embassy in 2007.

Let's look at some of the issues on Washington's agenda. The first of these was elections. Washington was very eager to move quickly toward elections. I think there were unrealistic expectations built up in Washington as to how quickly you can move to elections. I knew when I arrived in 2004 they would not occur in 2005 when they were scheduled to occur or even in 2006. When I left I felt they would not occur in 2007 or 2008, probably not until 2009 or 2010. What I found to be unrealistic in Washington's position was the adamant insistence that the Gbagbo regime go to elections in a short timeframe. Elections are oftentimes seen as the end all. Elections are very important. They help to re-establish legitimacy, although they can tear a country apart if elections are not credible. Policy makers in Washington frequently make the mistake of insisting that elections be organized in the wake of severe political turmoil. There

frequently must be a healing process, and political leaders have to reestablish working relationships in order to have elections. I think there was a somewhat unrealistic expectation coupled with the fact of course that Washington was not prepared to invest any money, or very little money, in elections. The European Union finances in a big way -- several millions of Euro - - but we were unprepared to do so. I felt that I had to keep reminding Washington that we simply can't rush Cote d'Ivoire to elections.

The whole question of who votes now is an issue in the Ivory Coast. It comes back to the business of who is Ivorian and who isn't. It is a unique country in that sense.

The second issue I want to raise has to do with consultants and lobbyists. Many countries in Africa feel they have to have consultants in Washington in order to get Washington's attention. One of the problems in Washington is that there are different consultants who are all working for Cote d'Ivoire. I had several discussions with President Gbagbo about this problem. When Assistant Secretary Jendayi Frazer came to Abidjan, I suggested she raise this issue with President Gbagbo. She was quite blunt with him. She said, "You know, I don't know who speaks for you. I have this parade of people in my office, all claiming to speak for you and I don't know who does. So who speaks for you?" He said, "We will solve that problem."

She made it very clear to President Gbagbo that it was very difficult to know who spoke for him. Unfortunately, the problem continued the whole time I was in Abidjan. President Gbagbo sent to Washington the same advisor who came to see me originally to let me know she had been very unhappy with my predecessor. She wasted hundreds of thousands of dollars hiring first one lobbying group and then another. I tried to explain to the president many times that substance is more important than form. It is important the way you package your message, but you've got to have something to package, and until you have elections, legitimate elections, our sanctions remain in place. There is a congressional mandate and we can't change that. To improve your business climate, we've got to get to elections, and you've got to stop the riots in the streets. Take your Young Patriots out of the street.

Let me relate another incident which shows how the Presidency worked. I was away on appointments late on a Wednesday afternoon when the Presidency delivered a diplomatic note informing me that the President was arriving in Washington on Saturday. My secretary gave it to me on Thursday morning when I came into the office. I looked at the note and I thought that this was insane. The President is heading off to Washington tomorrow, arriving in Washington on Saturday.

I called Ambassador Adou, the head of protocol at the Presidency, and said, "I received a diplomatic note this morning informing me that the President is traveling to Washington, leaving tomorrow. It has your signature." He said, "Yes, yes." I said, "That's very interesting, Mr. Ambassador. I have been in this business for thirty-five years at this point. I have never seen a situation where the American Embassy is informed only 48 hours before the arrival of the president or the head of state in Washington, DC. There are practical implications to the arrival of a head of state in Washington. Normally security is provided by the Secret Service. The Secret Service is not on standby to provide security for President Gbagbo. They knew nothing about his arrival. They may have other obligations and we can't just program it at the last minute. State

Department Protocol normally meets heads of state when they arrive at Andrews Air Force Base. Protocol can't be arranged in a matter of minutes. Does President Gbagbo have a meeting with the President of the United States?" Ambassador Adou replied: "No, but that is being worked on." One of the President's advisors (Otto-Toure) who spoke English was already in Washington working with lobbyists to arrange a meeting with the White House.

I said, "I really am astonished. Normally the third element is that an American ambassador always accompanies the head of state in the country. Should a problem arise, do you think the police in Baltimore know where Cote d'Ivoire is, much less who President Gbagbo is? You have to have someone there who can say, I am with the State Department, here is my ID. This is the head of state of a foreign country. Plus you do it as a courtesy. I said, "I am not leaving Abidjan this evening." I cannot take responsibility for the President's visit if I have had no input and I have absolutely no details about it." Ambassador Adou told me: "Well, we are very sorry but the President has just made the decision to travel." I remarked: "Well, I seriously doubt it, Mr. Ambassador, that the president woke up one morning and decided he was going to fly off to the United States."

Ambassador Adou then said something that completely contradicted his last statement: "Well, Mme. Otto-Toure is in Washington, and she has made some meetings." Surprised by this piece of news, I could not help asking the question: "Oh, so she has arranged all these things? At any rate, since I don't have an itinerary, I cannot inform the State Department of details of President Gbagbo's arrival. Saturday is now only 48 hours away."

I knew Ambassador Adou very well, so I could be slightly testy with him to let him know that President Gbagbo's visit was off to a bad start, and Mme. Otto-Toure was incompetent and did not know how to organize presidential visits to the United States. I said, "I really need an itinerary. That would be a start." He said, "I'll get it to you right away." Right away meant it arrived at the Embassy late Thursday afternoon. Obviously, I had already informed Washington that this visit was in the works. I told the desk I would provide details as I received them. In the meantime, when I finally received the itinerary from the head of Protocol late Thursday afternoon, it was different from the one which their Ambassador in Washington provided to the State Department. We went from no itinerary to two different official itineraries.

I forwarded the itinerary to the State Department and ultimately we were able to get Secret Service protection and State Department protocol arranged to meet President Gbagbo at the airport. I told the State Department I did not plan to travel to Washington on such short notice. I would have had to leave on Thursday evening to get to Washington on Friday in order to attend the meet and greet on Saturday. I could not accept responsibility for a program that I had not worked on. I had no idea what the schedule looked like. Normally the ambassador is involved in coordinating the program and setting up meetings in order to avoid conflicts. Foreigners sometimes forget the distances here in the United States. You can't have a 9 o'clock appointment with the President in Washington and an appointment two hours later in California. It doesn't work very well. People from small countries do not always keep these practical considerations in mind.

As soon as President Gbagbo arrived, the lobbyists started calling me. There were two different

consulting groups working on the visit, which resulted in different programs. They were frantically calling me and blaming each other for the confusion surrounding the visit. One lobbyist was absolutely adamant that I had to go to Washington. She said that President Bush would not receive President Gbagbo unless I, the American ambassador, was there.” I told her that she was absolutely right, but I was not traveling because President Bush would not be receiving President Gbagbo. The White House receives a set number of heads of state every year. You can imagine many heads of state want to travel to Washington. From Africa he receives four or five a year, and the President will not receive a head of state right before election time. The timing of this visit was just before elections scheduled for 2005, so that also worked against a White House visit for President Gbagbo. I knew that there was no point in my going to Washington.

The consultants were very upset with me. They are like lawyers; they are paid to present a case. The Embassy, however, is supposed to be neutral and present a case as the Ambassador sees it there and not as it necessarily flatters the host President. Oftentimes consultants would complain that I had not supported President Gbagbo on this and that point. I had to remind people in Washington sometimes that my role was not to support President Gbagbo. My role was to analyze the situation as I saw it. In fact, while I was advocating a policy of moving to elections, it would have been counter-productive for me to identify with the presidential camp; it would have undermined whatever credibility I had with other groups.

Another point I want to raise which I think was important concerns the gap between policy and resources. Washington was unwilling to invest politically in Cote d’Ivoire. I understand that to a large degree, given our strategic interests elsewhere, although we had significant business interests there. You know 40% of the world’s cocoa beans were produced there and several large American companies like Cargill were involved in the export of cocoa beans. We had a number of missionaries in country. However, I had few resources, and most of the resources we had came from the PEPFAR program which was the presidential initiative to fight against AIDS.

I tried to have a very high profile to hide the fact that I had no resources. I went to all sorts of ceremonies and I traveled all over the country. There is a road system in Ivory Coast, unlike Congo where I had to fly from city to city, so I could drive almost everywhere in the Ivory Coast.

In a divided country like Cote d’Ivoire, government authorities thought that if a foreign ambassador had contact with the rebels, he was sympathetic to the rebels. The rebels felt that all the ambassadors were sympathetic to the government since they were all located in Abidjan. We were always walking a fine line. As the American ambassador, my role was to maintain contact with everyone. After the conflict that I referred to earlier where the French destroyed the air force and took over the airport was over and the French gave the airport back to the Government, the various political groupings reached an agreement to form a national unity government in which the rebels participated. Prior to that time, if you traveled to rebel-held areas, Government authorities took that as a sign of sympathy for the rebels. I decided once all the political groups had formed a national unity government, we needed to do something to move the process forward. I decided to make a very high profile trip through the whole country. I decided to do it high profile in part to emphasize the fact that both Government-held territory and rebel-held

territory formed one country. In Cote d'Ivoire, the northern part is mostly Muslim, while the southern half is largely Christian. Government authorities often times questioned the identity and citizenship of the whole Muslim north. If a last name was Toure or Ouédraogo, names very common Burkina Faso, authorities sometimes considered the person a foreigner. Police at roadblocks intimidated people in order to get more money.

We had a very good press attaché, a young, first-tour officer. I decided the best way to get the news out was to tell people what you are going to tell them, then tell them, and then summarize what you have just told them. So we decided to call one of the better newspapers and leak the fact that I was traveling. It appeared in the press that the American ambassador was traveling up north. That hit the news wires.

Before that leak, however, I met with the President. I told him, "I am here to inform you that I am traveling to the north. The reason I am doing so is to emphasize that this is one country. I want to emphasize the unity of the country, the fact that the rebels are now part of the government. I am accredited to this country and I feel it is my role to know this country and therefore I intend to travel both in the south and in the north. I am not here to ask your permission. I am here to inform you so you are not surprised about it. I am sure you will hear about it, but here are my goals and objectives."

He said, "I understand." He told me some weeks afterwards, "I was very hesitant as to why you were going up there. I read all the newspapers that I don't normally read to find out what you were up to."

The next day I held a press conference in which we confirmed the rumor that I was going to the north. That created a buzz of excitement. We formed a caravan of three cars because, when you are traveling on the road, you need to take a backup car as there is no service station every few miles as there is here. There is no road help if your car breaks down, and the roads are pretty bad in some places. The defense attaché and the press attaché accompanied me on the trip. We went west where the roads were best and then we went into rebel-held territory. I was in touch with the rebel spokesperson regularly. The rebels were very happy to hear I was going to visit them. They wanted to make a big to do about my coming.

The first city in rebel-held territory that I visited was Man in the west. The rebels received me like a head of state almost, including reviewing of the troops and so forth. The rebel commandant, who introduced himself as Commandant Big, stuck to me the whole time. I knew they wanted to control my program but I had told them beforehand, "You cannot control my program. Yes, I will see you, but I will also see other people and no, you don't organize the program; I organize the program." They would like to have me meet for five hours with the rebel groups and have no time to meet with local populations because there had been horrific human rights violations in the areas they controlled.

In Man we had an incredible reception. The rebels sent a representative from rebel headquarters to accompany me on the trip because I was going north almost to the border with Mali before turning east to head towards rebel headquarters.

We went to one town, Touba, where we had to stop the cars because literally everyone in the town was in the streets. They were 10 to 15 deep on each side. About every 100 yards there was a local folk musical group, drums by and large, local dancers and singers. As I approached, the drumming and dancing became even more frenetic. It was well organized. I think everyone in town was there. It was absolutely incredible. It was more high profile than I anticipated. People in the area had not seen a high-level visitor in four or five years, so this was a big deal.

I met with local groups and local politicians without anyone from the rebels being present. These meetings gave me a sense of what living conditions were like, what sort of problems people were facing. Surprisingly, the primary concern of the people was not the rebels. Their primary concern was more prosaic in terms of water and school because the government in Abidjan refused to organize high school exams in the north. In Cote d'Ivoire, like in many countries, students have to complete the course work and pass a comprehensive exam in order to finish high school and receive a diploma (baccalaureate). The government had stopped organizing the bac in 2002, and I was there in 2006. Students could not graduate from high school. The schools were backing up because many students kept repeating their final year in hopes of taking the bac.

While I was traveling in the north, many of the international news services became aware of my visit and began to call me to find out what was going on. We got phone calls from BBC, the French press, Reuters and others. Normally when an ambassador travels, no one knows or cares. In this case in Cote d'Ivoire, because of the unique situation there, my travel was headline news in Abidjan and even got mention by the international news services. There was no one else who could have undertaken such a trip at that time. There was such animosity towards the French that the French Ambassador could not venture outside Abidjan. No other ambassador in Abidjan had the diplomatic weight to get attention. At the same time, I was taking serious political risk, because had I said the wrong thing, whichever side took offense would have jumped on my comments to discredit me. I thought often during this trip of the expression that success has many mothers and failure is an orphan. I don't take credit for the fact that the country moved in a positive direction while I was there. It could have gone the other direction. The one thing I do take credit for was having the courage to undertake this trip to the north and to do it in a very high profile way in order to break the taboo against travel to the north.

While in the north, I pushed the rebels hard to participate fully in the Government. Guillaume Soro, the head of the rebels, was a minister in the Government of National Unity, but he refused to travel to Abidjan to attend Cabinet meetings. I told them that they had to participate in a program of disarmament. They had to participate fully in the electoral process. They said all the right things, but they were very distrustful of President Gbagbo and rightfully so. He had just bombed them a few months earlier and his word didn't mean much.

Many people on both sides of the political spectrum told me afterwards that my trip to the north was a turning point in relations between the Government and the rebels. When I arrived back in Abidjan, I went to see President Gbagbo to brief him on the trip. One of the things I emphasized was education and the high school exam. He said, "Well, this is a security issue." I said, "Mr. President, could you explain to me how an American ambassador can travel all over the north as I have just done and you can't organize high school graduation exams? It makes no sense. It is not a security issue at all. It is a political decision. You and the government have made a decision

for the past few years not to organize these exams in order to try to make the population unhappy and create problems for the rebels. It hasn't worked. What it has done is make the population unhappy with you. Furthermore, if you want to emphasize the fact that you are really the legitimate government, organizing the bac is a way of emphasizing that point. If you are not careful, you are going to push the rebels into setting up state institutions."

The rebels had given little thought to a political agenda. Instead of setting up a government and carrying out the functions of government, they continued to function as a rebel group with no political institutions. I told President Gbagbo: "You are going to push the rebels to organize exams, and that is going to create a political problem for you. You need to maintain the monopoly of legitimacy and power. Organize the bac. Those kids will be grateful. They will vote. When you have elections, they will vote for you. They will remember that Gbagbo organized the bac and let them finish high school."

President Gbagbo sent the Minister of Education to see me. He raised the same issue of security. I told him the issue was not security. You can travel up north just as I have traveled up north. You are from the north. The next time I went up there, that minister went with me. In fact, he and I were sitting side by side at a ceremony in the north when he got a phone call and was summoned back to Abidjan. The next day his wife was sitting beside me at a ceremony and she leaned over and whispered to me: "My husband has just been named Minister of Defense."

I think I helped to break the ice to some extent. I do take some credit for that. Washington was curious but wary about this initiative. It was one of those things that if done well, it can work. So many things could have gone wrong. Had it gone wrong, people would have said, "How could you have been so foolish as to have done such a thing?"

I thought it was time to have someone try to make a statement, to break the taboo, particularly since a government in theory had been formed to open up the country a little bit more. I emphasized in my press conference when I came back the fact that whether you live in Abidjan or whether you live in Korhogo, you are Ivorian. And this is one country and I as the American ambassador was accredited to the whole country. I was accredited to the government but I fudged slightly. It worked in this case.

Afterwards Mme. Otto-Toure, the same lady I mentioned to you before, said to me just before I left Abidjan: "You know, I want to thank you for what you did for Cote d'Ivoire." Those around the President appreciated my gesture because it opened up the country and led to a formation of a broader government.

My point here is that sometimes you can make a difference in a country as the American ambassador because of the high profile that you have. You have to take risky decisions to do so, but you can sometimes make a difference. That is not always the case, but at critical moments in the history of a country you can make a difference.

*Q: Looking back on an interview I did maybe 20 years ago or more, Bill Crawford was our ambassador to Cyprus and there was the green line and he insisted he would travel across the green line to go into the Turkish side and the Greeks hated this openness.*

*I'd like you to talk a little about the French decision to take out the Ivorian air force. That was a decision made in Paris without consultation with the French ambassador which put thousands of people at risk. It is one of those things how these decisions made to be tough and for political reasons in the capital can have horrendous consequences if you've got people on the ground.*

*Also I would like you to talk a bit about, you mentioned the human rights violations in the north and maybe in the south too. And also your estimate of the Ivorian military force and were there problems with Muslim extremists there?*

HOOKS: This has to do with the whole question of who was Ivorian and the impact on politics and the fabric of society which has been torn in Cote d'Ivoire. One of the lessons you learn from this is that human accidents can change the course of history for a country. The young military had no intention of planning a coup. They were simply unhappy at not having been paid. President Bédié's drunken reaction caused the situation to unravel and led to a coup which took Ivory Coast off the path it was on and put it onto the wrong path.

It is interesting how events in small countries in Africa that the President of the United States has never heard of suddenly grab his attention, whether it is Somalia and the issue of sea piracy or a coup in Cote d'Ivoire. Once the crisis becomes a new political reality, the country recedes into the media background. President Chirac's decision to bomb the Air Force of Cote d'Ivoire based on his personal dislike of President Gbagbo and the fact that he felt that Gbagbo had deliberately bombed his French soldiers had immediate consequences, and the long term consequences will overshadow French-Cote d'Ivoire relations for years.

It is interesting when you are on the ground and an actor in events. I oftentimes thought, based on my experiences in Africa and elsewhere, that when you come in the Foreign Service, you never know what sort of career you are going to have. I think we feel very insular in the United States and very protected, although as we saw in Oklahoma and in New York, we are not immune to acts of terrorism, whether it is homegrown or whether it is directed from outside the United States. I think this is becoming a reality that more Americans are now beginning to realize.

But when you go into the Foreign Service and travel to different countries, you never know what situation you are going to end up in. Being an eye witness to the military coup in Turkey and the Gulf War in Israel were not events that my university and Foreign Service training had fully prepared me for.

I recall a Foreign Service colleague that I worked with in Turkey. He had been part of the CORDS program in Vietnam. For a period of time in the '60s every male member of the Foreign Service was required to go to Vietnam; not the women but the men. This guy had been up stationed in a province in the north, not near the front lines but in some region outside of Saigon. His area was attacked by rockets, one of which landed on his house. He said that he was in bed at the time of the attack, and when he came to after the event, he was under his bed, flipped upside down. He said his first reaction was, "This can't happen to me. I am a Foreign Service officer." It is funny how your mind plays tricks on you when you are in a situation like that. He was unhurt,

fortunately.

I oftentimes felt when I lived in Africa and elsewhere that I was a witness or a participator in history. It was a fascinating experience. It is always more fascinating when you can talk about it afterwards, which I obviously lived to do, but these events make for a fascinating career. Sometimes you are faced with life and death issues. You find yourself making decisions you thought you would never have to make. I am sure that the stories of Foreign Service officers will be useful for historians.

*Q: These stories, I feel are both history and lessons to be learned. You were in the Ivory Coast from when to when?*

HOOKS: I was in the Ivory Coast from 2004 until 2007.

*Q: OK, so this was a rather stressful time. We discussed the situation up to the time you were evacuating dependents.*

HOOKS: We evacuated all dependents and a good part of the staff.

*Q: I think of the Ivory Coast as having a line drawn through it during this time. Rebels up to the north and the government people to the south or something. Was that what happened? What was the situation?*

HOOKS: When it comes to politics in Africa, the lines are rarely if ever clear. That said, when I arrived in Abidjan in August, 2004 there was a line halfway across the country, horizontally, dividing the north from the south. Yet this line was not as clear-cut as perhaps you might think, although it did follow more or less along the fault lines between the Muslim north and the Christian-animist south. Guillaume Soro was the head of the rebel movement. He did not start it per se. It was basically Commandant Wattao and his fellow sergeants who were behind the coup in 1999. They called upon Soro to be the political head of the movement and he was able more or less to establish his authority over the rebel movement.

Who was Soro? Soro had been the head of the FSCI student association of the FPI, which was President Gbagbo's political party. When President Gbagbo was a professor at the university, he had been the sponsor of this youth organization. Soro was his protégé. Who was head of the 'Young Patriots', the young people loyal to the President who were the thugs in the streets? Charles Blé Goudé. Blé Goudé had been Soro's assistant when he helped Soro run the FSCI, and he later became Soro's successor as the head of the FSCI. So in some respects the conflict in Cote d'Ivoire was an internal FPI quarrel, over power, of course, and access to resources. Today Gbagbo is President of the country and Soro is Prime Minister. And so you see, there is a bit of an incestuous relationship there. It means that the lines are not quite as firm as they may look from the outside, but when you begin to do an analysis of the situation and who the leading actors are, you see that Soro was a protégé of President Gbagbo in the past and is a protégé today, and the two of them are running the country and do not seem to be in very much of a hurry to get to elections.

*Q: When you get right down to it, maybe these were internal quarrels and all, but if you are running an embassy and trying to run relations with the country and people are shooting, you've got to figure out where you want to be. I mean either one side of the line or the other side of the line or just plain out of the country.*

HOOKS: I was really walking a tightrope in Ivory Coast. I had contacts with all the parties. If you had contacts with the rebels, Government authorities did not view that very favorably and felt that you were disloyal. The average citizen was in a very dangerous situation. For diplomats, it was dangerous in the sense that Government authorities would be very unhappy and express that unhappiness. I was fortunate as the American ambassador as the situation evolved because I had contact with the rebels from the very beginning, mostly by telephone.

Soro was a minister, minister of state as a matter of fact, and number three in the Government of National Reconciliation, yet he did not come to Abidjan to run his ministry. The government did not function very well. In theory at least it was a government of national reconciliation. I think I referred last time to the fact that I traveled to the north and did a highly publicized trip to the north to emphasize the unity of the country, the fact that Ivory Coast was one, the fact that all the citizens were Ivorians. I was able to do so by capitalizing on the fact that there had been some evolution in the political process.

But that said, it is always very important whenever you are in a country of conflict to establish your role as the American ambassador. You have to make it very clear from the beginning that you as the American ambassador will have contacts with all parties involved in the conflict. That's absolutely important. That's what American ambassadors do. Don't let the government define your role. As I mentioned earlier, the President's counselor (Mme. Otto-Toure) came to see me to let me know that the President was very unhappy with my predecessor. She wanted me in the president's camp, and I had to make it very clear to her that I would not be in the president's camp. I wanted to work with him to move the process forward. You cannot be in the President's camp just like you cannot be in the rebels' camp. As the American ambassador you often can't make your judgments based on virtue and justice; who is right and who is wrong, because oftentimes it is hard to figure out who the good guys are and who is right and who is wrong.

What you have to deal with is the political reality on the ground and what you really want to do is move that country toward a better situation, better being fewer violations of human rights and a more legitimate political process. Oftentimes that is defined through elections that are more or less credible in the local context. These would not be credible elections in Sweden or Iceland but credible in the local context. Governments frequently are reluctant to have contact with rebel groups for fear that the contact will somehow confer legitimacy on those groups.

*Q: But there are times when there are strong rebel forces opposed to a government which we recognize and that gets very tricky in terms of contacts. We were under the strictest of instructions for example not to talk to the PLO, dealing with Palestine Israel. This came essentially from the president. This goes against everything you are saying.*

HOOKS: I think we moved away from that policy, didn't we? As the PLO evolved, I think the

policy was probably one that was questioned from the very beginning. That was our policy; we had to abide by the law, but I think it was based on politics and not really on a broader perspective of diplomacy. It was supportive of Israel and it must be seen in that context and not in terms of how you really should carry out diplomacy. Our experience with the PLO was unique because of our special relationship with Israel and our policy must be seen in that prism. One of the things President Obama got a lot of heat for during the campaign was his position that we need to be talking to people who are our enemies. You don't make peace with your friends; you make peace with your enemies. I think you need to have those contacts. After all, what are you really trying to do? You are trying to influence behavior, and ignoring rebel groups who occupy a huge part of the country is in my view not the way to influence their behavior.

Now having contacts with them doesn't mean you recognize them or confer any legitimacy upon them. It is that you realize it is a reality. Looking here in an African context, we recognize the government of Zimbabwe and we have an ambassador there, we have an embassy, we have contact with that government and yet that government has little legitimacy. They stole elections as we know from the experience of the past several elections. We have legislation against coups outside the government but we don't have legislation that deals with coups by the government, in which governments seize power in a sense by stealing elections. If you work in Africa, that's a problem. I have always felt that this is a serious gap in our policies.

We also put ourselves in a difficult position sometimes by announcing that we will not recognize the legitimacy of a government, only to find that the reality on the ground is that that government controls the country. Ultimately, we have to come to terms with it. For instance, we did not recognize the legitimacy of the Gbagbo election in 2000, but we have to work with that government. We accredit ambassadors to that government. I was accredited to that government as well as my predecessor; we just have to deal with reality.

*Q: During the time you were in the Ivory Coast, particularly France but some of the other countries that may have had some interests there, or embassies there, what were they doing and were we working divergently?*

HOOKS: We talked about Congo earlier. I mentioned there were three important embassies that had high profiles and were very involved: the Belgians for historic reasons, the French because they also have had a strong position in Africa, and the United States. Other countries had very low profiles. The Chinese as I mentioned really did not want to engage in any public way. The Russians engaged only marginally so and generally in the context of the P-5. So only three embassies were very active.

In the case of the Ivory Coast, there were only two important embassies: the French and the United States: The French for historic reasons, the United States because of our superpower position.

On certain issues of course, other embassies were engaged. For instance, the embassy of Burkina Faso in Abidjan played a role, although not really because the political issues were dealt with primarily by the president of Burkina Faso directly. The Burkina Embassy in Abidjan was a very small embassy and the ambassador was never seen in public and never spoke on political issues.

He largely provided logistical support for his president.

What was the relationship between the United States and the French embassy? I think it was a very close relationship. When I arrived in Abidjan, the French ambassador was Gildas Le Lidec, who had been the French ambassador in Kinshasa when I arrived there in 2001. He left there after one year and I subsequently followed him to Abidjan.

*Q: We did talk about you being in the president's office with the French ambassador. As things developed farther along, you had both gone through a very rough patch. How did that play out while you were there? The French American relationship.*

HOOKS: We worked very closely together. We had a very cordial relationship, as I did with his successor. I think I mentioned one of the problems at that particular time in Africa was the fact that French policy was evolving but had not yet solidified. The French no longer wanted to play the role of gendarme, and they were wavering back and forth. They had played the gendarme in Bangui. They decided in Brazzaville, Congo that they no longer wanted to play that role, so they withdrew and told the parties to resolve the issue on their own.

Ivory Coast was bigger, the French had more at stake there, and they were wavering. In 1999 when Bédié fled through the tunnel to the French ambassador's house, the French ambassador didn't call French troops from the base there and tell them to throw the sergeants out of the presidential palace and put Bédié back in. They could have very easily, but they didn't do it because they did not have a clear policy. The French were wavering. Then they decided there was really too much at stake, so in 2002 when there was another coup attempt, they did intervene, but again, on a very hesitant basis. President Gbagbo accused the French of not fulfilling the terms of the defense agreement and therefore favoring the rebels, and the rebels accused the French of interfering and stopping them from seizing power. Both sides blamed the French.

The French were in a difficult position. French bashing was very popular. That was certainly the case after the events of November, 2004, when the government bombed the French base, killed nine French soldiers and one American civilian and the French retaliated. I think we covered this issue last time. This was a very low point in French-Ivorian relations and the French therefore were in a very difficult position.

This led also to a continuing evolution in the relationship of the government of the Ivory Coast and the United States. The Government had two motivations; one negative and one positive. The positive is due to a genuine fascination with the United States and admiration for American culture. American movies and music are becoming part of the local scene. At the same time, particularly on the part of the government, there was a desire to flirt with the United States to make the French jealous. That was a negative phenomenon, one that I tried to discourage, as a matter of fact. I didn't think it was healthy for us or for the French.

*Q: It is not healthy because you are playing their game.*

HOOKS: That's right and it was not healthy for anyone. I tried to discourage that. I recall a very

uncomfortable dinner I attended, with a minister on my left side and his French wife on my right side. She engaged in what I thought was the ugliest French bashing that I have ever heard. Her comments reflected more on her than on French policy.

*Q: She was bashing France?*

HOOKS: Right, yes. And she herself was French. This was in the wake of the events of November 2004, and I think it was an effort to show that she may have been French by origin but her heart was fully Ivorian. I did not want to be rude to her, but at the same time I did not want to give the impression to anyone listening that I was encouraging her in this virulent, anti-French attitude she had. I really did not want to engage her in conversation. I was not about to take a side in the quarrel that was going on.

I had to walk a tightrope, one in which I did not want to appear overly pro-French or anti-French. I frequently suggested to a French basher that they needed to address the French ambassador, not me. I pointed out that France and the United States were allies. The United States was not trying to take the place of France in Africa. Cote d'Ivoire should have multiple trading partners. The French have traditional ties that we don't have and will continue to have them.

With the French ambassador, I had very close ties. We met frequently. We compared notes and certain analyses. I certainly didn't give everything I had and I am sure the French didn't give everything they had, but I found our contacts to be very useful. They still had a very heavy net spread across that country, whether it was French missionaries or French citizens or Ivorians sympathetic to the French cause. After all, many Ivorians had dual nationality, so they could be very helpful in sharing information, and I found that to be useful.

*Q: Did you find, going back to the French wife, that the French and the French sympathizers in Ivory Coast must have felt almost let down or betrayed by the French government with the taking out of the air force and all that, although it had been provoked but often a provocation doesn't register when they see particularly the horrendous aftermath of the reprisal.*

HOOKS: That's absolutely true. I think I mentioned that people took to the streets, not because they were necessarily pro-Gbagbo. Some of them in fact were anti-Gbagbo. It is just that they felt wounded in their pride and wanted to express their sense of patriotism, the fact their air force had been destroyed and their airport had been taken over. So yes, that certainly was manifested by ordinary people.

At the same time, many people recognized that the government had done wrong and that the government was largely responsible for this sharp breakdown in relationships. I recall an interesting dinner in which the French ambassador turned to a former Foreign Minister of Cote d'Ivoire. The French ambassador was rather direct. He said, "You know, where are our friends at this difficult time? No one is standing up and speaking up on behalf of France. The government is constantly bashing France but none of our friends are standing up." The minister began to squirm; he was very uncomfortable. He said, "The people are afraid. If you stand up now and say anything positive about France, you are treated as a traitor and as a French sympathizer. It is very dangerous."

Over time relations between the two countries evolved, and by the time I left in 2007, there were editorials in the opposition newspapers stating that while France had made its share of mistakes, the government was using France as a convenient scapegoat for its own failures. I think the pendulum was beginning to swing back in a more moderate fashion there. French foreign policy in Africa was still evolving at that time.

*Q: Chirac was getting away from Mitterrand and his sons who had questionable ties in some African countries.*

HOOKS: Chirac had very close relationships with some leaders in Africa; President Bongo in Gabon is a good example. With the change of government in France, where Sarkozy replaced Chirac, relations with Africa are changing. Sarkozy is of a different generation, he doesn't have the long ties that go back to what is called *Françafrique*. When I was in Abidjan between 2004 and 2007, Chirac was still President of France. The French Ambassador readily admitted that France no longer had a clear vision of what it wanted to do in Africa. It was a policy that was in evolution, one that had not yet solidified. They realized the days of playing the gendarme, of continuing the period of colonization with a façade of independence, keeping leaders in power who owed their existence in large part to their ties to France was no longer feasible.

The French Government had not yet worked out a new, clear cut policy of what it would like to do. The French wanted less interference and less involvement, but still wanted to protect French interests. They wanted to maintain the Francophone countries in France's camp because without Francophone Africa, France would be half of what it is today. France has always been able to deliver the Francophone African votes in the United Nations. If you take away the Francophone countries in Africa, who speaks French, other than France and Belgium? Using French as a language in the UN is justified in part by the fact that there are so many Francophone countries from Africa. The francophone African countries enhance the role of French as a language and France as a superpower. I think France is well aware of that. I am not sure that Sarkozy has a clear vision of the relationship he wants with Africa.

*Q: Thinking back to the 1950s and '60s, the French had been in the Ivory Coast and you had people doing very well in France. These were people who would not accept basic Algerian rule but I was wondering if there was a counterpart in Ivory Coast?*

HOOKS: I am not sure I understand your question. Houphouët-Boigny was the most pro-French leader in Africa. He had been a minister in France, he had been in parliament and counted upon the French rather than his own troops to keep him in power. That's why he had French troops based at the airport to protect the airport and to protect him. After all, the tunnel between his residence and the French ambassador's residence was dug when he was president. He was criticized oftentimes, certainly by his neighbors in Guinea, for being a French puppet. Abidjan was called the 'Paris of Africa'. It was the most developed and the most comfortable capital in Africa outside of South Africa. I think Cote d'Ivoire was seen as the anchor of French influence in Africa, given Houphouët-Boigny's own stature. As long as the French could keep him in their camp, he could bring along many other Francophone countries through skillful use of his money.

*Q: The African ruling elite and the French colonials were melded together pretty well.*

HOOKS: There was a very close relationship. There was some degree of intermarriage but also business interests. First of all, when doing business in Ivory Coast, it is always useful to have the Minister of the Interior or the Minister of Defense as your partner. That's just the way it was.

*Q: By the time you left there, were you able to re-form your embassy?*

HOOKS: An evacuation is one of the worst things that could happen to an embassy. After three or four months, dependents over 18 were allowed to return to post. That meant basically spouses. Children under 18 were not allowed back at post, which meant that many spouses didn't come back. When the spouse and children are back in the States, the employee begins to count the days until he can leave post. When his family isn't there, he just wants out. That is a problem. An evacuation divides the staff into the indispensable who stayed and the rest who were forced to leave.

So the embassy never gets back on its feet in terms of morale until all those at post that went through the evacuation have moved on. As new people arrive at post, the dynamics change. The whole time I was in Abidjan we continued to have that unfortunate divide between those who stayed and those who left. It really was a severe blow. We did not have minor dependents back at post, which meant that the American School was almost wiped out. I just learned when I was in Abidjan this past week that school enrollment is up to 140 students again. Most of them are Ivorians and third country nationals. The embassy never really fully recovered for the whole time I was there.

*Q: How was the cathedral or whatever the hell it was treated? He replicated what, St. Peters, wasn't it?*

HOOKS: Yes, it's modeled after St. Peter's. It's taller; it's not as big. It's the world's tallest basilica. The front courtyard looks much like St. Peter's Cathedral. I think there are two things we can say about this basilica; one, it is seen as a symbol of Ivory Coast, a symbol of nationalism and national identity. People are very proud of it, and the fact that there is something in Ivory Coast that is unique on a worldwide scale. The second thing you can say is that it is a little bit of a white elephant. It never should have been built in the first place. The basilica is located in Yamoussoukro, not in Abidjan, because Houphouët-Boigny wanted to move the capital from Abidjan to Yamoussoukro, his village. He started building grandiose buildings in Yamoussoukro. In fact, Yamoussoukro is the official political capital although Abidjan remains the de facto capital.

The third point I wanted to make is that it is run by Polish priests. Pope John Paul put Polish priests in charge of it. Since I speak Polish very well, I got to know the Polish priests. I visited the basilica a number of times. I took many visitors there. The problem is how to maintain a structure like that. Building it is one thing, but maintenance is another. President Gbagbo once said, "We in the Ivory Coast can build beautiful buildings, but the problem we have here is that we don't maintain them" and that is exactly the issue.

*Q: This is something I have noted throughout the world. These structural monuments fall apart so rapidly. It needs a lot of money to maintain them.*

HOOKS: It takes a lot of money. Even though the Pope insisted that Houphouët-Boigny also give money for a hospital, the hospital has never been built. The Polish priests explained to me that their budget was probably about half of what they needed to maintain that structure. They point out, for instance, that it is a unique structure and therefore unique components are required to replace old ones. For instance, there are huge columns, round structures with elevators inside. The elevators were made uniquely for these columns for that particular facility, so standard elevator parts don't fit.

The dome was leaking in a couple of places, and Father Stanislaw explained to me that after every heavy rain, the staff has to mop the floor. The climate is very unforgiving in that part of the world; it is very hot and very humid, with heavy tropical rains. The basilica has stained glass windows that rise several stories. The architect built a structure around them with glass to protect the stained glass windows against the tropical sun to prevent fading. Some of the protective windows have broken at the top; not the stained glass windows but the protectors on the outside. The priests do not have the money to replace them, so they are using ordinary corrugated plastic as replacements.

The cement apparently was not designed for a hot, humid climate. There are deep gaps between blocks where the cement has crumbled and fallen away. The priests explained to me that the cleaning crew sweeps up the cement dust that falls from these structures every day. In fact, the gaps between the stones are getting bigger, and in some cases you barely see any cement left. It has practically disappeared. The rain gets in the cracks. I wonder what is going to happen in a few years.

To get to the roof, special equipment is needed even from the inside because the dome is 14 stories up from the ground. You would have to build a structure 14 stories high both inside and out in order to do repairs. The priests do not have money to do that. The priests are concerned that that over time the structural safety of the building will be compromised. Mildew grows so easily in the humidity. The leaks in the roof are going to spread. In order to save electricity, the priests only use air conditioning on high holidays when large numbers of people are inside. They can no longer afford to turn on all the lighting at night so they use minimal lighting.

Who goes to the basilica? It is in Yamoussoukro, which is not the capital, except on paper. It is not even in the center of Yamoussoukro. It is on the edge of Yamoussoukro and therefore even people in Yamoussoukro go to neighborhood churches rather than take a taxi to the basilica. There are at most 400 people in the basilica on a Sunday and often times only 200. It is a little far to walk for most people. The basilica can seat 7,000 people, with the possibility of putting additional chairs for 10,000, and at most 400 people show up on Sunday. Local donations are practically non-existent. The residents are poor people, by and large, and they have little to contribute. There are no large corporations that contribute to the upkeep of the building. As a result, the basilica, like many other things in the country, is deteriorating rapidly. I wondered when I was there what that basilica will look like in 20 years in the absence of any serious maintenance. They clean it but they can't maintain it as needed.

*Q: The thought of that dome sitting up there with the pillars around it becoming structurally weaker and weaker is a bit scary.*

HOOKS: It is indeed.

From the highway into the courtyard there is a kilometer covered with white marble, but there are problems maintaining that marble because it is built in a swampy area.

*Q: Ok. You left in 2007. What were American interests in Ivory Coast when you left and where did you see the short run course of things there?*

HOOKS: Well, I think we should put this in a broader context, what are our policies there? We had a bit of a problem in my view. During much of the remaining time I had in Ivory Coast, Sudan was the issue that caught the attention of decision-makers in Washington. The Assistant Secretary of State was seized with the issue because of political pressure.

Our interest in Ivory Coast was basically to move Ivory Coast back to where it had originally been, where it would be an anchor of stability in the region. It is one of the larger countries in the region. If Cote d'Ivoire could become a stable country, a country with a legitimate government, a democracy and hopefully with some degree of economic prosperity, it could serve as an engine of growth for other countries.

We do have economic interests in Cote d'Ivoire. Several of the companies that were processing cocoa beans were American companies, and there were other American interests, including growing oil interests. In fact, in 2005 oil became the largest and most important source of revenue in the budget, passing cocoa beans for the first time ever.

The focus back in Washington was on a stable, democratic, prosperous Cote d'Ivoire that could serve as an anchor for the rest of the region. The problem was that the Assistant Secretary had little time and attention to give to Cote d'Ivoire. I don't think any of the assistant secretaries while I was there had much depth of understanding of Francophone Africa. There was a naïve sense or hope that somehow we were going to quickly move Cote d'Ivoire to elections. That was the big thing in 2005, to get to elections. Well, I could tell we were not getting to elections. The political will was just not there. I think there was not an appreciation of the fact that the country had been torn apart. It had been traumatized by the coup of 1999 and the semi-successful coup of 2002. They still haven't gone to elections. I think the Assistant Secretary at the time was determined that Cote d'Ivoire was going to go to elections, and she did not want to hear comments to the contrary. I felt that was very naïve. First of all, we are not putting any money into elections. Initially I was told we would have \$100,000 to cover administrative costs. Later we were promised \$600,000, but that was mostly for training. It was never very solid, it was never finalized while I was there because elections kept being postponed.

So we had a situation where our whole focus was on elections while the country was simply not ready for it. The fact that we are now in 2010 and we still don't have elections is a telling point. In February there was a slight mini-crisis in Cote d'Ivoire when the President dismissed the

Government, except for Prime Minister Soro. Many of the same people were included in the new government. The President also dismissed the head of the independent electoral commission, claiming the President of the IEC planned to add 400,000 names to the voter registrations list, people who shouldn't be on the list. President Gbagbo named a new President and new vice presidents for the IEC.

*Q: Was this part of the 'who is Ivorian and who isn't'?*

HOOKS: That's always an issue, especially when it comes to voter registration lists. That's an issue in Cote d'Ivoire that you don't have in other countries. In many countries the question is the timing of elections, and often how much do you have to cheat to win. In Cote d'Ivoire, the fundamental question is who is a citizen and who is entitled to vote. Cote d'Ivoire has a population of about 16 million people, but about half of those are considered foreigners. If you consider that there are only eight 8 million people, of which maybe half are adults and eligible to vote, 400,000 becomes a significant number.

*Q: Also you are pointing to something I think is very American. We fix on gimmicks; elections, for example. There are countries, particularly Islamic ones, where they don't have an election. In Saudi Arabia there is a good chance they might have one election and then declare it an Islamic republic with no need for further elections. This is the problem, I mean, you know elections don't always solve problems. We have elections and recently not an awful lot has been solved.*

HOOKS: Elections are critical to a democracy. We know that. However, elections can aggravate problems when society is divided. It's like, if you have a certain existing medical condition, don't go running. In the United States we are very impatient people. We demand elections. They are scheduled for 2005. We want elections as we have them here in the United States. I think there is a failure to understand that in some countries the political process is just not mature enough, the institutions are not strong enough, and therefore elections don't take place as scheduled on the calendar.

Secondly, there is not always a clear understanding of the fact that countries can sometimes be traumatized, as the Ivory Coast was. Our position is basically to get over it. We don't vote in Cote d'Ivoire, and that is something we forget. We invest very little money, and we expect countries to move on our timetable. I think I told you, when I was in Brazzaville I was instructed by the deputy assistant secretary of state to tell President Sassou that we wanted elections to take place in six months. That was absolutely insane because, as I told her, if she and I were in charge of putting together elections, we couldn't organize them in six months. The country was still torn apart by civil war. It was absurd. We were not credible.

Cote d'Ivoire needs to organize new elections in order to restore credibility, but elections have to reflect political will. I was just in Abidjan last week. I can tell you, the opposition is doing very little to call for elections. There is a certain lethargy that is just palpable and not a sense of urgency to get to elections now. There are no demonstrations in the streets, there are no signs up. The government does not want elections. There is a general sentiment that somebody ought to do something, the somebody being the international community. That is not a coherent strategy for

getting to elections.

I don't quite understand why President Gbagbo does not want to go to elections. The opposition is fragmented. Former President Bédié is the symbolic leader of the opposition, and he is weak. Bédié is the best asset Gbagbo could have under the circumstances. Until he passes on or resigns, which I doubt he will do, the opposition will remain rudderless. The young generation is blocked from taking the reins.

Interestingly, during a discussion of the events of 2000, President Gbagbo told me in 2004 that had Bédié and Ouattara not been disqualified from running, he (Gbagbo) might never have been elected president. After all, he was a minority candidate from the lesser populated part of the western part of the country. He was never taken all that seriously by the population as a whole. However, due to unique circumstances, he came to power. Naturally, he does not want to jeopardize losing that power. I don't think he has the confidence to face elections. He is afraid there could be surprises, so he wants to control the voter lists so that he minimizes any risk of losing.

*Q: Before we leave the subject of Cote d'Ivoire, you mentioned something about the attention of the African Bureau during this particular time. We are talking about the Bush administration. I am not stigmatizing the Bush administration, but sometimes you get a conjunction of personalities and issues. Did you feel that Francophone or parts of Africa were just not of great interest where there were problems elsewhere from the Washington point of view?*

HOOKS: There are two things you can say about that. The good news is that attitudes are changing and a certain evolution in thinking is taking place. However, traditions don't die very easily. Whenever a President goes to Africa, where does he tend to go? Ghana. Ghana is English speaking, as are South Africa and Kenya. Generally one Francophone country is added to the program just for appearances. That tends to be Senegal, but POTUS never seems to go beyond that. Traditionally, we have looked upon the French-speaking countries as France's backyard, so we have been reluctant to trespass. While that policy is evolving to some degree, there is still not a depth of understanding of Francophone Africa. Few of the Assistant Secretaries have served there or have particularly close ties there that I am aware of. George Moose did have some experience there and Hank Cohen, but in recent years, that has not been the case. I think there has been a tendency not to engage there and to tell the French to take care of that area.

*Q: And also for a long time the French have taken care of it.*

HOOKS: The French are changing their policies. For example, Bangui, the Central African Republic. Initially the French went in to fix the problem, but then they decided they really couldn't afford that type of outlay anymore. They told the United Nations they were going to leave, and it was up to the United Nations to take over the peacekeeping process. The French decided it was too heavy a burden to maintain. Moreover, France is changing, and so is Africa. And the United States has to change its policies toward French-speaking Africa as well.

No doubt there will be future UN peacekeeping missions in countries where there are none today. We end up paying 27% of the costs, and we are going to have to continue to do that. I

think that we need to give French-speaking Africa more attention. We still need to let France take the lead in many places. I don't think we should go in and take the lead, but I think we need to be more engaged, both with France and with the host countries. We also need to be more realistic when it comes to what we can do and what we can't do; what the limits of our power are, in other words. That is something I don't think is always understood in Washington, what the limits of our power are. As a result, we sometimes put ourselves in untenable positions that make us look foolish rather than in a constructive capacity.

*Q: You left in 2007.*

HOOKS: August, 2007.

*End of reader*