**KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

**COUNTRY READER**
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## EDMUND MCWILLIAMS
**Chargé d'Affaires, a.i.**
**Bishkek (1992)**

*A native of Rhode Island, Mr. Mc Williams was educated at the University of Rhode Island and Ohio University. In the course of his diplomatic career he served in several South East Asia posts including Vientiane, Bangkok and Djakarta. Other assignments took him to Moscow, Managua, Kabul, and Islamabad. In 1992 Mr. McWilliams was engaged in opening US Embassies in the newly independent states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While his assignments were primarily in the Political and Economic fields, in Washington he dealt with Labor and Human Rights issues. Mr. McWilliams was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005-2006.*

*Q: Well then in 1992, whither?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well. In the fall of early winter of '91 the collapse of the Soviet Union became apparent and I guess in like December of '91 the State Department started sending out bleats, messages saying anyone with Russian experience, Russian language skills or experience in the Soviet Union that would be interested we're looking to staff these new embassies that will be created in all of these new states as they began to be formed. And inasmuch as my tour was due to end in a couple of months anyway I thought this a very exciting opportunity so I sent my name in, again the embassy very generously was prepared to let me go a month or two early, and initially was given Armenia but in kind of scrum for posts out there I was able to argue that I would be better suited to assignment into Central Asia given my experience in Afghanistan and Pakistan. So was in the first tier, as they say, of chief submission going out to set up embassies in these states, former states of the Soviet Union.

*Q: Alright. Well let's talk- okay, well we're off. '92, what did they do with you?*

MCWILLIAMS: We were basically all flown to Frankfurt from various parts of the world, those of us going in on the first tier and we had, I guess two or three days of briefings at the consulate, U.S. consulate in Frankfurt. And that is briefings for those of us who were going out to basically set up these missions. As I recall they were sending us to Belarus, Kyrgyzstan where I went, Armenia and can't remember whether it was Ukraine or Georgia, the other one. In any event, with minimal instructions really, they sent us out and I recall as we met in Frankfurt there was an agreement which became sort of comical but we agreed, all of us, that we would open all of our embassies the same day so that there wouldn't be one embassy opening ahead of the other. That's important later; I'll get to that. But then took off from Frankfurt and flew into Moscow and I remember we almost lost the entire operation as this German aircraft tired to fly in to Moscow airport in a blizzard and with two passes, both having been missed, we were told that well, we can't land because the snow is just too bad, this is at night, so we're going on to Leningrad because if we make a third attempt there will not be enough fuel to get to any airport. So we said well we're off to Leningrad and at that point suddenly we realized no, we're not, we're coming in for that third pass. And it occurred to all of us that if they hadn't landed on that third pass there was no other alternative. Anyway. We landed, we got in and then went off to our posts. And I went to Bishkek.

*Q: A quickie. While you were in Moscow did you talk to the embassy there?*

MCWILLIAMS: Very, very limited.

*Q: Because I was wondering whether you were sensing any kind of resentment that their empire was being destroyed?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well there's a little bit to discuss there, yes. Essentially there was where I met up with my team. There were five, four officers going in with me from various branches of the government and-

*Q: I'm going to stop here.*

MCWILLIAMS: There were four, I think four or five officers going with me out to set up the embassy in Bishkek from a couple of agencies and I do recall only one thing, that we were told that we would be met in Bishkek by an advance officer from the embassy who had been sort of scouting out places where we could live and where we'd set up the embassy and so on. We arrived at night in Bishkek and were greeted very warmly by a small delegation from the government, this was like on a Thursday night, and informed at that point that they expected us to open the embassy the following morning, Friday morning. And I objected, in part because we hadn't even seen the facility, literally we were at the airport when they informed us of this, and then secondly I was concerned that I had made this deal with my colleagues that I wasn't going to open early, we were all supposed to open the next Monday. And as a consequence I objected and said just take us to our hotel, we'll look at the facility tomorrow morning. And I was picked up by the government cars the next morning with senior officials who explained to me that it was the president's wish, President Akayev, or President Akayev's wish, that we open the embassy

no later than Saturday, the next day, this is Friday morning, as was explained to me because the Iranian had been left hanging around the city for a couple of weeks and was desperate to open his embassy but the president, Akayev, was determined that the first embassy would not be the Iranian embassy but would be the American embassy. So he said I just cannot wait any longer, you've got to open. So anyway, we opened on Saturday. We inspected the facility on Friday and did some initial hiring as I recall, for staff, and the president appeared at the steps of our building, we had speeches and so on. And it was a very, very warm welcome and I was only there six weeks before I moved on to my next assignment but it was a very interesting period.

I can remember it being desperately cold and we were all sick from the day we arrived. We were in this hotel, the wind literally blew through this place, we were freezing all the time we were there. But as we'd go out to dinner at night, always to restaurants because of course we had no facilities set up invariably when the little tribe of Americans, five or six of us would walk into a restaurant in the city we'd just basically would be swamped by drinks brought to our table and food brought to the table and people coming over for pictures with us and so on, just an extremely warm welcome. The facility we set up was right on a fairly main street and no setback at all, I mean, the building was right on the sidewalk and I chose as my office as chargé one of the large, only two really decent size rooms in the building but it was right on the street. As I would be writing at desk, working at my desk, people would walk by and tap on the window and wave at me and I often thought subsequently what the security people would have thought of that arrangement. But we would have flowers brought to the embassy by individual citizens. People just were so anxious to make it known that Americans were welcome in Bishkek. It was just an extraordinarily cordial welcome, both from the officials and from people. A wonderful experience.

*Q: What- I know the facility because I went there two years later as a USIA-sponsored person to set up a consular service and I mean, we're really talking about a modest cottage.*

MCWILLIAMS: Modest- it was a dentist's office, actually. And one of the interesting things was that it had no functioning loo, there was no toilet facility in there. And the facility that we were relying on was out back in a little shed and literally two holes in the ground. And there was one for the ladies and one for the men and that was the first three or four days before they did come in and eventually fix the toilets in the building but it was hard scrabble for awhile. But as I say, what was most memorable was the warmth of the people.

I recall a fellow coming in, I think on the first Friday we were there and insisting that, and I think this was government help, that we all go off with him to the hills for a falcon hunt. And I always regretted I never took that opportunity, on horseback. Anyway, it was just a lovely experience.

*Q: Did you sense any unease about the Russians pulling out? Because many of these Stans actually had been the recipients of more aid than, I mean they, some were exploited and some were exploiters you might say of the Soviet system and _____ Kyrgyzstan-*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, I think Kyrgyzstan was unique. Certainly one of the reasons that we opened in Kyrgyzstan before we opened anywhere else in Central Asia was because the leadership there was deemed to be particularly progressive. It was thought of as the Switzerland

of Central Asia. President Akayev was a former medical profession, not a communist apparatchik at all with progressive policies. And I think there was a real hope that something could be developed that would be a model in some ways for some of the other Central American, much richer, much more in some ways important American- Central Asian states. Ultimately that didn't come to pass but I think no, there was no sense of resentment towards Moscow but I think a very clear sense, which we sought to foster, that Bishkek would have its own relationship with America and not through Moscow but directly with us.

I should say one disappointment moment, I had been very impressed with the young fellow who had come in and basically did all the set up for us, finding the building and so on. But learned, I think on the second or third day, that he had prevailed upon our communications person to develop a separate channel of reporting that he would utilize to his embassy in Moscow, which I didn't know about as chargé, and in fact messages had gone out reporting on the progress that we were making to his chiefs in Moscow, this is State Department, without my knowledge.

*Q: Let me get this straight. This is not a CIA man?*

MCWILLIAMS: No, this is State. As a matter of fact, I think the reporting was going to the political section chief, which is also kind of discouraging. But I tried not to be too abrupt about that but I didn't want that. I didn't want this embassy being run by or even having anybody on my team reporting-

*Q: Well it was part of the mindset too, I guess at the time.*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, the whole clientitis thing, as you asked the question as I think about it, that was an early concern when we met in Frankfurt, we chiefs of mission, that we not simply become consulates for the embassy in Moscow. Obviously we would depend entirely on embassy Moscow for our support but we wanted, for political reasons, that these representations not be simply extensions of the embassy in Moscow. And maybe I was being oversensitive but the fact that a couple of reports had gone out even as official informals or whatever they were that I didn't know about bothered me a great deal. So I asked the fellow to leave.

*Q: What was sort of the attitude- Secretary of State Baker had made a big play that he wasn't going to ask for extra money and this was by many considered to be a really stupid thing to do. There was a time we could have gotten money and it seemed like a grandstand play. Did you feel this?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, I think as I recall what he felt he could do was to pull money from other places in State and I suspect that a lot of other embassies were shorted, a lot of other State functions were shorted because of that project. But no, I don't think that we felt particularly put upon, either in Bishkek or subsequently in Dushanbe where I was by lack of support, physical support, because we recognized there were limits. I would say ultimately it was a master stroke on the part of the Bush I administration, of which I'm not a great fan, and Baker specifically, again of whom I'm not a great fan, that they would have moved so quickly. I mean, given the State Department bureaucracy to move so quickly to line up the kinds of people that would man

these positions and get them established so, so quickly was I think a tribute to Baker and Bush I and it was really well done.

## THOMAS R. HUTSON
## Deputy Principal Officer
## Bishkek (1992)

*Thomas R. Hutson was born in Nebraska in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska in 1962 he served in the US Army from 1962-1967. His career has included positions in Teheran, Belgrade, Winnipeg, Moscow, Lagos, Taipei, Belgrade, Bishkek, and Mazar-e-Sharif. Mr. Hutson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in April 1999.*

HUTSON: So we were all on this "task force" together. One day, Earle turns to me and says that he is having breakfast with Colin Powell the next day, but that he didn't want it known. Powell was then the chairman of the Joint Chiefs. It is not often that someone of Earle's ranks has breakfast with the chairman. In any case, the next day he came and reported that he not only had breakfast with Powell, but also lunch with Secretary Cheney and the Joint Chiefs. That night, Cheney went on TV to announce that we would not put any troops in the former Yugoslavia republic. Earle had at one time covered Bosnia-Herzegovina; he knew the territory. He knew how to deal with the "natives." He had access in the U.S. government far beyond what his rank would have suggested. I later found out that Earle's sister had been one of Powell's high school classmates. So he grew up in the Jamaican-American community in New York.

I finally located myself a job. Earle, I think went to Brazil - Sao Paulo - as political officer. I ended up as deputy principal officer in Bishkek - Kyrgyzstan. Taking that job was the greatest career mistake I made in my life. It was a new embassy, but the department was not willing to give me the title of deputy chief of mission. We were housed in a very small place - a one story bungalow really. It had a lot of partitions. We worked long hours - there was nothing else to do.

One day an American working for an NGO came in seeking advice on some issue. He came to my office and we sat for some time discussing the matter. At some stage, Ambassador Ed Hurwitz came in and told me that I shouldn't be talking to this man; I should be writing a political report or something. This was right in front of the visitor. Later, I went to Hurwitz' office and told him that I hoped he would never do that again–the language was a little stronger. I was furious. I thought that he had been exceedingly rude; not only had he berated me in front of a visitor, but he also had no idea who it was or why he was in my office. I was just helping an American citizen. That was just one of the encounters I had with the ambassador.

*Q: The tiniest embassy I ever saw. What was your impression of the country when you arrived in late 1992?*

HUTSON: I felt I was getting into a box that had been sealed for 70 years. It had popped open all of the sudden and the people inside began to peek over the edge–very hesitantly. They were so naive about the world; they were wonderfully fresh in their insights. Ed Hurwitz was the

ambassador; he and I parted ways after about five months. I did my best work of my career in Bishkek. My Russian came back to me so that I could really use it.

*Q: What were we doing in Kyrgyzstan?*

HUTSON: Secretary Baker wrote a wonderful book in which he discusses this issue and related ones. As the Soviet Union was breaking up, the U.S. government decided that it was important to have some representation in all of the new republics that were becoming independent nations. So the department sent people out everywhere. Kyrgyzstan was a place that would have been forgotten except for one person: their foreign minister, Rosa Otunbayeva. She was a very competent person. She had been their ambassador in Washington first. So as soon as the U.S. government decided on its approach, lots and lots of NGOs decided that there would be money available for programs in the former republics, including Kyrgyzstan.

The foreign minister encouraged the NGOs in their quests. She facilitated the initiation of their programs. She inspired them. We had people lined up at the door of the embassy, asking that we make appointments with the foreign minister. Of course, they knew nothing about the country; they had to be taught about how to get around. It was a great moment. I helped convince McKinney Russell of USIA to open a cultural center, even though Hurwitz really objected. One was opened in Bishkek with the assistance of Ian Kelly who was then the regional cultural officer based in Vienna. He was great.

While Hurwitz was away and I was the chargé, I had the chance to sing "White Christmas" over national television. Ian announced during the same program that USIA was going to open a cultural center. No one had bothered to tell Hurwitz of that decision which didn't go over very well.

But the opportunities for us in Kyrgyzstan were just enormous. We gave the country two military hospitals which had been in storage in Great Britain almost since WWII. It took two train loads to get all the material to Bishkek. The U.S. military installed them. This happened after I left, but I was told it was quite an event with local girls hardly able to contain themselves at the sight of the GIs. For them, marrying one of them was a ticket out of Kyrgyzstan. This was particularly true of the Russians who really had no place to go. About 20% of the population was of Russian ethnicity.

I became a personal friend of Feliks Kulov, the country's vice president. Hurwitz told me to stop meeting with him. I would guess that President Akayev asked that I cease and desist. Kulov had been a former KBG major general and undoubtedly was viewed as a threat to Akayev. He was very personable; we used to drink together. It is interesting how intense a relationship can develop in a new post where you have to work 24/7. Of course, the ambassador had the right to tell me to break off my relationship. But, lo and behold, Madeleine Albright, with whom I seldom agreed, decided to take up Kulov's case primarily because he was viewed as the leader of the opposition. As far as I know, he is still in prison. If I should ever get back to Bishkek, I am going to ask my old friend John O'Keefe, who is now our ambassador there to try to find a way for me to see Kulov. Someone should be remembering him because he does not deserve to be in

jail. (In the "Rose Revolution" of early 2005, Kulov was finally freed, and is back in politics, running for Vice President on the strongest ticket.)

*Q: What was the feelings about Akayev?*

HUTSON: Akayev was viewed as enlightened. He played the game well. He was the hope of the future. With him in Bishkek and Otunbayeva in Washington, Kyrgyzstan seemed to have a bright future. The deputy foreign minister was Makoff, the son of a famous Russian writer. He was enlightened, worldly. So the future seemed filled with opportunities. Unfortunately, the country really has few natural resources. That became the reality.

*Q: What happened with Hurwitz?*

HUTSON: He didn't like me from the moment he heard my name. We had a couple of mutual friends - Marty Wennick and Bill Farrand. Hurwitz was an enigma to me because he was a very quiet guy. Farrand could make Hurwitz laugh. We had a meeting one time, when we were all in stitches. I thought then I could get along with Hurwitz. The assignment was a great opportunity for me and there were no other bidders for the job. I had had some household effects stored in Antwerp from my days in Belgrade. I wanted to stop there to see what I wanted to take to Bishkek. I had another reason to stop in western Europe. One of the good sources of information about Kyrgyzstan was Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty which was then based in Munich. The head of those organizations was my good friend Kevin Klose, a former American correspondent stationed in Moscow. I called him and said that I might drop by to see him to get briefed on Kyrgyzstan. So I sent a cable to Bishkek outlining my itinerary and asking for approval. The reply said that I was not to stop in either Antwerp or Munich; I was to arrive in Bishkek ASAP.

I disregarded those instructions and stopped in Antwerp even though I didn't get my stuff out of storage. But in any case, this episode made me *persona non grata* from the day I arrived.

As you know, I am an old consular officer. I was assigned to Bishkek as the number 2 in the embassy. When I got to the post, I thought that we should register the few Americans that were in the country. There was a small group of missionaries in Kyrgyzstan that was teaching English, while also doing engineering work. I told the ambassador one day that I was going to those groups to start the registration process. He told me not to go. He considered them a "cult." That came as a surprise to me, but he had been in country for a period of time and I assumed he knew what he was talking about. But I did nosey about and found that some of our local staff were studying English surreptitiously with this group. It was the only English language program in country and they wanted to improve their language skills. I further found out that this group consisted not only of Americans, but included Australians, New Zealanders, Canadians. It was most likely to have been a group of fundamental Christians of some kind. So I began to wonder about Hurwitz' views. He had fought for the rights of Soviet Jewry for all of his career; why did he suspect a Christian group? Why did he call them a "cult"?

He even so characterized them when talking to the Foreign Minister and even perhaps the president. That was wrong! I called him on it. The fundamentalists also called him on it; they were going to protest to their headquarters which I think was in Chicago.

As it turned out, I happened to be chargé over Christmas of that year. Ed's wife was German; she worked for the German foreign assistance program and he was going to spend some time with her. As I have mentioned before, I love to sing and I participated in Christmas caroling whenever I could. I told Ed that I was going to organize a caroling in Bishkek. He told me not to do it. He thought it was too dangerous. That really puzzled me. He thought that the Kyrgyz wouldn't understand. At one point, someone said that I should listen to Ed and then do what I thought was right. Which is what I did; I organized a Christmas caroling session. We sang at the Orthodox Cathedral, at the national opera, on TV, at the foreign ministry. There the foreign minister said to me that he hoped that on the following Christmas his English would be good enough so that he could join the caroling group. I think our efforts were a great success. We invited that "engineering" group–whom Hurwitz had tagged as a "cult"–and found that they were wonderful people. They were very happy to be invited to their embassy.

When Ed came back and heard about what I had done, he was furious. But the thing that did me in was when he turned me in to the inspector general. That really ended my career. It cost me thousands of dollars to clear my name. But even after I did that, no one would have me and that is how I ended up in Bosnia. I have mentioned that by the time I arrived in Bishkek, a number of NGOs had already established themselves. They came to the embassy for advice and assistance as did a number of the recently established embassies - German, Russian, Chinese, British, etc. They also turned to some to us for advice. Hurwitz used to get very upset by those visits and told us to get those people out of the embassy. He didn't want to see them and he didn't want anyone on his staff spending time with them.

When I got to Bishkek, they were making a movie about Genghis Khan which had Charleston Heston in it. Parenthetically, I must say that I feel some sympathy for that son-of-a-bitch, that fascist, now that he has Alzheimer's. As president of the NRA, what he did was the opposite of everything that I thought was right. I feel very strongly about that organization particularly since my daughter was murdered by a man with a gun about ten years ago. Heston only had a cameo appearance; John Saxon was the lead actor. We became friends. He was dating an FSN; his driver eventually became my driver because at one time, Hurwitz complained that I was using too much over-time for my driver. There were no lights on the streets of Bishkek, there were ten foot deep holes in the sidewalks in the center of town; so that traveling by car was the only safe method. We were paying our drivers maybe $10-15 per week. But the ambassador became upset because I was "using too much overtime." So when Saxon left, I hired his driver - a wonderful Russian engineer who used to work in a torpedo factory. Just like the Russians to build a torpedo factory in a land-locked country!

*Q*: *They tested their torpedoes in Issyk Kul, a very deep sea, where they could not be observed. Issyk Kul is a large lake, one of the highest in the world.*

HUTSON: There is a fish from there which when smoked is a real delicacy.

So I had my own driver over whom the ambassador had no control. There was another issue which came between us. Senators Lugar and Nunn had passed legislation which authorized that funds be made available for undergraduate scholarships good for one year for students from the former Soviet Union republics. Great idea. Hurwitz was totally opposed. He didn't want us to participate. I was on the other side. I was invited by the Kyrgyz to be a judge in a competition for these scholarships primarily to test their language skills. I told them I would be glad to observe, but that I couldn't really participate in the selection process. The person who was running this competition was a Russian from the ministry of education. Nice young man. The competition was held and Kyrgyz and Russians participated. When the final selections were made, they did not include a single ethnic Russian. The fellow from the ministry came to me and said that the competition was not held objectively. The Kyrgyz position was that the Russians would never return. I told them that that was palpably discriminatory and that we could not accept that position. So they fired the Russian employee and I hired him for the embassy. Hurwitz was opposed to that; so I put him on the payroll of a non-profit which I called "Consultimate International Inc" for $50 per month. That got me in a lot of trouble.

This non-profit began its own educational counseling service. I asked friends at Amerika Haus in Munich, Bonn and Frankfurt to send us their year old college catalogues. Ed Hurwitz sequestered those boxes in his office–you can imagine how many boxes there were. He was compiling evidence against me for misuse of the U.S. pouch. I should mention that I was also the AID person in the embassy. The regional supervisor was an AID employee by the name of Paula Finney, who was the wife of our ambassador in Almaty, Kazakhstan. They have since divorced. She was the regional general project officer; she covered Kyrgyzstan from Almaty. When she came to town, I was her embassy contact. One time, I took her to Hotel Dostuk which was a hole. I remember arguing with hotel "administrator" for a half an hour that we had a reservation; he finally made a room available. The next day, Paula came to complain that she hadn't slept a wink; someone in the room next to her had been murdered and there had been a huge commotion. That put an end to our use of that hotel.

We had a number of AID personnel studying the delivery of secondary health systems, who came to Bishkek who had to put up somewhere. They would rent vehicles and go into the countryside during the day and then return to Bishkek for the night. I saw the same thing in Africa where these consultants got paid lots of money for two week stints–it is a great racket that I have tried to join, but have not been successful. I suggested to these people that they take 10% of their grant in hard cash and give it someone to start a business. Cash was a scarce commodity in Bishkek; reports were plentiful. That was my general attitude towards AID projects; it still is. Later on, I was supposed to go out to evaluate economic and business education in Central Asia for AID. The offer was withdrawn, I think, when they found out more about me; I would undoubtedly have given the program a negative rating. Hurwitz saw the NGOs and the international organizations as problems. I didn't. I took my friends - the driver, the education guy - and suggested that they form a travel service company. This company would take care of all travel requirements of these official visitors. There was an organization in Almaty called "Statistica" which provided such services. It was going to open a subsidiary office in Bishkek, but never did. I had started long before a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization which I told my friends they could use as a base. They could advertise through it. I bought them a fax machine; they rented a little apartment and turned it into an office. The first customer was Paula Finney

who was going to evaluate a proposal by a well known Central Asian scholar, Martha Brill Olcott – who is now at Brookings. She was then a consultant to the secretary of state, to the secretary of defense, to the CIA director on central Asia. She was a real expert on the area. We were good friends. I suggested that we use this new organization to accommodate Paula Finney and her team from USIAD Washington. I swear that I told her that that was the plan and I fully revealed my relationship to the organization.

I fully admit that I was going to finance this AID project through my organization. It would have cost the non-profit very little - perhaps $350 for the rent of the apartment and some equipment. Paula came and the work began. She went to the Hotel Issykul which had a Korean restaurant on the top floor. As a matter of fact, the whole top floor was run by Koreans - and run well. Somewhere along the way, Paula Finney asked her interpreter what the relationship of the "Top of the World" - that is the organization I put together–was to the U.S. government. She was told that it was an embassy operation or perhaps he even told her that it was mine. He didn't really know; he had been hired as an interpreter and knew nothing about such matters.

Paula then decided that she would raise the issue with Ed Hurwitz. He then wrote a report to the Inspector General, accusing me as being involved in a profit-making operation - the company had just started, so that this was a slight exaggeration. He called me into his office and told me that he was going to send this report. I asked to see it, but was refused. So I turned around and told him that I was leaving. Larry Napper was the head of EUR/SOV; he was no friend of mine, but he was a friend's of the ambassador. Jim Shumaker, an old Yugoslav hand, was also working in EUR as Napper's deputy and he advised me to leave Bishkek as quickly as possible. That is what I did. I left Kyrgyzstan.

When I returned to Washington, I went to the I.G. and explained the situation. I told them everything. A while later, my daughter was killed and I went almost around the bend in grief and in the American mania for guns. The Department sent me to Barbados. I was there for almost a year when I got a cable from the I.G. ordering me to Washington to face charges. I returned and once again told the I.G. the whole story of what had happened in Bishkek. I always respected I.G. people and expected a fair hearing. Some months later, I got a summary of the investigation which found me guilty on a number of charges. It was a prosecutatory document, not an investigative one. Finally, after hearing my rebuttals, I was told that I would be suspended without pay for ten days. I could hardly believe it and then went out to hire a lawyer. That was the smartest move I ever made; I should have done right from the beginning. It took another three years for us to win our grievance charges. The Department ended up paying $17,000 for lawyers fees out of my total costs for those services of $27,000. But despite this success in the legal avenues, it was the end of my career.

**RICHARD L. STOCKMAN**
**Temporary Duty Assignment**
**Bishkek (1992-1993)**

*Richard Stockman was born in 1940 in Kansas City, Missouri. He went to seminary at Cape Girardeau in Missouri, and was then drafted into the U.S. Army in 1963, where he spent most of his tour in Germany. Mr. Stockman entered the Foreign Service in 1966 as a communications specialist. He served in Brazil, Honduras, Singapore, Togo, Switzerland, Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Canada, and the Soviet Union. Mr. Stockman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.*

*Q: Well then let's move to the Kyrgyz Republic where you are now on a temporary assignment. Were you here when we first set this place up?*

STOCKMAN: No. My first visit here was this year in July and August.

*Q: When was it set up?*

STOCKMAN: Well, I believe it was one of the very first. I recall seeing it on the front of State Magazine and would guess that was probably in early 1992. There was a large group of us who were recruited in the spring of that year, retired annuitants, to help alleviate the personnel shortages. We eventually got out into the field...most of us went into Moscow and then fanned out over the various CIS countries. This was in May and June, 1992. So I think the few embassies which were able to get open and staffed quickly probably did so in early 1992.

*Q: How did you find Kyrgyzstan different from the other places?*

STOCKMAN: Well, in this situation here...I am particularly fond of Kyrgyzstan. The people are marvelous. I have learned an awful lot in being able to talk with the people about their culture. One can visit a museum that is full of antiquities and historical artifacts. It is very accessible. It shows you a very, very sharp contrast with their historical past up to and including 70 years of communism, all within the same museum. So if that is your thing, it is available here. But I would say equally importantly is that fact that one can freely talk to the Kyrgyz people here and get a perspective...this is all in English, of course...of their country and traditions and still get a balanced feel for their patience and tolerance of other ethnic groups, particularly the Russians. I think that really shows a great deal of maturity on their part which may not be the case in many of the other republics. I believe that is really going to be their strongest trump that will really attract US support. And they may make progress far faster than the others. But there are numerous reasons why Bishkek is very enjoyable.

*Q: What have been the greatest changes in the communications field since you came into the Service?*

STOCKMAN: Looking back over almost 30 years, I first entered the communications business, which was in the Vietnam era...I was drafted into the US Army and working radio teletype, Morse code communications on Rhein Main Air Base, and in late 1966 I came on board with State expecting to do somewhat the same things. I was a little bit surprised when that was not the case, for various reasons. Nevertheless, looking at the overall state of the art, I would say that we have made astronomical advances in the technology, the management, the budget, the staffing, just about every possible aspect of running this professional cone within State. Most of these

dramatic changes have really taken place starting with the appearance of what we call the TERP equipment, which was the beginning of computerization in communications in early to mid 1970s. I think we have made phenomenal progress in an extremely short time thanks to a very generous budget.

## EDWARD HURWITZ
## Ambassador
## Kyrgyzstan (1992-1994)

*Edward Hurwitz was born in New York in 1931. He received his bachelor's degree from Cornell University in 1952. After serving in the US Army from 1953-1955 he entered the Foreign Service in 1956. During his career he had positions in Moscow, Seoul, Washington D.C., Afghanistan, Leningrad, and an Ambassadorship to Kyrgyzstan. Ambassador Hurwitz was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in August 1996.*

HURWITZ: September, 1991 until February, 1992 when I was nominated as ambassador. I basically eased out of the Board of Examiners and began this whole process of the papers you have to submit. I actually went to Kyrgyzstan at the end of March, 1992 as chargé, sort of an unusual situation. The embassy had opened in February and they had a temporary chargé, Ed McWilliams, who had served in Afghanistan after me at one point. He opened the embassy with an advanced team in February, 1992, and I took his place in March, 1992. I stayed there until July, came home and went through the ambassadorial seminar, etc. and was confirmed on August 6, 1992 and went back in September as ambassador.

*Q: You were ambassador from when to when?*

HURWITZ: September, 1992 to October, 1994.

*Q: Could you describe Kyrgyzstan the first time you went out there? How it was put together and what you were trying to do.*

HURWITZ: Kyrgyzstan governmentwise, like all these countries, was in a state of transition, as was our policy. We had considerable hopes for Kyrgyzstan because it was one of, perhaps the only, newly created ex-Soviet state that did not have the old ex-Party official as the number one guy. The president was Askar Akayev, a scientist, a physicist, who before assuming the presidency was president of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences. We had some hopes that this would be a real new leaf and that you could have an actual democratic country arising from the ashes of the Soviet Union. It was clear from the beginning that they would have immense economic problems. That was one thing we could not deal with immediately. What we were hoping to get and what really evolved anyway was a situation in which you didn't have a lot of turmoil. A situation in which even at the time we were concerned about was the Iranians moving in. We weren't concerned about Turkish influence, but we were curious to how the Turks would react to this. A big issue was how would the Russians react. Now that this thing officially exists

will the Russians try to work out a situation in which the independence is more of a question of what is on paper? Then you had the issue of China. There is a 400 kilometer border with China, which is something else that concerned us. But the main issue was to try to get the Kyrgyz government, society, moving on a basically democratic, stable track.

*Q: Here we are the American chargé and then ambassador way off in Central Asia with an embryo government. What was your role, how did you operate there?*

HURWITZ: You do the basic things. You present your credentials. You get to know as many people as you can. You go around to the ministries. You talk to people. You hold their hands in a certain manner of speaking. It was an incredible situation where you had all these people who only understood the trappings. They had a foreign ministry but the Kyrgyz foreign ministry had done absolutely nothing except to arrange visits of Cuban Trade Unionists and stuff like that. Kyrgyzstan had always been a distant outpost of the Soviet Union. It was perhaps the most obedient of all Soviet republics. And, it was one that had prospered because of the Soviet Union. I recall in all my tours in the Soviet Union the question used to be asked by Russians, at first in a non-public way because you couldn't raise questions like this, was "Do we get more out of Central Asia or do we give it more?" Well, by the time I went to Leningrad and glasnost was in full bloom, you would hear this question raised at public meetings. Why are we spending money to give to these little black people to support them? Well, you could argue the issue both ways, I suppose, when it came to Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan with oil, gold and cotton, but in the case of Kyrgyzstan there was no question but that everything you saw, every institute, every library, every theater, every factory was there at the largess of the Soviet Union.

And they did incredible things to prop up this distant republic to make it look prosperous and give jobs to everybody. For example, they built in Kyrgyzstan one of the largest sugar refineries in the Soviet Union. A refinery that could only refine sugar cane, which came from Cuba. So, it was shipped from Cuba all the way across the Soviet Union. The refinery, by the way, was not equipped to refine sugar beets which can be grown around Kyrgyzstan. But it was done for jobs, you had to give them something to do.

The Soviets liked it in one respect and found it very convenient because it was like Colorado with so many sunny days, it was a great place for flying instructions. It was a place where budding pilots being trained could train around 300 days a year. So, they had an air school there which trained not only a lot of Soviets but Afghans, Cubans, Ethiopians, etc. You occasionally would see little black kids running around, the offspring of an Ethiopian or Congolese, Patrice Lumumba style, air man and a Russian lady. They also used the Issyk Kul. Did you ever go to the lake?

*Q: Yes.*

HURWITZ: It is an enormous lake high up in the mountains. They used that to test torpedoes in submarines because this was a body of water totally landlocked, totally within Kyrgyzstan, a body of water into which they could be certain American submarines couldn't come and monitor the tests. So, they tested the missiles and also had a torpedo factory. And, of course, it was a crucial place because of the Chinese. Once you are in the Far East you had to protect it.

But other then that it had very little in the way of industry. It had some animal husbandry, but very primitive by world standards. It had gold, but in areas very difficult to extract it from. And that is about it. So, when the Soviet umbilical cord was cut, Kyrgyzstan was and still is in big trouble. How do you deal with this? They didn't have a clue.

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*Q: Today is October 9, 1996. Ed, let's get the dates again of your tour in Kyrgyzstan.*

HURWITZ: I arrived in the capacity of chargé, although I had been announced as the future ambassador but had not been confirmed or appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I had been preceded by Ed McWilliams, also in that capacity. He had literally opened the embassy, finding a temporary location for it while living in a hotel room. I understand the embassy is still there. I arrived a month and a half after McWilliams.

I arrived March, 1992, went home in July and went through the ambassadorial seminar, appeared in front of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was confirmed on August 6, I believe it was, and returned to Kyrgyzstan in September as ambassador. So, I was ambassador from September, 1992 until October, 1994.

*Q: Let's talk first about the household arrangements. Could you describe the embassy and staff's working conditions?*

HURWITZ: The working conditions were incredibly bad. We had as a building a structure that from every standpoint was inadequate whether talking about security or the ability to function. It was a small, one story, old structure that had been at one time the Bishkek Komsomol headquarters, and at one time the city tax office, and I would occasionally get telephone calls concerning city taxes and had by my phone the number of the current tax office so I could direct people. Security was zilch. It was a fire trap. In my tenure there we did have an electrical fire. Anybody who wanted to toss a note, a rock or a bomb through the front window could have done so. It was a small structure. We had a very small staff, of course. People came and went, but we had about seven Americans when I was there. There were 10 or 12 locals including drivers.

*Q: I visited you there and the place was just incredibly crowded. To my mind it looked about the size of what we could call a 1930, two-bedroom, single story house, the kind you hoped you would work out of as a family man in time.*

HURWITZ: Right. That, of course, was the idea. We did expect to move fairly soon. Unfortunately, the team that went in to choose the embassy building in January, 1992, were shown a number of buildings which they turned down largely on security grounds. They were justified in doing so, but what they ended up with was far worse. We simply didn't estimate properly the difficulty finding a better building as a follow on. And, we didn't estimate how difficult it would be dealing with the Kyrgyz. I understand the negotiations are still in progress to have a plot of land outside the main center of the city, but quite close, on which we would build our own building. I think you may know that the State Department at that time had just

begun that project of bringing in already made embassies. They would just ship them in and put them together. The first successful attempt at doing that was some place in Africa. They already have one in Ashgabat. Now, the transportation difficulties getting to Kyrgyzstan really compounded that problem. But, it was considered the only way to go because all the standing structures, as you saw, in Bishkek, were either solid but very old and totally inadequate and probably full of asbestos and every other hazard you can think of, or they were not adequately defendable, or both. So, FBO figured in the long run to renovate anything you might find would cost as much as bringing in something that we would know from scratch was secure, adequate and clean. And that is the way they are going to go, but I don't know when this will happen.

*Q: When you say clean do you mean free of bugs?*

HURWITZ: Free of structural hazards including rats and asbestos, particularly. The physical circumstances were extremely difficult. The housing was also very difficult. Bishkek was surprisingly well off when it came to housing compared to the Soviet norm. On the other hand, by our standards, the housing was woefully inadequate. I must have seen 15 or 20 buildings as possible residences and I settled on none of them. I lived for four months in a hotel room, me and about ten thousand cockroaches, and then moved into an apartment that I had looked at and said, "Take it" but for use by a staff member. Well, the staff member, who moved in immediately, was my first DCM, who later left because his child developed medical problems there. When he vacated it I moved in. I think the current ambassador is still living in that place, although they have added what was a separate additional apartment, putting the two together.

*Q: How about staff morale during your time there?*

HURWITZ: It is curious, but I would say staff morale was high. You are working check by jowl here, it is not that you are not aware of problems, although very often the ambassador is less aware of problems that people might have. But, I was working side by side and talked to everybody every day. You had that sort of hyper-activity. Your know, morale was good and you had a lot to do, a lot of challenges, and it is all new and interesting. I think that was the case. In fact, when talking about this to personnel people in the Department, they made the point, and I think it is probably a valid one, they were less worried about the first wave of embassy officers and staff in all these new embassies that were undergoing more or less the same problems--some had it worse than others and we had it as bad as anybody--but they were more concerned about the second wave when things were settled and when everyday didn't present a new, possibly frustrating, but exciting adventure. And, I think for that first wave which I was in and all our staff was in that there was this feeling of excitement. And, the people they sent out, which in some respects was bad, were young, a couple of first tour officers. This hurt in terms of experience, but added something in terms of morale.

Let me just make one further point that added to the difficulties that we faced. To get people out in a hurry they had to go to a system of TDYs. So, for the first year and a half I had seven admin officers. They were all experienced guys but they came and they left. The question of establishing a real presence, having some institutional memory and some follow through, was a real problem.

*Q: Before you went out there did you carry in your mental attaché case a series of things that you wanted to get done, either from consultation with the Department, instructions from the Department and your own? What did you want to accomplish when you went out there?*

HURWITZ: From the very beginning Kyrgyzstan had a good reputation. I didn't know anything about Kyrgyzstan and I had spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union as the record shows. I hadn't given much thought to Central Asia and hadn't been particularly interested in it, even though I had had a tour in Afghanistan. But, Kyrgyzstan was already getting a good reputation in the Department for its seemingly greater interest in having a real democratic country. It was the only former Soviet republic whose president was not the last first secretary of the Party. He was an academic who was certainly talk up a great democracy line. Our position, the government's position and mine, was to try to see what we could do to foster this, to keep it going on a democratic track and also so find out what they could do to overcome their economic problems, the fact that they had so little to work with. They were indeed running on empty and cut off from the Soviets they would be facing grave economic problems. So, the major task as I saw it was twofold. One, making sure they keep going politically on a democratic track and two, economically trying to see what they could do and to use their reputation for democracy to drum up support for them among the world business community. And, I think we succeeded to a great extent and they succeeded too. We have made them focus on the political atmosphere as a means of pulling themselves up by their boot straps economically, or at least getting help so that they could begin to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. The point I would make constantly and which became rather a touchy thing prior to my departure was "Look, right now you don't have much to work with other than your reputation. Keep it going and we will do our best to get you US aid and to encourage others to help out." So, that was more or less my function and the US in general. And, we succeeded in terms of US aid. At one time Kyrgyzstan was getting more aid per capita from the US than any other former Soviet republic.

*Q: Could you talk a bit about our role and what type of aid was coming?*

HURWITZ: You may remember there was a lot of money being thrown at the Soviet Union. The question for the embassy was to convince the administration and the administration to convince congress that Kyrgyzstan deserved a really good share of this aid. So, we kept close track of what they were doing right and informed the Department as events progressed. There was another problem of seeing that this aid was properly used. I would have maybe 15 people a week come through who had either already gotten AID grants or were seeking AID grants. Some of the schemes were dreams, simply off base, unrealistic, displayed a lot of ignorance about the situation on the ground in Kyrgyzstan and about what they really need and how they operated. My role was to tell them this wouldn't work or, if it was already on paper and beginning to take effect, to tell the Department this was a mistake.

*Q: Were these usually people from the United States coming in?*

HURWITZ: Yes. They were what I used to call grantologists, people who had studied the whole subject of getting grants, never mind how useful these projects would actually be. For these people it was a living. Some of them were completely off base.

Let me give you one example of something that had taken off and was operating. This was the farmer-to-farmer program, which to some extent was very useful, but had many aspects that were silly. Basically the idea is that this farmer-to-farmer organization would send out--and it is operated as I say quite usefully in a lot of areas in that part of the world--delegations of American farmers or other specialists, not government officials, people who had or were working in the field, and they would go around and visit their counterparts in the dairy industry, whatever, and advise them what they were doing wrong and what they could do better. However, in a lot of instances they come unprepared for what they were seeing. I recall a dairy delegation, actually had to do with cheese making, and they wrote a report after their visit. I had seen them once and then had nothing to do with them, they were out in the countryside. Some months later I got a copy of their report which was filled with suggestions and observations that were either totally silly or self-evident. For instance, one suggestion was that the Kyrgyz need more modern equipment. They should have milking machines here and there. Or their barns should be air-conditioned. These were things that the Kyrgyz knew but were totally unrealistic, far beyond their means. I had sent this report back to Washington and a lot of people had a good chuckle over it. The report among other things listed ways that cheese could be used in the Kyrgyz diet and had a recipe for cheese fondue which said to take half a pound of Swiss cheese and a glass of white wine, all things that the Kyrgyz peasant never even heard of. While that was a little far out and a little silly, it did typify the approach a lot of these people coming to Kyrgyzstan and looking around and dropping off their advice and leaving.

*Q: Basically they were bringing what they did back at home and saying do it our way.*

HURWITZ: Right. At first the Kyrgyz were very flattered with all of this attention and they saw dollar signs floating in the air whenever one of these delegations came through. But, when the delegations didn't leave behind a pile of money and when they left behind a lot of totally irrelevant advice, the Kyrgyz began to get a little annoyed. I talked to many Kyrgyz officials who said, "Look, we really appreciate the attention but we don't have time to talk to all of these delegations." And you know how Americans are, you get a chairman of a small company in Ohio and he has been put on an official delegation and he comes to me and says, "Well, I would like to see the president and the prime minister and the minister of agriculture." For a while we managed to get them rather high level meetings but the Kyrgyz soon learned what the score was.

But, a part from that there was a lot of useful aid, of course. There was surplus grain that was donated. We gave very crucial advice to a very crucial segment of Kyrgyzstan's budding industry, water power.

*Q: I was also thinking not only water power, but water, itself.*

HURWITZ: Well, you are right. That is one thing I talked to the Kyrgyz endlessly about. The whole concept of water as an exploitable resource which was one of Kyrgyzstan's riches. They had gotten used to this Soviet approach that we are all one big happy family, so whatever Uzbekistan gets from Kyrgyzstan that doesn't matter because we are all Soviet brothers. But, after the Soviet Union fell apart, Uzbekistan had its gold within its borders, which it could extract and export at will. Kazakhstan had its oil and gas, to say nothing about enormous territory to grow wheat on. The Kyrgyz had basically only the water. It is very rich in water

resources. Perhaps second only to Russia in all of the Soviet Union. But, they looked on their water, which was flowing right into Uzbekistan, which was irrigating all of those vast cotton fields, not as a resource but something that came from God and just flowed down. We tried to tell them that their water was a resource and they should get some quid pro quo for it.

When I say hydroelectric, one of the most useful ideas was brought forth by an AID sponsored hydroelectric group that pointed out to me, and I from then on used it with every Kyrgyz that had anything to do with the economy, that Kyrgyzstan not only let the flow into Uzbekistan but it regulated that flow in such a way as to lose not only the water but what the water could do for Kyrgyzstan. In other words, the water was dammed up in the winter so that it didn't flow when it wasn't of use for the Uzbek cotton. Of course, when the water is dammed up and not flowing you can't produce hydroelectric power from it, the way their system was set up. So, at the very time that they need the electric power in the winter to run the heaters to heat the country, the water couldn't flow. In the spring, when they lifted the sluices and let the water go through, that was when they didn't need the electric power in such big quantities. So, what they really needed was a dam further up stream so they could let the water flow down to the second dam and have the electric power produced up stream. I don't know where that stands now but it would be a major addition to their economy. It was costing them tens of millions of dollars to irrigate Uzbekistan at no profit to Kyrgyzstan.

*Q: How did you personally deal with the government? How would you get around?*

HURWITZ: All I had to do was to pick up the phone. I could see anybody I wanted. Before my first year was over the president and I had a very good relationship. I spoke very good Russian at that time. I would see him maybe once a month for lunch. He had me out to his hunting lodge three times. He would call me up and say, "Come to lunch.." We would go to either his office or his home. I don't know if it did any good though because towards the end that changed. We can get to that later.

*Q: If I recall correctly, our embassy was on Dzerzhinsky Street.*

HURWITZ: They have renamed it.

*Q: You were really just down the street from the old KGB. What was your relationship with the security forces there? What were they like at that time?*

HURWITZ: The relationship was very good. There was a very close relationship between the station chief and the old KGB. We were giving them a lot of advise. We put together and trained their presidential security staff. We gave them equipment and were working closely with them on drugs. We had a lot of drug delegations from DEA through. Security relationship was very good. There was absolutely no harassment from their side and no bugs or anything like that.

*Q: What was the role of the Russians while you were there?*

HURWITZ: The whole subject of Russian-Kyrgyz relationship is interesting. When I got to Kyrgyzstan I had expected to see what you think of when you think of a colonial situation--the mother country sort of dominating a colony. You would expect to see Kyrgyz street sweepers, Kyrgyz truck drivers and Kyrgyz plumbers and maids and dishwashers, and Russians walking around in suits and briefcases. It was exactly the opposite. The whole Kyrgyz-Russian relationship was historically developed in an unusual way from the standpoint of a colony. When the Russians got there sort of mid-19th century, there was virtually nothing. The Kyrgyz were largely pastoral, sheep herders, etc. The Russians brought in all the labor force, the technicians, so you always had a Russian, blue collar working class there often doing menial work in the cities. Then the general scheme was carried on by Stalin. The Russians were obviously calling all the shots and had the power in the area, but there was this union of brotherly republics and they needed to have them focus on Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty, if not independence. So, in all the ministries, in all of the government organizations, the top dog was usually a Kyrgyz who did what his Russian masters told him, obviously, but it was the Kyrgyz who walked around carrying the briefcases with the fedora hats and pens in the pocket. That has continued. So, the teachers, most of the bureaucracy, except for the very top behind the scenes, was Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz always walked around well dress and it was the Russian street cleaners and Russian gardeners, etc.

*Q: But, also you had the feeling it was the Russians who kept the engines going, ran the little shops and all that sort of stuff.*

HURWITZ: Oh, yes. So, that first of all defined a lot of the life in urban Kyrgyzstan. The Russians were essential to making the place go. When your telephone wouldn't work, when your plumbing went bad, it was always a Russian who did it. I think the Kyrgyz realized that and although you had the young firebrands saying, "Russians get out," most of them realized that the Russians were very necessary plus which the Kyrgyz are just basically just extremely tolerant, quiet people. They are very reasonable people. The feeling between the Russians and Kyrgyz was basically quite good. Plus which the Kyrgyz never had much of a developed culture of their own. They will argue with that, of course. But, as a basically nomadic nation they didn't have much time to build up a culture or great religious or artistic tradition. There was no great center of culture, which was different than the case in Uzbekistan, by the way, which for centuries was the center of Central Asia. A lot of the Persian-language writers like Babur were really not Persian but Uzbek. This was not the case in Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyz always looked to Russia for its cultural roots, its language--most city dwellers in Kyrgyzstan do much better in Russian than in Kyrgyz. So, this naturally tolerant attitude plus all they knew they owed to Russia in terms of culture, economy and infrastructure, meant the relationship was good.

*Q: What was the Russian ambassador doing?*

HURWITZ: Well, the Russian ambassador and the whole embassy was largely busy with handling the exodus. I just said the relations were good, but I think the Russians saw the handwriting on the wall, that the opportunities for Russians would no longer be the same. They felt they were living in a foreign country and a lot of them wanted to return. They could be the plumbers and carpenters, but they couldn't be much else and that meant a lot of the intellectuals

wanted to leave. So, the Russian embassy was tied up with that. The initial outflow subsided and I don't know what it is now.

After the Union fell apart, I think the Russian attitude towards this has gone through some ups and downs. I think there was a time when they felt they would make the best of this and try to forge something out of the break up. It won't be the Soviet Union but it will be something that we at least can control. But, as the economic problems mounted in the Soviet Union they realized they couldn't do this. They didn't have the resources or couldn't pay enough attention to keeping these far flung parts of the former Union more or less under their control. Certain things, however, in Kyrgyzstan they were very concerned about and that was China. While I was there, and I think it is still the case, it was Soviet troops on the long border with China. The Soviets, more or less, ran that whole border and security operation from the standpoint of China. Now, that is in their interests and they won't give that up.

*Q: When I talked to the ministry of foreign affairs, people expressed concern over two groups. One was the Chinese, because there are just so many of them that they really didn't want to let them get in because the Kyrgyz are only four and a half million and the Chinese could just out populate them in a very short time. The other one was Iranian fundamentalists coming in there.*

HURWITZ: We were concerned about both. I think the Chinese were not that interested. I think the Chinese were sort of a bugaboo and you always had stories about the Chinese coming in and buying up property and houses. I think that was exaggerated. The Chinese are concerned with the area only in a sense it is next to their Sinkiang province, next to the Uighurs in China talking about Eastern Turkestan. In fact, there was a large Uighur population in Kyrgyzstan which has been there for generations and some of them were linking up with the Chinese Uighurs. So, this was a concern from the Chinese standpoint.

Another problem the Kyrgyz had with the Chinese, a more realistic one, was Chinese nuclear tests nearby. But, I think basically the Chinese provided a lot of cheap consumer goods that flooded Kyrgyzstan at the time which they wouldn't be able to get from Russia any more. How they bought these things, I don't know. There was a lot of trade in metals and things like that were smuggled out of Russia through Kyrgyzstan or the Kyrgyz just had sitting there from the Russian time--copper and that sort of stuff.

*Q: What about concern about religion from Iran? When I was there from what I could observe there wasn't much religion there.*

HURWITZ: No, no, they are very irreligious, as I say. They never paid much attention to religion. There was a little more attention to it. Certainly, they made some of the Muslim holidays national holidays. The Iranians set up an embassy and at one point had opened an information office that sold magazines and books which nobody bought. I looked through the window a number of times and there was nobody in it. And, there was a visit by the foreign minister and by Rafsanjani. But, I don't think they are really taking off. The Iranians have their own problems. I think the Iranians are more interested in countries closer to them like Azerbaijan.

*Q: What about Turkey?*

HURWITZ: Oh, the Turks initially were enormously interested in bringing back their long lost little brothers from Central Asia. The Turks were very active. They had a big embassy there and a lot of educational programs. But, I think, they too, initially had grandiose ideas which didn't come to pass. First of all because Turkey economically couldn't do as much for the area as it wanted and secondly because the Kyrgyz, at least, were not that interested. The Kyrgyz, first of all, had enough little brotherism in their relationship with Russia in the past and secondly, the Kyrgyz were really looking beyond Turkey. Turkey was trying to present itself as the West to them, but they weren't interested in that as time when on. They realized that things were happening much further west then Turkey. I recall in May, 1992, a big Turkish trade delegation came over and started handing out their cards. It turned out that virtually every one of them was really an affiliate of an American firm and that all the cards were in English. Everybody spoke English even though the Turks had told the Kyrgyz that they had to learn Turkish as their key to the Western world. Well, they weren't interested in learning Turkish.

*Q: Were the Japanese interested there?*

HURWITZ: No. They were very good in terms of aid. The Japanese like the Swiss, who didn't have a lot to offer but paid a lot of attention of Kyrgyzstan, as did the Danes and the Dutch, were good on aid and I think there is potential there. But, the Japanese are very crafty, in the business sense, and they are not interested in something that doesn't have much potential. I think they made that decision. They didn't open an embassy there. They saw that this place was no market for anything they produced and didn't produce anything they needed.

*Q: If nothing else they could have some great resorts there.*

HURWITZ: Well, the whole question of tourism is one that we talked about and listened to foreigners talk about. It is very difficult. What we told them to focus on is the sort of eco tourism--bird watchers, people who like to go to the outer limits like mountain climbers--but there is a dreadful lack of facilities there. The Kyrgyz used to say Issyk Kul was a marvelous place and Europeans should come there in droves. However, the accommodations were so disastrously bad, even by Soviet standards. It is so hard to get to and even if you begin to have reasonably good transportation, international flights, why would people want to go there, the average blue-haired lady, tourist type with tied shoes. It just takes a long time to develop that sort of stuff and you have to have side interests or sights to see. You just can't come and stay in a hotel and have a lake. People come and you have to restaurants around and other facilities. And, that would just take too long. But, as I kept telling them, "Look, your mountains aren't going away, you have time to play with this. In the meantime, put ads in the "Audubon Magazine", put ads in other speciality magazines. They were beginning to get hunters, people who were going for various kinds of game that you don't find except in those areas. They were getting a few bird watchers and advertising for these horse tours through the mountains. Here again, it is not big scale, but can be a beginning.

*Q: What about relations with Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan?*

HURWITZ: The relations with Kazakhstan were good, they are similar in many ways. Language is extremely close. The border is right there.

*Q: You really don't know it is there, at least in our time.*

HURWITZ: I think that is still the same. It is like going to New York from New Jersey.

The relationship with the Uzbeks has always been strained. There is a sort of traditional animosity there which exploded in 1990 in that Osh incident in which 200 or so people were killed.

*Q: What was that?*

HURWITZ: That was over land rights and water rights in the Fergana Valley. Osh is the second city in Kyrgyzstan which is off in the western part of the lowlands. Its population is about 50 percent ethnic Uzbek. I don't recall the exact details, but poor Kyrgyz squatters came in and just took over some land which belonged to some ethnic Uzbek farmers and you had an explosion. That settled down, although it is an issue and there is some tension there. Then, also during my tenure, Uzbekistan shut off the supply of natural gas. They supply part of Kyrgyzstan's natural gas and shut off deliveries because they had not been paid. There was some harassment and they set up a real border control setup at that point. But, that passed over all right.

Tajikistan, of course, was a problem. The same thing holds there with the border being very porous having been really non-existent during Soviet times. You have a lot of ethnic Tajiks living in Kyrgyzstan and vice-a-versa. So, if things get upset in Tajikistan then there is the question of the problem spilling over.

*Q: While you were there there was a guerrilla war going on.*

HURWITZ: There was fighting in Tajikistan.

*Q: What was that over?*

HURWITZ: That was over factions. That never extended into Kyrgyzstan. The Russians had sent in peacekeepers and Kyrgyzstan had sent a brigade to help out. I think the Kazakhs were also involved.

Afghanistan was also a problem because you get arms and drugs coming into Kyrgyzstan and that is part of the problem now. The only stories you read about Kyrgyzstan in the American press have to do with drugs and drug traffic. That whole area now is becoming a transit point. It has never been a big consumption area, but it is a transit point. The drugs come up from Afghanistan into Tajikistan. From there they go up the road to Osh, on the western border of Kyrgyzstan, and then into Russia and across to Uzbekistan. I am sure some of it gets diverted, but very little of it. Kyrgyzstan, itself, could be, has been a primary for growing poppies. The meadows just before you get into the highest portion of the mountains are just covered with poppies. Not the opium poppies but the climate and terrain is find for opium poppies. The Chu

Valley, which is the valley between...the Chu River is the border between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan...that whole valley is the world's biggest producer of wild cannabis. In the Soviet times they had the facilities to keep track of this...helicopters, train a large force...but now they are having trouble keeping track of that. That is one of the areas that we cooperate with them very closely.

*Q: Was this much of a concern of yours?*

HURWITZ: Yes, yes. It was beginning to build up. It has gotten worse now.

*Q: What was the attitude of the government?*

HURWITZ: They were serious about it, but they were strapped for resources, trained people, etc. We did a lot of training in the United States and in Kyrgyzstan we had all kinds of seminars--the USG, not the embassy. Every time somebody from the Department, DEA or CIA came through on this issue we ran them through the ministry of interior, the minister, himself, the vice president. I think they are serious about it. In 1992 it was proposed legalizing the growing of poppies for medicinal reasons, but the president said no, they didn't want to have anything to do with it. We gave them a good pat on the back, and I am sure it still holds.

*Q: Did you find yourself in a position as an unofficial adviser on things when they were setting up their government?*

HURWITZ: Well, we advised through the means of sending out teams. AID put together all kinds of programs, State did too, for individual ministries, for banking people, for planning organizations. There was a great deal of that. I did a great deal of talking from the president on down about general approaches such as a free press. We talked to them very much on my level and AID groups who brought out specialists, contractors, on the question of constitution. They were working out a constitution. The whole question of human rights, on police abuses, etc. We were talking to them constantly.

*Q: You mentioned while you were there that things got more difficult. What happened?*

HURWITZ: Yes, towards the end. This all started up in perhaps late August, September, 1994 and I left in October. The president simply lost patience with various segments of the press that were being very critical. There were a number of scandals about issues that had taken place pretty soon after independence. The disappearance of some gold from their reserves. The letting of contracts for gold mining, particularly. So, you had the press being critical and you had the national assembly being extremely critical. The president decided that he liked being president and there would be an election, I believe, in February, 1995, as well as a national assembly election in November, 1994, so the president shut down a newspaper and threatened to shut down another one and to put editors in jail. Then he came out with a referendum as to whether there should be a totally different parliament system. Instead of a one house system that there should be a bicameral legislature and that the election procedure would be such that in effect he would be in control. We tried to talk him out of it. I went to see him constantly during the last couple of weeks. He invited me for a hunting session with him with the head of the KGB or

security services and the foreign minister, and I couldn't budge him on it. And, indeed, things have developed that way now. He has lost a little of the sheen of being the only island of democracy, as they like to call themselves. I told them, "Look, you have very little going for you except your reputation. This was the one thing that distinguished Kyrgyzstan from being just another one of these backward little third world countries." I pointed things out to him which he should have understood. For example, he paid a private visit to the United States in May, 1993, in connection with the Andre Sakharov fund. Being himself a physicist he was a close friend of Sakharov's widow; who has been living in the States and he came over to make a speech at the National Academy of Sciences do in connection with Sakharov. He wanted desperately during this visit to see the President. Well, we turned handsprings in the embassy and in the Department... Strobe Talbott was very much in favor of this, too...to try to get him in to see the President. This was during a period of time when Clinton had not much to do with foreign policy, didn't seem to be very interested in foreign policy. So, it worked out that Akayev was received in his office by Vice President Gore and during that visit Clinton came in and they had about 15 or 20 minutes, with lots of photos, of course, so he could say he had been received by the President. Well, he was in seventh heaven. I kept saying to him, "You see, when the president of Uzbekistan came here he only got as high as Under Secretary of State. You have gotten in to see the President. You know why? That is because you are a democratic country. You are bucking the whole trend. You are proving that something can rise out of the ashes of the Soviet Union." And they ran on that and they ran with it. And, as I said before, it meant a lot in terms of getting aid....

*Q: The ambassador is Rosa...?*

HURWITZ: Well, it was Rosa Otunbayeva, but she is now foreign minister. She was a strong ally of mine in trying to prevent this trend that we later saw. But, she was more or less out of it. She was foreign minister and knew a lot about the United States and lot about how the world reacts to things, but she was not getting much in the way of attention from her president.

I have not gone recently to the desk. I know the Department was disappointed with what transpired at this point and I don't know where it stands now.

*Q: Had the president already made his decision when you left?*

HURWITZ: Oh, yes. After my departure at some time they had their referendum and you could certify it as being rather fairly carried out, but on the other hand, votes in that part of the world for various reasons are not the same as in the West. I was terribly disappointed. It was a complete reversal. It happened rather suddenly. We tried very hard. There were messages that flew back and forth. Even Clinton sent messages that were very harsh. But, it didn't turn him around. One element that is relevant here was brought to our attention by the most knowledgeable economic planner in Kyrgyzstan, a guy who really had some experience with the West. He point blank said to us, "Look, you guys aren't going to be around for a long time. Your aid, despite your best intentions, is going to drop off. So, no matter how much you think we are nice guys, you are not going to do a heck of a lot for us. Besides we have the World Bank, the IMF, the Japanese, who pay a lot less attention to these political factors. So, we thank

you for your help and advice but it really is not crucial." And he is undoubtedly right. I don't know what our aid level is now but willy nilly it is going to come down or has come down.

The sad part of it is, the Kyrgyz being as tolerant and easy going and basically fair minded, I think, as they are, they could have pulled this off. In other words they could have had a democratic society that would not have...as the Soviets always say and as the Kyrgyz and other people who are about to impose harsh restrictions always claim, you know, we have to do it in the name of stability, we can't have this dissent. You in the West can afford the luxury of dissent, but we can't here. We are new at democracy. Well, they were new at democracy, that's true, but they could have made it work because of their general attitude towards each other and towards working together.

*Q: What about the nationalist wing within the body politic or only doing business in the Kyrgyz language and that sort of thing?*

HURWITZ: Initially you had a bit of that but they realized it was a non-starter. They were having trouble expressing themselves on many, many subjects in Kyrgyz. This may change over a generation, and maybe it will. As a matter of fact, as of now the ruling class is much more comfortable in Russian and dealing with the issues they have to deal with in Russian.

*Q: I notice as I walked down the street I would see Kyrgyz talking to each other and almost invariably it obviously was in Russian.*

HURWITZ: Yes. Their initial access to the outside world, and this will continue for a while, has to be in Russian. When the opportunity seemed to make it appropriate and useful I did say, "Hey, look, don't bad mouth Russian as a language or as a culture. You will notice when we bring an interpreter over on any subject here, we don't bring in a Kyrgyz interpreter, there is no such thing. We bring a Russian interpreter. By the same token you have to recognize that." And I think they do.

Initially the nationalist thing happened and probably always does when you have the first blush of independence, but that has fairly well died out, as has any animosity towards the Russians. As I used to tell them, "Look, you are now number one, there is no reason to push anybody's nose in it. Nobody is challenging you. There is no reason to get rid of Russians. You are in control. Use the Russians." And, I think that is what they are doing.

## MARY A. WRIGHT
## Administrative Officer
## Bishkek (1994-1996)

*Ms. Wright was born in Durant, Oklahoma in 1946 and graduated from the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville. She has served in numerous posts including Managua, St. George's, Tashkent, Bishkek, Freetown, Palikir, Kabul and Ulaanbataar. She was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.*

WRIGHT: From Somalia I went back and completed a couple months of Russian language training and then went to Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia in the summer of 1994.

*Q: Alright, well we'll pick it up when you're off to Bishkek.*

*Ann, you're off to Bishkek and you were there for how long?*

WRIGHT: I was there for two years.

*Q: What was your job?*

WRIGHT: I was the administrative officer at the embassy. I wanted to go back to Central Asia and to Bishkek in particular. But the embassy's only open position was as the admin officer. As a political officer you always question whether you should serve out of cone but I had such an interesting experience as an admin officer in Tashkent for a couple of months that I thought that would be quite fascinating to continue work in the admin field.

*Q: Could you describe the magnificent embassy we had in Bishkek at the time?*

WRIGHT: It was stellar. We tried to renovate the small, old building and found out it was a log cabin!

*Q: Really?*

WRIGHT: Yes, a little log cabin. It was a historical site of Bishkek and the government kindly identified it for our roving real estate guy who – I can't remember his name, but some real estate guru that the State Department hired to quickly go around and pinpoint sites for our fifteen new embassies. Some of the sites that were made available to our new missions were quite strange. Bishkek had one of the strangest buildings.

*Q: I speak from experience because around '94 or '95 I was there for three weeks and saw that place.*

WRIGHT: When I got there, there was no fence around any part of the property. The front door was a very flimsy little wooden door. You could punch your hand through any wall in the place. It was definitely not a secure embassy.

*Q: Well, you didn't have to worry because I think one block away was the state security service run by the Soviets, wasn't it?*

WRIGHT: That's right. In fact there was a telephone line that ran across the roof of the intervening building between the intelligence building and ours. It ran across the roof and it was hooked into our roof. *[laughs]* But we cut that line and kept cutting it and kept cutting it. Finally, we had security people that did an underground survey of the building. All of these things happened two years after the establishment of the embassy! For two years we really

didn't apparently know what was under our embassy. Fortunately it was nothing more than just dirt and foundation as best we could find, but it certainly was a vulnerable place.

*Q: How did you find working in that environment? You know, getting administrative things done.*

WRIGHT: Administrative issues were always a challenge because of the lack of resources in the Kyrgyz market. The Bishkek market still had mostly Soviet supplies in it and they were dwindling. Our lifeline at the end of two years was Germany and Western Europe, but it hadn't been developed when I first got there. By the time I left two years later it was developing and you could find a lot more things there like sinks for bathrooms and kitchen appliances for the apartments. But in the early days there was very little there. We also used the monthly support flights that were being flown into all of the small, small embassies. Those flights could bring in supplies and food purchased at the commissary in Frankfurt. We could put in individual food orders and have them flown in for us.

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

WRIGHT: Ed Hurwitz was there for about two months finishing up his two-year tour when I got there. He was followed by Eileen Malloy.

*Q: How did that work out?*

WRIGHT: Very well. Ambassador Hurwitz was a very interesting character himself and developed his own style of operating within the Kyrgyz environment. Ambassador Malloy brought a completely different aspect to embassy life as she and her husband arrived with a little five- year-old girl. Suddenly the embassy changed from supporting a bachelor ambassador to an ambassador with concerns about balancing the job with family life. Both of the ambassadors worked quite well in the Kyrgyz political scene.

*Q: How did you find morale? I remember when I was there the consular officer was a very capable woman, Julie Rodenberry. She was saying, with others, that there was no real social life. If you went out with any Kyrgyz or something like that, the whole idea was to go to a so-called restaurant – there were about four there – and get a bottle of vodka and consume it at the table. You know, that was the sport of the day.*

WRIGHT: [laughs] Well, certainly the types of entertainment were very limited usually consisted of going out to dinner. On weekends there might be a concert, opera or a symphony performance. The Soviets left a legacy in all of the former Soviet republics of "western" music and arts. All of the capital cities had a symphony hall and an opera. The ones in Bishkek were pretty good. What provided the most entertainment for us, I think, was leaving Bishkek and going out into the beautiful countryside. If you were a sports person or an outdoors person it was a wonderful, wonderful place for hiking, horseback riding and trekking. The other source of entertainment was taking the four-hour trip over to Almaty, Kazakhstan, which was developing at a much more rapid pace than Bishkek. Almaty already had lots of western stores. We would go over for grocery shopping trips. The embassy crew in Almaty was very, very gracious folks

who always welcomed us and helped us out a lot. Their embassy was three or four times as large as ours. They got a lot more things and a lot more attention from Washington. Whenever we had any problems in Bishkek, they would pull out the stops to help us with whatever we needed.

*Q: How did you find all the missionaries, non-governmental agencies? I mean the place was awash with all sorts of Americans and other Europeans and all out to do good, or to do good for themselves or something.*

WRIGHT: It definitely was a growth industry there. The Kyrgyz were more accepting than the Uzbeks had been. When I had been in Uzbekistan two years earlier the NGO community was having a very rough time in Uzbekistan. But in Kyrgyzstan most of the NGOs found their niches. But there were plenty of them that were trying to develop programs there. And I guess its part of the syndrome that whenever there's a new opportunity opening up in the world, a new country that's opened up, people flock in. *laughs]*

WRIGHT: Yes, indeed. Afghanistan is the same way. We had barely gotten into Kabul before we started running into people representing the wheelchairs for the handicapped, and many other humanitarian organizations. They were all there for good humanitarian reasons but you wondered how they could operate in that environment. I guess being there helps for sending out a new appeal to their membership.

*Q: So brush over this period rather briefly, after two years how did you find your two years there?*

WRIGHT: It was fascinating. It was great because we had lots of challenges in reconstructing first our little bitty log cabin embassy building making it more usable. With the assistance of the embassy in Almaty who had embarked on a huge building program, we got all of their leftovers and were able to construct a two-story building next to that little log cabin and make real progress on adequate space for our employees. (end of tape) Just one more thing on Kyrgyzstan before we go on to Sierra Leone. One of the real fascinating aspects was the Kyrgyz culture and all of the unique handicrafts like the yurts, the felt tents that they have that…Kyrgyzstan, being formerly a nomadic society, had very fascinating and interesting accouterments. The embassy became known as a good place for people to come and sell cultural handicrafts. One day we got a visit from a family who had just been awarded a grand prize for the most beautiful yurt that had been made in Kyrgyzstan for years. They were supposed to have received not only a prize, but a stipend from the government. The government was to take this yurt and display it at the national museum. A government official reportedly instead bought a Mercedes with the money they were supposed to get this family. The family wanted to sell the yurt to regain some of the money that they had sunk into this yurt.

So I embarked on a great adventure with the museums of America to see if some museum would want to buy this beautiful yurt; it was a marvelous, marvelous art thing. No one would; nobody was interested in it. I had a friend that happened to be coming out to visit. She was on the board of one of the museums in San Diego. She purchased the yurt and took it back to San Diego and had it displayed at the San Diego Museum of Man and Culture for a long time. This next week I am going to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, for a special Mountain People's Folk Festival. The

Kyrgyz yurt will be on display again. The Kyrgyz ambassador to the U.S. – the same ambassador that's been here for six years in Washington – is again going out to Jackson Hole. The cultural side of Kyrgyzstan was one of the most interesting parts of it for me.

*End of reader*