

LIBERIA

COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

William E. Reed	1946-1948	Economic Mission for the State Department, Liberia
Edward R. Dudley Jr.	1948-1953	Ambassador, Liberia
Allen C. Davis	1958-1960	Consular/Political Officer, Monrovia
George Jaeger	1958-1960	Commercial Officer, Monrovia
Miles Wedeman	1960s	USAID Africa Bureau, Washington, DC
Leon Weintraub	1962-1964	Peace Corps Volunteer, Monrovia and Kahnple
Mary Chiavarini	1963-1965	Consul, Monrovia
James R. Meenan	1965	Trainee, Liberia Audit Program, USAID, Monrovia
Robert H. Nooter	1965-1967	Mission Director, USAID, Liberia
John L. Loughran	1966-1967	Consul, Monrovia
Horace G. Dawson	1967-1970	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Monrovia
John A. Linehan Jr.	1967-1970	Senior Political Officer, Monrovia
John G. Edensword	1970-1972	Consular Officer, Monrovia
Charles E. Rushing	1971-1973	Chief of the Economic/ Commercial Section, Monrovia
Beauveau B. Nalle	1972-1974	Chief of the Political Section, Monrovia
Howard S. Teeple	1972-1975	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Monrovia
Thomas F. Johnson	1975-1977	Assistant. Public Affairs/Information Officer, Monrovia
Harvey E. Gutman	1975-1978	Program Officer, USAID, Monrovia

Beverly Carter, Jr.	1976-1979	Ambassador, Liberia
Harold E. Horan	1976-1979	Deputy Chief of Mission, Monrovia
Noel Marsh	1976-1980	Program Officer, USAID, Monrovia
Julius W. Walker Jr.	1978-1981	Deputy Chief of Mission, Monrovia
Parker W. Borg	1979-1981	Country Director, West African Affairs, Washington, DC
Robert P. Smith	1979-1981	Ambassador, Liberia
Peter David Eicher	1981-1983	Desk Officer, Washington, DC
John D. Pielemeier	1981-1984	Deputy Director, USAID, Monrovia
John E. Hall	1984-1986	Economic Counselor, Monrovia
Keith L. Wauchope	1984-1986	Deputy Director, Francophone West Africa, Washington, DC
	1986-1989	Deputy Chief of Mission, Monrovia
Herman J. Rossi III	1986-1989	Economic Officer, Monrovia
James K. Bishop Jr.	1987-1990	Ambassador, Liberia
Donald Petterson	1998-1999	Chargé d’Affaires, Monrovia
Prudence Bushnell	1993-1995	Deputy Assistant Secretary, Sub-Sahara Africa, Washington, DC

WILLIAM E. REED
Economic Mission for the State Department
Monrovia (1946-1948)

Dr. William E. Reed was born in 1914 and raised in Columbia, Louisiana. He received a bachelor’s degree in agricultural science from Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; a master’s degree in 1940 from Iowa State University; and earned a Ph.D. in soil science and chemistry from Cornell University in 1945. In addition to serving in Ghana, Dr. Reed served in Liberia, Nigeria and Ethiopia. He was interviewed by Henry E. Mattox on July 3, 1992.

REED: In October of '46, I was contacted by the State Department, which invited me to join an economic mission to Liberia.

Q: They wrote you? They telephoned you?

REED: I was contacted by the State Department. Actually, it was the National Academy of Sciences that had listed my name as a suitable person to contact. And I believe it was my major professor, who was a member of the National Academy of Sciences. He was the head of the department of soil science and agronomy at Cornell.

Q: What was your Ph.D. area?

REED: My Ph.D. was in soil science, soil chemistry. I was in school at Cornell from 1944 to '45. I had the Ph.D., and I was invited to join this team.

The money funding this economic mission to Liberia was through the State Department. The reason for establishing this mission was that before President Roosevelt died, he had made a loan for twenty million dollars to build a port in Liberia. After President Roosevelt passed, the State Department was concerned about whether Liberia would ever be able to repay that loan. Before that, small amounts of money had been loaned to Liberia, but I think Liberia had defaulted on most of those payments. So there was a concern about whether Liberia would ever be able to repay that loan. Unlike today, the loan was made without any feasibility study or anything, and there was very little information in Liberia itself, what missionaries and all, and it was scattered. Actually, there was very little factual economic information on the economic potential of Liberia. So a small team of about 15 officers was sent to Liberia to make an economic survey, and I was a member of that team.

Q: Do you remember who the team leader was?

REED: Oscar W. Meier was the chief of the mission, you could call it.

Q: Was he an economist?

REED: I don't think he was really a trained economist, as such. He was supposed to have had some experience in administration of a..., but I don't think he was really a trained economist. He was more or less a person who had worked in the government and had moved up more or less in administration. Perhaps he might have had some experience in managing finance, but I don't think he was an economist.

Q: So all 15 of you got together and flew out to Monrovia.

REED: We didn't go out at one time, no. The recruitment was scattered. When I arrived, Meier was there, and there must have been four or five other officers. There was one person who had been there before, and he was held on. His name was Frank Fender. And Frank Fender had carried on a type of agricultural extension work, but he really wasn't trained in research and that type of thing. He had been there during the war period, when our government sent people out to

promote the extraction availability of agricultural products that would be useful for the war effort. He had been there earlier, and so he was held on.

Q: Was the mission based in the embassy?

REED: No, our headquarters was in the old German legation building, which I imagine had been almost vacant since World War I. During World War II, there had been a public health program there, and there was already in operation a team, I think detailed from the military, to supervise the building of the port. So that was another unit there. Our program was directly under the control of the State Department, whereas the public health mission was under the Department of Health...not Human Services then. It was another unit of government, but not under the Department of State.

Q: How did the team conduct its activities?

REED: Well, my responsibility was to travel into the field and to collect information on the different soils.

In fact, I could give you a publication that was done of my work, a report of the mission. There were two reports that were published by the State Department and the U.S. Department of Agriculture: my report; and another one, by Carl Mayer, of the forestry resources.

Now what we did was to travel all over the country. There were no roads in the interior. There were no paved roads in Liberia at that time, except for about 20 feet in front of the president's mansion. There were these laterite roads, you know, gravel, laterite, dusty roads from Roberts Field, the Firestone Plantation, up to Monrovia, which is about a distance of 40 miles. And the only other passable road was...you've never been to Liberia?

Q: No, I haven't.

REED: There was another road that extended inward about 20 additional miles. So altogether there were hardly over 60 miles of roads over which you could use a Jeep or a car to travel on in all of Liberia. And all the other places you had to go, you had to walk.

So I would maybe spend as much as three to four weeks in the interior—walking for 20 or 30 miles a day—collect information, make notes, and return.

When I would go out, I would have to have a lot of what we called local employees to go with me. And I'd have to carry enough money to buy food for them, to feed them while I was on these field trips. We couldn't use paper money; it would have to be coins, and we'd have to carry that in on the heads, in metal cases. You'd have to take maybe four or five hundred dollars in change, and that's pretty heavy.

Q: Sounds like a safari.

REED: It was.

Q: And it wasn't dangerous, carrying that money around?

REED: I never lost any money.

Q: Well, that's an interesting way to see the country.

REED: Yes.

Q: I did that in Nepal years ago. The only way to get around was to walk.

REED: That's right.

Q: You were there two years.

REED: It was actually almost two and a half years.

Q: And the team eventually issued an overall report?

REED: I never saw an overall report. I think everything we did was monthly reports and provide additional information. In fact, I was asked to stay on six months longer than I had planned. During the period we were in Liberia, President Truman made his Point Four speech, and we were asked to make recommendations as to how that program might be applied to Liberia. So we made... recommendations. In fact, at that time, there were only two programs worldwide that carried out the idea of what we were doing in Liberia. There was our program in Liberia, and I think there was one in Indonesia at the time.

Q: So you were in on one of the earliest AID efforts.

REED: That's right.

Q: Give me an idea of some of the other disciplines that were represented on the team.

REED: We had two civil engineers. We had a fisheries expert. That program never materialized, because the fisheries expert was drowned. We never found him. It started out there were two. The chief one died. The boat capsized.

Q: In a river or the ocean?

REED: In the ocean. He was lost, so I think that program was aborted completely. We had one forestry man. We had a tropical horticulturist. Later we had an education consultant.

Q: It sounds like a prototype of an AID mission.

REED: Except we didn't have programs defined and really developed. The only thing that resembled a current AID mission was this small contingent. We had two agricultural extension

workers there, and another fellow by name of Forbes, and they carried on a type of educational program, trying to teach the farmers how to produce more food, and introduced some of the improved foods. But it wasn't an AID mission.

Q: No, I know.

REED: But some of the ideas, yes.

Q: Generally speaking, what were your determinations? What did you determine, that Liberia was creditworthy or not?

REED: Well, the more information we got, the more hopeful we were about their potential of repaying the loan.

A number of things happened after we arrived. A road was constructed after the port was completed. The port actually was the thing that resulted in real economic growth. When that port was constructed, a road was built from Monrovia all the way through the interior, on up into what was French Guinea then. It opened that highway, and the amount of exports that went through that port increased so much that I think they repaid the loan in less than ten years.

And there was another thing that resulted in the economic growth of the country: the development of iron ore. We didn't have that much to do with that part; that somewhat preceded our arrival. The Bomi Hills iron ore project also resulted in a lot of economic growth.

I did some reporting on the mineral potential of the country, but I wasn't a trained geologist. In my reports I mentioned that there appeared to be other mineral rich areas. So, in addition to the Bomi Hills mine, there were about three other areas where they established mining operations.

So there was quite a bit of economic growth in the country.

Q: Well, one last question on that. You never did really have much to do with the embassy, then, while you were there?

REED: All of us had to go through the embassy. The embassy didn't supervise us, but all the communication had to go through the embassy. The embassy was very small. When we were there, we didn't have an embassy; it was a legation first. I think it only had two officers and several secretaries and that type of thing, and then the minister. The legation was elevated to an embassy while I was there. The first ambassador was Dudley, who was a lawyer. He came there as a minister. The reason the original minister left was the fact he was so sure President Truman wouldn't be elected that he took a job in the States. Dudley came, and shortly after Truman was elected it was elevated to embassy status.

Q: A lot of people backed the wrong horse in 1948.

REED: That's right.

Q: So you left Liberia and returned to teaching.

EDWARD R. DUDLEY JR.
Ambassador
Liberia (1948-1953)

The Honorable Edward R. Dudley was born in Roanoke, Virginia and was educated at Johnson C. Smith University and St John's University School of Law. He served as ambassador to Liberia, and also as a New York state supreme court judge and borough president of Manhattan. He was interviewed by Michael L. Krenn in 1995.

Q: During that same year you were chosen to become US minister to Liberia. How did that come about; and, I guess, the other question, were you surprised that it came about?

DUDLEY: Well, I had had a number of jobs in city government in New York. And then I worked with the NAACP and we had a Washington office. The NAACP at that time was rather well known because it was dealing with discrimination throughout the United States, primarily in the Southern states—that's where most of our law work was. So, our organization was pretty well known, and so was Thurgood, who was the chief counsel. And I suppose they were looking around for someone to replace whoever was in the Foreign Service in Africa at that time, and they sort of hit on me. I made no effort to get the post. In fact, I didn't even know it existed. When I looked into it, it sounded interesting. My wife and I said, "Well, let's give it a try."

Q: That was, in some ways, sort of a chancy decision for you. Nineteen-forty-eight was a year in which everyone predicted that Truman was going to go down to defeat. It looked like it might be a pretty short-term job.

DUDLEY: Right. That's what we said; we'll go over and have a vacation and then we'll come back after the elections. That's exactly right. But then we stayed five years, as you know.

Q: In some of the articles that I read about your appointment there were some rumors that instead of Liberia you might be chosen to go to an Iron Curtain country. Was that ever raised with you?

DUDLEY: Never with me, no. I'm sure that it was discussed in the State Department since they had to fill those spots as well, but the only spot that they talked to me about was Liberia, at that time. Because I don't think blacks had advanced too far in the State Department, or anywhere else, and Africa was a black continent and Liberia was a black country so they had no problems with assigning one of our people to that spot.

Q: In the State Department guides Liberia was traditionally described as a "hardship" post. Did you have any nervousness about taking your wife, and I think your son was six or seven at that time, over there?

DUDLEY: No, not at all, because we had known about Liberia through the missionaries at our church and whatnot. It was a civilized area. We knew it was a hardship post. In fact, a hardship post in the State Department carried an additional 10% stipend. We didn't lose any sleep over that, not at all. In fact, when we got over there and met the people in power—President Tubman and his cabinet, and all of the people—there were others who had been there—we found it very interesting. It wasn't a hardship post at all. We did a few things ourselves—building areas for the staff that came on. But, we got a chance to move out in Africa, visiting other places. In fact, on one occasion, I went all the way to South Africa, and South Africa was very controversial in those days. So, I think we spent four or five years over there, altogether, and built up a good mission. By that, I mean we brought interesting people in to serve in the black area. By doing that we also had a listening post for adjacent countries around, not only Liberia. We picked up information all around, so I think we did a credible job for the State Department at that time.

Q: What were your first impressions when you arrived at the American legation there in Monrovia? I've seen some reports from earlier years—the 1930s and '40s—where some visitors to the legation reported that morale seemed to be pretty low. That many of the employees that were there seemed to feel that it was a dead-end, career-wise, to be assigned to Monrovia. What did you find when you got there in 1948?

DUDLEY: I didn't get that impression at all, although some may have felt that because there weren't many blacks in the State Department anywhere. And this is true. They were immediately assigned to Liberia. Of course, over the period of time we were there we got them transferred to European posts and all over. I didn't feel that the people that I met there were too uncomfortable. Number one, they were happy to have a job. Number two, they were glad to be in the State Department, and, number two, that in itself was breaking ground. So that impression didn't hit me. We used that as a base, and my own expertise as it had developed working with people in the State Department, to get these people moved out, at least as I indicated before. And we had quite a mission. And we had quite a bit of help from the State Department in building quarters for the staff and that sort of thing. So, it worked out very well over that five-year period.

Q: Yes, I came across that quite a bit in the State Department material of you requesting improvements and so forth. And sometimes grudgingly, but eventually they did give in on a number of those things.

DUDLEY: Yes, they did.

Q: When you arrived in Liberia in 1948 what were you told and what did you perceive as the basic US interests in Liberia and the basic problems that we might have with Liberia?

DUDLEY: First of all, we decided that we were in no hurry, so we took a ship to go to Liberia. And it took many, many days before we got there. And we were welcomed by the staff who were there. Our first impression was that there was American interests there—business interests. I think we talked about this before. The Liberian Mining Company. Many of the things that were being done there were spearheaded by American entrepreneurs, and therefore the character of the embassy itself took on greater importance. Because we had persons who were writing reports on

different phases of life there and this kept them very busy. Quite often they would come into the embassy to see us with respect to setting up appointments with the president. This is a small, tightly-knit country, and one man ran it. There wasn't too much underneath. Underneath, the lieutenants were there, but they couldn't make decisions. Decisions were made at the top, and the closer you could get to the top, the better off the business people were. This was the biggest thing that we had to do—representing American interests. And it succeeded. We found the president to be a very affable man. Those of us in the foreign service, and other countries as well, set up appointments with him, once a week or twice a month or whatever, and we would go and sit down and chat about the various interests. He had interests and we had interests, and that's the way it worked.

Q: Let me ask a question about your reception from the Liberian government. You said you got on very well with President Tubman. Once again, some of the State Department materials that I went through from the 1930s and 1940s and so forth seemed to indicate that some of the previous US representatives felt that there was a resentment on the part of the Liberians that only blacks were being assigned as the head of the US mission to Liberia. Did you notice any of that when you were there?

DUDLEY: I did not, no. In fact, most of the Liberians were happy to have the black fellows there. They felt closer to them. And on the other hand, there was white business there—Firestone itself had one of the largest businesses in Africa. Thousands of acres of rubber trees that they were managing and getting latex to send back. So, you had all kinds of groups there. And it merged right in, and we didn't seem to have any problem.

Q: In general, when you arrived there in 1948, what were your first impressions of Liberia and its people?

DUDLEY: I wasn't surprised, because I had read about it and had been thoroughly briefed in the State Department and talked to people who had been there, and my impression probably was that here was a group of people trying to get along in that part of Africa—one of the few independent countries in Africa; the first independent, Liberia turned out to be—and we had to work with them. We found in the government itself some very competent, qualified people. Some of the heads of departments there had been to Hampton and universities in America. Steve Tolbert and some of the others who we met right away, had a working knowledge of the United States. So, I wasn't surprised, because much of this I knew, having been briefed thoroughly before coming there, and so we fell right into it. We had to work in the embassy there, and then you make the rounds of the other groups. Right below us was the British minister, and some of the others from other parts of Europe. It was a very delightful assignment. A hardworking one, because we really got out into the countryside and roughed it. We were out in the heart of Africa, places where roads were just like this, up and down. We got our car and we had our chauffeur and that sort of thing, but it was no picnic moving around in a country such as that.

Q: In 1949 the US mission was raised to embassy level and you were made...

DUDLEY: From a minister to an ambassador, that's right. That's the first time that had happened in Africa.

Q: Right, and you were the first black American ambassador in US history.

DUDLEY: Right.

Q: Were you surprised by that development at all?

DUDLEY: No. I think we did a lot to push it. I had some very able staff people. One chap in particular, a brilliant boy, whose name was Rupert Lloyd. And Rupert Lloyd was the first assistant, so to speak. These fellows knew how to push, and what to push, and what buttons to push—they'd been there some time—and I would say they deserve a lot of credit for how they ended the...

The legation moved on; it was the legation at that time. Because every time it moved up a step, it helped them, salary-wise, in particular. So, it was a normal progression, you might say.

Q: One thing I guess that I was surprised at... I did find an article in Ebony about the raising of the embassy and yourself being made the first black US ambassador, but in general was this seen by yourself and other black Americans as a monumental step?

DUDLEY: No, not at all. It was just a step along the way. Most of us, probably, who were involved in it sort of looked at it as a step in your own career, not as any monumental thing. We didn't consider that. I don't think the question ever came up—how many people do we have in Europe, who's assigned where and whatnot. At that time, that phase of it was not significant. The significant part was that you have a personal title and maybe a little more money and so on and so forth. You weren't thinking about groundbreaking, even though it was. It never even dawned on me that I was the first black ambassador. Those things come on later. Even now, people are talking about it. So, at that time, not at all; we were just another one. In fact, I'm not sure that we even knew that—we had countries all over the world—not sure at all.

Q: Your talking about the roads leads into one of the questions I had. One of the programs that you and your staff seemed to push very, very hard for when you were in Liberia was Point 4 and other economic assistance to Liberia. First, was it difficult to get? And then second, how successful do you think you were in terms of getting economic aid for Liberia?

DUDLEY: We were very successful, because, here again, Liberia was the State Department's jewel in all of Africa. It was also well known from a business point of view, simply because Firestone—which was a huge American business—had a major stake in it. And so when we began to talk about this, it was no strange subject at all. It wasn't too difficult to get them to give us what we wanted. So, we knew that the Point 4 program was in essence moving throughout the world, and we put in our two-cents and they gave us everything we needed. It probably doubled the staff that we had there. Here you have a group of business people, so to speak, working on roads, buildings, whatever they were doing, but still they were under the Embassy. This was just one phase of the Point 4 establishment.

Q: I found one document that said—I didn't find anything else about this—that you were Chairman of the American Committee on Point 4 Development in Africa. Was that a more wide ranging program?

DUDLEY: Not to my knowledge, not to my knowledge. We do know that they had some things going on in other provinces of Africa, but nothing that called on me to make any visits there. We were the headquarters, no doubt about it, because we were the first and had the largest input in this Point 4 thing. Probably Liberia needed more at that particular time. They got a lot of help from our State Department in these areas here. We had people coming over who were experts in different fields; any number of experts were coming over. And Point 4 encompassed much more than road building. There were a number of things that they were successful at, and the embassy was simply another place for them to hang their hat. But we had Under Secretaries, and three or four different departments in the embassy. We had a pretty large staff, and a huge building that we were instrumental in getting going at the time, right on the banks of the ocean. It was a beautiful place.

Q: Yes, I saw one very small picture in one of the articles.

DUDLEY: Then during that time we had, on what we called the embassy compound, which was more than a quarter of an acre all around there—houses built to house these people. Because there were no hotels or anything like that. We had to put our own housing up. And we were very successful with that. We had all kinds of crews that came over to do that. It was a major operation, and far more important than it would be perceived today for a small country. Because we were a small country. We had an operation that you would probably find in any major country in the world. And I suppose there was justification for it, because Americans were taking out diamonds and gold. And the Liberian government was very free with the technical assistance that was coming in there, because they got their share out of it, and it worked for everybody.

Q: You said earlier that your relationship with President Tubman was very good.

DUDLEY: It was very good.

Q: I came across some correspondence in the NAACP files, however, that seemed to indicate that that often put you at odds with people like Walter White. The one main affair that they seemed to cite was the Tve affair, T-w-e was the name of the individual in Liberia, someone who I suppose Tubman was trying to have arrested or something. And they complained about his one-man rule in Liberia. Do you think those criticisms were fair, or was that basically what was needed?

DUDLEY: There was some fairness to them, but there was nothing that they could do about it. Any number of countries had kind of a one-man rule—at that time—and I think I probably told Walter to let up on this thing, because there was nothing they could do and it made it worse for us over there. Because, here you have a dictator say, whose running the operation, and he's not going to brook any interference within his own country. He doesn't give a darn, because he holds all the cards. He's the one who lets the Americans in to do business. Americans are banging the door down to come in and work on lumber and diamond mines and so forth and so on. So that

was just a passing phase with respect to any objections that the NAACP might have had and whatnot. And I would say that they didn't have all the information that I had. Not that they didn't do a good job, because I worked for them for five years with Thurgood in the legal department, and they did. But a lot of things like this, you can make observation about but you can't even dent, because you have no authority. You can't take them to court. They're independent people and they don't give a darn about what you think, and you can't change it. In time, the local people there were able, as politics moved up, they were able to change it. But the outside criticism, as I recall, was like water falling off a log. Particularly with a man like Tubman, who was a strong kind of fellow, and probably resented this outside interference. He was so strong in this area that there was no local group that could dent it. If the election was held—and they didn't have any elections—he would win it anyway. Tubman and his cabinet—he used to call them his “crowd of boys”, those that he would put in office here, here, here, heads of the various departments, those were his “crowd of boys”. Outsiders, they would laugh at, they would criticize them. But we spent all our time trying to get along with them, so we could further our aims and objectives.

Q: I found a number of documents in the libraries and archives about visitors to Liberia; black Americans such as Claude Barnett—I believe he came in 1950, and so forth. Generally speaking, do you think black Americans in the late-1940s, 1950s, were very interested in foreign policy; very informed about foreign policy?

DUDLEY: No, I don't. But there were some individuals who, as you pointed out, would make trips. And they would be well received. We had some artists come in there, and they would be well received. But I don't think there were any tree-shakers. During that period of time, you couldn't change anything.

Q: Of course, your stay in Liberia coincided with the heating up of the Cold War. During your time in Liberia were either communism or anti-American nationalism—were either of those two things really much of a problem for US interests in Liberia?

DUDLEY: Not at all. In America they were making a lot of noise and kicking up. They wouldn't be in Liberia for the simple reason that Liberia—the government—was run with an iron hand. The man in charge—Tubman—wouldn't permit any of that. At the drop of a hat, he would cut it off. And he would use tactics probably that we wouldn't use; it would be illegal in our country. So there was nothing...there was criticism from the outside of how the government would be run, but there wasn't anything inside stirring up the people, because they wouldn't stand for it. You must realize that this was a dictatorship in Liberia at the time that I was there. Whoever was running the government and happened to be there at the time, he could do whatever he wanted to do. And they did. But it didn't interfere with us. We were able to protect our people who were there making a living, in lumber and this, that, and the other. Again, as I said, the Firestone people, and whatnot. Part of my job was once a week, when the head of Firestone would meet with the President, I would meet...the three of us would meet there. And there were many lesser American business people who would come and not even get a chance to see the President, but who would happen to see the various offices and departments that they were interested in. Tubman was very fond of many Americans. We had a black doctor there by the name of John West. He was Tubman's own physician, and West could do no wrong. He had individuals like

that. But everything came from the top; that's where the power was in the country. You had a legislature and everything else there, but when you get through it and settle down, it was what the bossman said. And that was William V.S. Tubman—Shadrack(?) Tubman. And I had a lot of respect for him, because he was a strong man and basically he would use his strength and knowledge and so forth on behalf of his people. Of course, he looked out after number one. For example, if the Americans were there and discovered a rich ore of some kind, he'd get his cut, he'd have his share and whatnot. Unlike in America where you couldn't do anything like that. But, they did all right. And I couldn't criticize him because he took care of everybody, all of his people. It was just, "Do as I say, and you'll get along all right." And people got along all right. He built the schools for the kids, so forth and so on. But he wouldn't brook any interference. He was a tough man.

Q: Let me ask this about the Liberians. Were they very aware of or very interested in US racial problems, civil rights problems here in this country?

DUDLEY: They were very knowledgeable. I don't know if they were very interested. They were knowledgeable because they were critical. Every once in while in talking to you they'd pull your leg and whatnot: "How long are you going to stand for it," and so forth and so on. Oh, they were very knowledgeable about it. Because many of them had been to America to get an education, and they had suffered some of these same things. Oh, yes, they were vocal; very much so. But they were sitting back in the catbird's seat. They have their own country, they have their own black president, and so forth and so on, and they didn't hesitate to speak their mind. But there was no interference; there was nothing they could do. But a lot of the criticism was caustic, because they had been there and many of them went to school there. They themselves had been the recipients of some of this backhanded stuff, race and whatnot. That's why they would bring it up to you. Here you are, you're the American ambassador, and they would jokingly say certain off-color things to you about it to see what you would say. "Why don't you straighten out things over here in your country?"; things like that.

Q: But do you think that US racial problems and civil rights problems had any impact on the carrying out of foreign policy in areas like Africa, Asia...

DUDLEY: I don't think it did anything at all. Because if you're in Africa you're dealing with people who didn't have this problem; Africans in their own country. It was just a different kettle of fish. Oh, everybody knew about it, and they would "tweak" you about, you know. But, I don't think so.

Q: I found a number of documents, especially in your papers that are at the Amistad Research Center in New Orleans, about the years 1950 and 1951, because there seemed to be a lot of discussion about a possible transfer for you. It seemed in your messages back to the State Department that you had set up most of the programs that you wanted to do and they could go on by themselves. There were a number of suggestions that seemed to be raised: once again, going to an Iron Curtain country; possibly Central America, the Caribbean; maybe Haiti or the Dominican Republic; and there were even some talks about sending you to the Far East, somewhere like Burma. Were you amenable to these kinds of transfers? Did you want to continue in foreign service after Liberia?

DUDLEY: It had not advanced far enough for me to even put any hope into it at that time. My own feeling was that I should come back here and get involved again with Thurgood and the law department; work that I had been doing. And I had left the NAACP once before and I think as I mentioned to you, Thurgood said, "How long are you going to stay this time?", the last time I came back. Because each time I'd go he'd have to have somebody take my place. But I had been for so many years the first assistant that there wasn't any question about my coming back. Walter White, who was head of the NAACP, he was for it, but Thurgood was always pulling my leg about it. I guess he didn't want me to get away. I was a workhorse in there. He was the head man, and we did a lot of things. We tried cases down in South Carolina and Georgia, and we were in Texas, toured NAACP branches and whatnot. And this was a very shaky period in our history, when there was complete segregation. And therefore a lot of the things we were doing were borderline things and in some cases dangerous. Because certain people were run out of certain areas. But despite all that, I was anxious to come back and pick up where I'd left off, and after a certain period of time I did, I came on back. But I don't recall that I was even offered another post or that I requested one. In my mind, that consideration didn't come up. I realized, I think, all along that this was a stepping-stone for my career, and that's all it turned out to be.

Q: So, rather than a transfer, you would probably be thinking of just getting back home and getting back to your work.

DUDLEY: That's right. Because our son was getting larger and we had school problems with him and so on. So, we just decided that was it.

Q: You left Liberia in 1953 when the Eisenhower administration came in. Just as sort of a summary of your service there, in 1953 when you left what would you consider to be your greatest accomplishments of your tenure in Liberia?

DUDLEY: Well, I think probably it was enlarging the American embassy there to a point where it was a real going operation. When I went there it was almost a one-man show. You had a secretary and so forth and so on. But over a period of time we were able to bring in so-called sub-department heads and whatnot, and enlarge it and build a new building and so forth. And we had a good listening post for the State Department throughout Africa, in Liberia. I think that was an accomplishment that I look at as being in good hands when I left.

Q: Did you have any significant regrets when you left in 1953, anything that you thought you should have done?

DUDLEY: I don't think so, because I knew that I had to get on with my life. And I was very young in those days, when I was over there.

Q: Right. You were only, what, 37 or 38?

DUDLEY: Something like that. So I had to get on with whatever I was going to do. And as I said, our son needed an education. His mother had been teaching him with another little boy in a little school. And it was now time to move on. Whether it was Republicans or Democrats didn't really

make any difference to me; who was in power. Because it was not our intention to make the Foreign Service our career. This was an opportunity to put something on your record and to do something that you'd never had an opportunity to do, and I was lucky in that respect and appreciated it. But here again, our office was back there; my former employers were back there, so I went back and joined them and went on with my life.

Q: Well, one last question about your service in Liberia, and then if we have time just a couple of questions about your activities after 1953. While you were in Liberia, a number of visitors sent memos back to the State Department—you sent a couple yourself—about the whole issue of trying to get more blacks into the State Department. First question, do you think the Truman administration did enough to encourage that; did it appoint enough people; did it try to get more blacks into the State Department? How good a job do you think it did in trying to do that?

DUDLEY: I really don't know, because being out in the field, except for those that they would send to me, I don't know what they did in other areas of the world. You have in the State Department, cut up by regions, and you have the African Desk and you have this and South America and so forth and so on, those of us out in the field had very little knowledge either of the requirements or what was being done in these other areas of the world. I don't have much that I can add to that, at this particular time.

Q: Were you disappointed that during the entire Truman years you were the only black American who was appointed to be a chief of mission?

DUDLEY: I don't think so, because the climate of that time was that anyone who was appointed, who was black, would probably go to a black country, which I did in the past. And we had not advanced enough in our own culture. So, other than probably my general disappointment about the slowness in which this was eradicated, I would not say that there was any particular disappointment at that time. Because, I was too knowledgeable about Washington and what it would do and what it would not do. And getting a foot in the door, if you were black, was not an easy thing in those days. And here I had gone over to minister, and they had put me up as an ambassador, so it looks like we had broken some ice, and we had to go from there. We had to continue the fight here, because segregation, discrimination were very rampant throughout America. So it wasn't so much a question of who was going to do it on the foreign field. In my case, I just picked up where I left off, four years previous. We were filing cases all over the South to get things straightened out, and that's what I did.

ALLEN C. DAVIS
Consular/Political Officer
Monrovia (1958-1960)

Ambassador Allen C. Davis was born in Tennessee in 1927. He served in the US Navy from 1945-1953 before receiving his BSFS from Georgetown University in 1956. His career has included positions in Monrovia, Moscow, Algiers,

*Ouagadougou, Dakar, Kinshasa, and ambassadorships in Guinea and Uganda.
Ambassador Davis was interviewed by Peter Moffat on June 26, 1998.*

Q: Can you situate what was going on in Liberia at that time for us?

DAVIS: It was indeed. Liberia was very firmly under the control of the Americo-Liberians who ruled almost every facet of life. Politically, of course, it was a kind of oligarchy with the Americo-Liberians virtually refusing to let the native peoples participate in political life. Economic life was quite similar. The good jobs and the good lands were reserved for the Americo-Liberians. Socially, in almost every way, the grip of the Americo-Liberians was firm and unrelenting. People who were returning from school in the United States at the time to become the future leaders of Liberia were such people as Cecil Dennis, who I think was the foreign minister when the Americo-Liberians regime eventually was overthrown. That was the group with which I primarily associated. They loved parties, they loved social events - usually late night dancing parties. I got to know some of them fairly well. They were a little bit younger than I was, but not all that much. I was the consular officer at the embassy for the first year and a half and then the political officer for the final year that I was there. For me, the time is memorable in a kind of sad way. This group of Dennises, Simpsons, Parkers - first family offspring, really - were the ones who were slaughtered - some of them tied to posts on the beach and machine-gunned when the native Liberians eventually took charge of their country.

Q: Were you aware of the depth of feeling which eventually burst out or was this hard to what subsequently happened...

DAVIS: Not difficult to imagine, Peter, but I think there's a kind of natural tendency to gravitate to the people with whom you are going to be associated with day in and day out in government in whatever social events are taking place and all the rest. Anybody who thought for very many moments about this deep schism would have to imagine also that eventually the eruption would take place. The fire that would burn this five percent of the population which had been so unrelenting and had shown no indication that they were going to share the power and the wealth of the country with the great majority of the population.

But did I have enough opportunity to associate with the Krahn and the Gio and the others in the countryside? No. I traveled some, but they were not politicized. They had not been allowed to become politicized. Their resentment was obvious to anybody who thought five minutes about it. But experiencing it was not something that happened in daily life, so the hope I guess that I had at the time was that something could eventually evolve rather than a cataclysm. I think it's the kind of feeling we had about South Africa. How is this going to change? Is it going to come about gradually and is there going to be a possibility for the two sides to work together afterward? I guess that's really the secret hope we had at the time, that it could be something that wouldn't have to be a bloodbath.

Q: But the United States Embassy must have had some sort of pro-consular role in trying to influence the Americo-Liberians to be more forthcoming to their countrymen or was it strictly day to day...

DAVIS: Peter, this was a long time ago, and I'm trying right now to remember any single instance in which Ambassador Jones ever did such a thing. I can't recall a single instance. Now, we had a long series of kind of semi-professional diplomats in the top job at the embassy, and when I arrived there, there was an ambassador who was new to his job but had been in Liberia as AID director. Richard Jones was his name. He was, I guess, a retired or general in the army reserve and had come out to be AID director. He was not the kind of person who would have originated any such initiative. He would not have been terribly reliable had he been asked to pursue any such initiatives. Now, when he left in 1959, the department assigned a career diplomat for the first time. You will remember his name. I cannot for the moment. He later became ambassador to Nigeria.

Q: Matthews?

DAVIS: Yes. Albert Matthews, who had been, I think, a deputy assistant secretary of state. A very distinguished, very polished, very accomplished man in many ways. And he was the kind of person with an intellectual bent - just a tremendously impressive diplomat who would have been the kind of person to do exactly what you are suggesting. I left the post soon after he arrived, so he was still kind of settling into his job. Whether he did, I can't say. It certainly was not a main kind of a theme of our assignment by any stretch of the imagination.

Much of the embassy's work at the time was economic. An extremely rich iron ore deposit had been discovered years earlier on the edges of Mount Nimba which is where Liberia, Guinea, and Ivory Coast (Côte d'Ivoire), where their frontiers come together. A company named Lamco was organized, a railroad was built across the country. Iron ore was already being brought out of some other places where the mining was taking place in Liberia even before this big deposit could be developed. Of course, we had the long, long-standing relationship with Liberia through Firestone's plantations which grew of rubber. Goodrich had had some rubber-growing plantations also, so our work was really oriented toward those economic aspects.

**GEORGE JAEGER
Commercial Officer
Monrovia (1958-1960)**

Mr. Jaeger was born in Austria and raised in Austria, England and the US. Evacuated from Austria to Holland and England, he immigrated to the US. After serving in the US Army he was educated at St. Vincent College and Harvard University. He joined the State Department in 1951 and the Foreign Service (USIA) in 1953. Primarily a Political Officer, Mr. Jaeger served in Washington several times as well as in Monrovia, Zagreb, Berlin, Bonn, Geneva, Paris, Quebec (Consul General), Ottawa (Political Counselor) and Brussels (Deputy Assistant Secretary General of NATO for Political Affairs. His final assignment was Diplomat in Residence at Middlebury College. Mr. Jaeger was interviewed by Robert Daniels in 2000.

Q: Where did you go from INR?

JAEGER: In July of 1958 my phone rang one day and someone from Personnel said, “Well, Mr. Jaeger, you seem to have done okay in your first assignment, but we have the feeling you’ve so far been looking at the Foreign Service from one end of the telescope. We thought that your next assignment should give you a chance to see it through the other.”

“Well, what do you have in mind?”, I said, thinking we were now starting an urbane negotiation. “Actually I am calling to tell you “, he said, “that you have been assigned as Third Secretary of Embassy for Commercial Affairs in Monrovia, Liberia!” I blurted out, “Where on earth is that?”

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: The guy said, “Well, you need to find out, that’s one of the reasons you’re going there. You’re to report there in three weeks.”

Needless to say that was a bit more of a shock than a surprise, since my Washington career had so far been in relatively high- level jobs and I had somehow developed the idea that things would simply continue that way. The notion of being a ‘third’ secretary in a country I could only place vaguely as being somewhere on the west-African coast, did not fit these expectations. I was to learn within a matter weeks that the Personnel people in fact had it absolutely right: First, because up to that point I had no idea what the bread and butter work in the Foreign Service was all about and had much to learn; and secondly, because, as it turned out, Liberia was to be one of the most important experience of my life and a place which, to my great surprise, I came to love.

Q: So you left the comforts of Washington for the trenches on the equator.

JAEGER: That’s right, although this first involved getting properly equipped. The key to any degree of success in Monrovia, I discovered was being properly dressed, - which in those days, when William Vacanarat Shadrach Tubman was still President, meant the ‘works’: White tie, black tie, morning coat, white gloves, spats, and of course a sturdy collapsible topper, all of which one acquired at S.S.S. Schwartz, the famous Foreign Service haberdasher in a Baltimore loft who has clothed generations of FSO’s for their assignments across the globe.

When, after some searching, I found their establishment, one of the three Schwartz brothers promptly told me to stand on a wooden box, asked where I was going and shouted to some assistants across many racks of clothing, “Monrovia”! The needed accoutrements appeared in succession from various corners of the loft, Mr. Schwartz fitted me with incisive expertise, told me that George Kennan had been there just a short time ago, congratulated me and wished me luck.

When I had completed my next purchase, a used black two-door Ford, which I had fitted with extra-heavy springs to withstand what I had been told were Liberia’s abominable roads, and had consigned my modest worldly goods to the shipping company, I was set to go.

Q: So you went off to Monrovia?

JAEGER: Yes, in September 1958. Getting there was an experience in itself, since I crossed the Atlantic on a Pan American Clipper which took off from the East River in New York, stopped some 18 hours later in the Azores and eventually got to Lisbon. It was the first and last time I really enjoyed a commercial flight. The plane had commodious seats, which, at night transformed into full-length double decked bunks, as in a Pullman car; excellent meals were prepared by an onboard cook and served on crisply pressed linen table cloths in genuine china with silverware. When dinner and 'digestives' were finished the stewardesses made up our bunks, which had curtains so that you could put on pajamas, stretch out and get a good nights sleep. I still remember that, just before I dozed off in a cozy upper, a hand pulled my curtain aside a bit and, as a last nice touch, a voice asked what I would like for a nightcap? I recall a very satisfying vintage Cognac!

Q: [Laughter]

JAEGER: After Lisbon, life got real on Pan Am's long, much more basic, but equally memorable flight across the West African Sahara and the Sahel to Roberts Field in Liberia; which had been built by the US in 1942 and 1943 as part of a backdoor route, via Brazil, to ferry supplies and troops to the North African campaign. Together with the Port of Monrovia, Roberts Field and the 5000-some US troops based in Liberia at the time, also assured access to Liberia's huge rubber resources, primarily at the Firestone plantation, which were critically important in World War II as well.

On our flight I had my first encounter with a cross-section of Africa's colorful traveling public - weary-looking Lebanese traders, some returning European business people, marked by years of living in the tropics, and all sorts of African men and women in a variety of striking robes and headgear speaking a multiplicity of languages. It was also an impressive introduction to West Africa's very different climate, since we passed through immense thunderclouds over the Sahara which shook our plane like a butterfly in the wind and left us all very glad when we finally landed safely at Roberts Field! And that, in spite of the unkempt air of its wet, desolate-looking landing strip carved out of the bush, the pathetic little hut which was the only airport building and the several snakes I noticed then and later under the benches in the small, stiflingly hot waiting room. Whether or not they were deadly mambas has remained unclear.

Q: Sounds like quite a trip!

JAEGER: Yes, it was the transition from one world to another. Waiting for me in the grey rainy season drizzle, was Bill Rush - my rumpled-looking new boss, the head of the Embassy's two-man economic section of which I was to be the junior member - who bundled me into a black Embassy car for the 20 mile drive on unpaved laterite roads into Monrovia.

I don't remember much of our conversation because I was so astonished by the succession of native Liberian villages we passed, which, with their thatched huts set in palm groves, bare-breasted women and naked children, looked just like New Yorker cartoons. The experience was

rounded out by village men, suffering from schistosomiasis and therefore urinating frequently, simply turning in our direction, so as not to miss the passing show, and spraying away.

Needless to say, by the time we arrived at the Embassy compound and Bill got me settled down in the quite comfortable house I was to share with Bob Allen, the Political Officer, I had a first-rate case of culture shock! It was during a little reception which had been arranged to welcome me that Bill Rush memorably recognized the symptoms and said: "Actually George, you look like a rabbit. We'll have to see what we can do with you."

Q: Laughter.

JAEGER: Not, I thought, a very good beginning!

Over my first weekend I ventured out to explore downtown Monrovia, at the time a depressing scene of badly maintained buildings, rusting corrugated roofs and potholed streets.

As I stood at the main intersection, wondering which way to head next, I suddenly heard what I thought were two fire engines. When I saw them, coming up the left and right sides of the same block on whose corner I was standing, I realized that they couldn't see each other, but were heading straight toward my corner where they were going to meet. I thought: "No, they're not going to do this! They are not going to do this!" But, they did! They totaled each other in front of me, sirens still going!

Next day, Monday, I attended my first staff meeting, and was welcomed by Ambassador Richard Lee Jones, a mild, friendly African-American who had been a Chicago department store executive, and one of the few black brigadier generals in the US Army during World War II.

Q: Just to interject, were there other blacks in the Embassy staff at that time?

JAEGER: Only the Public Affairs officer, a tall, competent, very nice man.

Q: Well, continue the story about this first staff meeting.

JAEGER: Everyone around the table made some report. When my turn came, having just arrived, it was assumed that I would just briefly say how pleased I was to be there. Instead I spoke up and said, "Well, I do have something to report, that is that I took a walk downtown yesterday and saw two fire engines, both pretty new, which totaled each other coming at speed from two sides of the same block."

The Ambassador just said, "Oh my God!"

I then learned that these fire engines had only a few weeks earlier arrived from the States and been ceremoniously turned over as a present to President Tubman. I had witnessed their virgin call to duty - with its disastrous results!

The next event was even more unnerving. Only a few days or so later was to be the great ceremonial launch of the first Liberian-built and owned cargo ship at a dry dock on the Mesurado River, a project specially dear to President Tubman. Although Liberia's flag vessels were crisscrossing the oceans, and so brought in a certain amount of income, up to that point not even one ship was actually owned by Liberia, much less constructed there. This launch was intended to remedy that and show the world that Liberia had the potential to become a real, albeit small part, part of the maritime scene.

Be that as it may, everybody who was anybody in the country was in the reviewing stand that sweltering day; the band struck up the national anthem, "The Love of Liberty brought us here"; Liberian flags did their best to flutter slightly in the stifling heat; and the huge wooden ship began to slip sideways toward the river after Mrs. Antoinette Tubman had vigorously swung the bottle and christened it.

Then everyone sucked in their breaths. For the ship slid and slid and kept on sliding - until it hit the water and began to sink! At first no one could believe their eyes. But there it was, the few sailors on board had jumped off into the dirty river, pretty soon the deck began to disappear, then the bridge went under, until, with a final shudder and a huge belch, the smokestack vanished under the lazy brown-green flow! There was a deathly silence, only punctured by the oinking of some frogs, until, after what seemed like an eternity, Tubman rose slowly and walked out.

What had happened was that the inexperienced shipwrights had indeed built a lovely ship, but had used heavy hard woods, abundant in Liberia, and then compounded the problem by fitting the vessel with a set of heavy engines. The 'Antoinette Tubman' never had a chance.

The Westerners that week made mostly snide comments and chattered about "WAWA" ("West Africa wins again!"), although, as I came to understand, there was poignancy in these often failed and even ludicrous attempts to bring Liberia up to Western standards: The result either of inadequate preparation and training, or, more often, a consequence of the deep cultural differences between our societies which frequently produced wholly unexpected reactions or results.

It was on this instructive note that my assignment in Liberia began.

Q: What were the next lessons?

JAEGER: I was to learn over the coming months that Bill Rush was a very bright guy and a pretty good economist, but that, most importantly, he had come to understand that you didn't learn much of any importance in West Africa by hanging around the Embassy social circuit - then, as probably now, a hyper-active cultural defense mechanism against the real and imagined risks of actually getting involved in Africa.

Instead he believed in going out into the bush as often as we could, meeting chiefs, missionaries, district commissioners, traders and our own economic development people at work in the up-country areas, as well as ordinary Africans. As a result we came to understand the country and its problems, were better able to advise on what might or might not work, and often scooped the

folks who stayed in town following the rumor mill. Bill's tough love, hands-on training was a tremendous lesson on how, in principle, good reporting and analysis should be done.

Q: How did Rush start you off?

JAEGER: Well, at the outset I understood none of that, and was therefore intensely surprised when, on the second weekend after my arrival, Bill stopped by my desk and announced that "we are leaving at eight tomorrow to go up-country. Try to be on time and have your gear ready for an overnight" !

I felt too intimidated to ask where we were going or why, but was ready with a little pack at the appointed time, piled into our jeep and set off. Bill drove about hundred miles north towards Gbarnga on a terribly potholed and rutted laterite road, passing village after village - with their palaver huts, topless women pounding cassava, naked children and more and more forlorn-looking Lebanese traders the farther north one went - stopping only occasionally to call on someone, and then continuing.

Q: What's laterite?

JAEGER: It's reddish dirt, prevalent in most of Liberia - red because of its high iron ore content.

Q: Oh.

JAEGER: None of this helped much with my culture shock and growing confusion as to what, less than two weeks out of Georgetown, I was doing in this god-forsaken wilderness! To make things worse, it was beginning to get dark. Being the new junior, and trying to get an idea what the plan was, I said, "You know, Bill, I haven't made any reservations (!). Where do you think we should stay tonight?" He burst out laughing, and allowed as to how as yet he hadn't figured that out either, but added cheerfully "Let's see what we can do."

So, a few miles on, he turned into a sketchy path which eventually led to a village where Bill asked for the chief. When we found him in the palaver hut, (an airy thatch-roofed structure found in most villages where the men discuss policy issues and hang out while the women pound cassava and do most of the other work) Bill told him that we needed a place to stay and wondered, pointing suggestively to some gin we had brought along, "if we could also have a little party".

All this seemed very agreeable to the chief; some topless ladies were promptly dispatched to sweep out a hut (the Maidenform bra was to appear in Liberia only in the following year); a tom-tom sounded just as in the movies to summon people to the celebration; and we were soon installed in our new mud-walled, utterly bare home - with people of all ages crowding the empty window frames to watch us unpack our kits.

Actually, we got off rather lightly that night, since on another occasion, still farther in the interior, a big menacing growl went up from the onlookers in the windows as we began eating the food

we always brought along; which, it was explained by a youngster who knew some English, expressed their shock that we didn't wash before eating - as "Africans always do!"

We, of course, offered to do so, and soon saw an amply endowed woman set down a little wooden board outside our hut, followed by a steaming enamel basin of hot water, both clearly meant to be used for our wash. So we went out, stood on the board, washed hands and faces, smiled all round and went back to try to eat.

No way! There were more, and more menacing growls, growing quickly louder. What was required, we were told, and what all people from that village did when they came in from the bush, was that we strip and let the nice woman wash us properly!

Bill, shaking with laughter, suggested that I go first. So I shed my clothes, stood on the board and grimly determined to let myself be cleansed, as a circle of intensely interested young onlookers of both sexes pressed in closer and closer to get a good look at all aspects of this amazing white phenomenon. My turn to laugh came moments later when it was Bill's turn to strip tease!

My experience on our first upcountry trip was less taxing. A big fire was started in the village center as we were eating our rations and, after a while, more and more women began chanting and dancing around it, to the stirring beat of the 'big' drums which sounded out over great distances, and the staccato cross rhythms of the smaller ones - some set on the ground, others held under the arms of the village musicians.

As the gin and palm wine made the rounds, the dancers' movements became more hypnotic, and they began to glow and glisten in the fire light as they danced and danced till the wee hours of the morning! Listening to the chanting and the pounding drums reach out across the vast dark night sky and the endless African bush all around us, was a deeply moving, humanizing experience, which on our many later trips I came to love. It is an amazing discovery when one comes to understand that these people, so much closer culturally to the stone age, are as essentially human as we are, and, like us, have constructed belief systems, reflected in ceremonies, music and art, to explain the mystery of what and where we are.

Exciting as all this was, my first night in the bush nevertheless became rather harrowing. We slept, or rather tried to sleep, in hammocks which we had hung up on the hut's wooden rafters, although rats kept trying to make it down the ropes, mosquitos and other insects buzzed around our nets, and the chief sent around two of his wives, in a well-meant offer, which we gratefully declined!

The next day, as we drank the coffee we had made, I realized that I had in fact survived - and overcome my fears! That, of course was Bill's point, and from then on I began to enjoy and savor my new life of exploring and coming to understand this complex and fascinating African country. By quickly getting me over my instinctive anxieties about Africa, Bill had done me a huge favor which made my assignment in Liberia one of the best in my career.

Q: Good. What did you work on on these upcountry trips?

JAEGER: We would focus on the state of the rural economy, the impact of development projects, how our AID projects were doing, or what the chiefs and missionaries had on their minds about local conditions or government policy. We usually came back with first-hand information on the state of rubber at Firestone and other plantations, the rice and cassava crops, Liberia's major iron mining project in the Nimba mountains in the north bordering Guinea, the illicit diamond trade with Sierra Leone or political nuggets nobody in Monrovia knew about - all of which helped make our reporting real.

Q: Much of your work must also have been focused on the more conventional sectors of Liberia's economy?

JAEGER: Most of it, in fact, was focused on Liberia's expanding economy, the result of President Tubman's opening of the country to foreign investment. It had produced a boomlet by the 1950's, not only at the Freeport of Monrovia, which attracted all sorts of distributors, but across the spectrum. For instance, investors came who wanted to gobble up as much as a million hectares of Liberia's prime timber lands full of valuable hardwoods, including ebony - a case in which I got into a major scrape by advising that no kickbacks should be paid. (Tubman personally let Ambassador Jones know that he was "vexed", although the latter to his credit backed me up). Others wanted to build hotels, roads, infrastructure, all, of course, badly needed; and, most importantly, there was the huge new LAMCO investment, by the Liberian-American Minerals Company, a mega-million Swedish/American consortium, which was preparing to mine the rich Nimba iron ore deposits. This required building a railroad to carry the ore from high on the Guinean border to the port of Buchanan and the modernization and expansion of that port. All of this called for extensive reporting and analysis of implications for the future.

Q: Do you remember some of your reporting?

JAEGER: Some of it, and for a variety of reasons.

Just after I had arrived, Bill Rush asked me to take look at a small rubber plantation, which was doing poorly. I went to visit it, came back with a lot of notes and impressions and wrote an ingoing five page analysis with reflections on the rubber industry in general and this poor specimen in particular - a first effort of of which I was rather proud. It came back the next day with a fat red line across it and the comment: Boil! So I boiled it down a bit. It came back again. We played this game for over a week, by which time my masterpiece had been reduced to one tight page, and finally came back signed! The lesson: Good reports should be concise and to the point if they are meant to be read in Washington!

Q: Well, that was a learning experience for a Harvard man!

JAEGER: The bread and butter work of a Third Secretary for Commercial Affairs in those days were the trade complaints filed with the Commerce Department by American businesses, in our case almost invariably against Monrovia's many Lebanese traders; usually matters of bills not paid or sales agreements not lived up to.

Whatever it was, each required a trip to Waterstreet - pulsing with dense crowds of all sorts of tribal people, Bassa, Kpelle, Mende, the seagoing Kru, or tall, aquiline Mandingos from Guinea and beyond, and their usually still topless women effortlessly balancing heavy loads on their heads. This is where most of the Lebanese had their metal-shuttered depots and retail businesses, all smelling pungently of spices, dried fish and mounds of rice and other staples, where you could buy virtually anything, from frozen Danish steaks to nails, screwdrivers or even cars. Among them Salami Brothers were preeminent.

Whoever it was, our conversations, usually over a lukewarm Coke, were invariably civilized and friendly and involved long obscure explanations why there had been an unfortunate 'misunderstanding', followed by promises that the issue would somehow be resolved. Sometimes it was, sometimes it wasn't, but my visits were always interesting, because the Lebanese grapevine, stretched like a web across the country, was the best-informed by far.

Another very different project came much later. It was in the depths of rainy season (Liberia gets about 180 inches in a period of six months), most of our required work had been done, and Bill and I were drinking Brandy Alexanders. I have an idea, he said, let's work up Liberia's first-ever National Accounts!

So we got out Samuelson's freshman economics textbook which had some examples of how to calculate national accounts, made up large spreadsheets, listed Liberia's sources of economic value, and started filling in the empty spaces. Current figures for things like rubber and iron ore production, port activity etc., were easy, although future projections would depend heavily on world market conditions. Others, like attaching values to the gathering of fire wood, pounding of cassava roots or reflecting in palaver huts, were harder to quantify. But, we were intrepid, dreamed up best-guess figures where we had no statistics, footnoted the whole thing heavily to emphasize that this was at best a rough approximation, not to be used to predict Liberia's economic future, and sent it off to Washington.

The first result was a glowing commendation from the Commerce Department for our maiden effort. Then months passed until one day a well-turned out banker from one of New York's most eminent establishments, I think it was Citibank, appeared in Monrovia, called on the Finance Minister, presented him with a laminated, gold-tasseled folder with his Bank's projections of Liberia's brilliant economic future and made clear that his bank would be glad to arrange for some extensive loans. The Minister couldn't resist this unexpected offer, bit off much more than he rationally should have, commodity prices promptly dropped, the new debt went into arrears and Liberia almost went bankrupt!

We came to understand what had happened only when got one of these folders in the mail. It was essentially a reprint of our seat-of-the-pants national accounts report - without the qualifying footnotes! Lesson learned: Never volunteer anything that can even remotely be misused!

Still another, involved my discovery of the 'Crocodile Bar', a dingy, Dickensian establishment with green slimy door steps near the St. Paul river, which, I somehow discovered, was the late-night drinking hole frequented at the time by most of Tubman's cabinet. Usually it was graced by a languid nude extended over the length of the bar whom everyone pretended to ignore and

was run by an American fugitive from the law from Brooklyn, who had somehow washed up in Liberia.

So, bushy-tailed as I was, I would begin to include the 'Crocodile' in my late evening rounds when it was cool. Dressed only in tennis shorts and sneakers, I would first pass through the large native parts of town, where people would sit quietly around fires or kerosene lamps in front of little huts murmuring a reassuring 'evenin boss'. Liberia in those years was still a safe and very peaceful place. I might then stop for a while at "Peanut 1" or "Peanut 2", the two thumping establishments famous for their 'Ghana dancing' to watch the colorful, heaving crowd and join the fun. Around midnight I might finally make my way through dark alleys to the 'Crocodile', where, after a while I came to be accepted as a regular by the cluster of Ministers who gathered there to relax after a hard day running the country. I learned a great deal of what was happening behind the scenes and was happy to note that my reports at staff meetings almost always proved more correct than the rumors passing for information which were circulating around town.

The lesson, which was to prove so critical in my later assignments, was that genuine human, not just official, contact is essential to any meaningful exchange.

One of the rotating chores of the more junior officers in those days was to fly to Freetown in Sierra Leone once a month to provide consular services, since we did not have an Embassy there during British colonial rule. My first visit was memorable on several counts.

First, one's day under British protection started early, since a uniformed servant would bang on the door of one's billet at six AM to bring "tea", not the first requirement when one had been taken along by some Brits on a late-night carouse. Freetown was also interesting because its look and feel was similar to Monrovia, but subtly different - more colorful, lively and vital, particularly the markets which were bursting with life - and, at that time, a bit more orderly, as a result of colonial rule. Traffic, for instance, was smartly controlled by British-trained policemen in sharp contrast to Monrovia's chaos.

The dramatic part of my visit took place that afternoon when, after I had finished my stint at a hotel issuing visas, and visited the dilapidated bar at the City Hotel made famous in Graham Greene's 'Heart of the Matter', I stopped by the British officer's club. I was standing at the bar pensively having a beer, when a Major came up to me, knocked me down with one punch and walked away, saying: "That's for Suez, Yank!" I was picked up, my bleeding nose taken care of, and profuse apologies offered over some fresh drinks. Just a bit later a smart-looking aide to the Governor General arrived hurriedly, proffered the GG's apologies and an invitation to a delightful tea at the residence - where I was driven in the official Rolls and which I much enjoyed, even though my suit was a bit the worse for what it had been through.

Apologies having been accepted I was invited the next day to the Brits intelligence HQ, since I had expressed some interest in the diamond trade. Although it was an interesting visit to a rather high-tech bunker, I didn't learn much, except for a story proudly told, of how the Brits recently dealt with a rather middle-aged Soviet "graduate student", clearly a KGB officer, who had arrived a few months ago to "work on his thesis on Sierra Leone". Anxious to avoid a fuss with Moscow which kicking him out would have involved, he was 'helped' to leave under his own

steam only a few weeks after arrival with, what my interlocutor described with understated satisfaction, a impressively blooming case of syphilis! Ah, perfidious Albion!

While all this made for good one-time reporting, the continuing theme was the diamond trade which, then as now flowed through Monrovia. It became one of my specialties, the subject of a long series of reports, since I had developed a good range of contacts among the principal traders, was able to obtain reasonable estimates of the amounts involved, and could fairly accurately diagram the flows, including Soviet interest in commercial diamonds. Diamonds were a constant cause of trouble in Sierra Leone, although their illicit export through Liberia was at the time effectively condoned.

One of the most basic issues we puzzled over was the uncertainty surrounding the size of Liberia's population. The official figure at the time was around 2 Million, a number Bill Rush and I found difficult to accept since we could not account for half that number in our travels in the interior. Our hunch was confirmed when we obtained a US Air Force aerial photo map of the country made some years earlier as part of an African mapping project. One rainy day we sat down on the floor with that large, detailed map, started counting villages, then made estimates of huts per comparably sized villages, made a generous guess as to how many people to count per hut, and finally added a hyper-generous number for Monrovia.

No matter how we stretched it, we couldn't even reach a million; a conclusion which, when we first casually mentioned it to some Liberian Ministers at a dinner, produced an explosion of anxiety! They allowed as to how this was the country's only real state secret, and begged us not to report it to Washington and the UN, since all their aid requests were based on the 2 Million number!

We, of course, felt required to do so, leading to subsequent readjustments. Official statistics now roughly confirm our estimate and set the 1958/9 population at a bit over 900,000 (we thought at the time that the real number was closer to 750,000) and acknowledge that earlier figures were inflated. In retrospect our bit of research resulted in an important breakthrough, since its not often that you can cut the population of a country by half in one afternoon!

If current statistics can be believed, the population has since quadrupled to over 4 Million, an amazing explosion, in spite of the terrible intervening wars, which, if correct, will have far-reaching implications for the country's future.

Q: Looking a bit to the larger picture, how was President Tubman doing while you were there? Did you get to know him?

JAEGER: Tubman's great contributions were that he had given the tribal people the vote, which diluted the power of the 'Honorables', and that he opened Liberia to foreign investment. He was a shrewd, but benevolent autocrat, who skillfully manipulated Liberia's 'democratic' system; didn't kill an awful lot of people, except when they were caught plotting to overthrow him, as was the case a year or so before I got there; and held only a few hundred political prisoners in undoubtedly quite unpleasant upcountry camps. He was also a great friend of the United States, not only because of Liberia's historic relationship with America, but because he really liked

Americans and understood the importance of being on good terms with Washington to gain as much aid and support as possible.

Q: Liberia, of course, was traditionally run by the descendants of American slaves, who then settled there...

JAEGER: There is a lot of irony in Liberia's history, since the freed American slaves, who arrived there through the first half of the 19th century, never integrated with the African natives they encountered. On the contrary, conscious of the skills and knowledge they had gained as American plantation slaves, they promptly set themselves up to rule and exploit the tribal people. In my time you could still see the overgrown remains of their white mini-mansions here and there in the bush, complete with pillars and porticos, which the 'Americans', as the early settlers called themselves, built in emulation of their former masters.

The irony extends to the national anthem's claim that "The love of Liberty brought us here". Actually they had little to do with getting there, since they were sent to Africa. Officially the impulse to free them, beginning in the time of President Monroe - hence Monrovia - and extending to about the middle of the 19th century, was Christian brotherly love - a sense of compassion for this rather small number of mostly house slaves, which was certainly not extended to the rest.

The real reasons may have been less admirable. Virtually all the freed American slaves who arrived in Liberia were mulattos, who, so the unofficial story goes, were a growing embarrassment to their former American masters and particularly to their wives, because they were so clearly fathered by members of these families. Hence the sudden upsurge of enthusiasm to free them and send them back to Africa, even though, once arrived, only some ten percent survived the rampant malaria and yellow fever to which they were no longer immune. They became the 'Honorables', kept their former American masters' names - the Tubmans, Tolberts, Dukeleys, Eastmans, Hortons and so forth - and were still, in the years when I was there, Liberia's ruling class. Having never subsequently been colonized, they, in effect, owned and ran the country like a farm, albeit one with, until very recently, virtually no infrastructure or facilities.

Q: So what, specifically, did Tubman do about this?

JAEGER: Tubman understood that this was an untenable situation as the twentieth century willy-nilly broke into Liberia's isolation during and after World War II. To preserve Liberia's stability and to keep himself and the Honorables in power, he therefore tried to bring about carefully controlled change: Political participation and slow progress for the tribal people, gradual modernization of the country and an adequate share of goodies for the ruling class to keep them happy and content.

In practice this meant encouraging foreign businesses to locate in Liberia - in addition to the Firestone Rubber plantation which had already been established in 1923 - through Tubman's 'Open Door Policy'. This was facilitated by the conversion of the Port of Monrovia into a, by my time, rather busy free port, the establishment of some other rubber plantations and the discovery of iron ore in the Nimba range, which eventually resulted in the building of a new rail line to the

port of Buchanan by LAMCO, a Scandinavian-American firm, which by the seventies made Liberia the biggest iron exporter in the world.

As resources, including some American aid, gradually increased, the streets of Monrovia were paved, although deplorably maintained; a basic sanitation system was created; some basic laterite roads were built so that cars and occasional trucks could, weather and ruts permitting, make their way upcountry; some medical facilities came into existence, although most serious care (for Westerners and Firestone's employees) was dispensed by its hospital on the plantation; and literacy and other educational program were gradually advanced.

As a result of all this, Liberia's average annual growth was impressive in the fifties and sixties, a feat less remarkable than it might seem when one considers that it started from scratch. By the time I arrived, Monrovia, while still a ramshackle potholed place, sported an inefficient Ford garage; there was a certain amount of automotive traffic on its roads; small representations had sprung up for all sorts of modern products, from Italian typewriters to Beck's Beer; and most modern necessities and even some conveniences could be provided by Liberia's Lebanese traders. There were even a small handful of local entrepreneurs, including one Honorable, Stephen Tolbert, who started a tiny fishing fleet. While desperately slow, some economic progress was at least beginning.

The results of 'Unification', the other pillar of Tubman's policies, were more ambiguous. In a startling effort to bridge the historic divide between the oppressed tribal majority and the ruling Honorables, Tubman had enfranchised native Liberians and women for the 1951 election. While this made him popular upcountry, pleased the international community and gave him leverage against potential Honorable competitors in Monrovia, it did not create real democracy. Tubman's notoriously corrupt True Whig party's electoral machinery, which he controlled, kept him in power and the Honorables on top for twenty eight years by lopsided voting margins reminiscent of Iron Curtain 'elections'.

Why he thought this was necessary, given his genuine popularity, remains unclear, although I always thought that, in addition to really enjoying his undisputed role, he deeply distrusted the ability of others to keep the country united and moving forward. These fears were realized in spades when, after his successor William Tolbert did allow the creation of an opposition party, the True Whig party fell apart and the country was taken over in 1980 in a bloody putsch, in which Tolbert and then a large number of Honorables were murdered by its first tribal ruler, Master Sergeant Doe. From there it was all down hill.

Q: Were you there for any of Tubman's Inaugurations?

JAEGER: Yes, Tubman's Fourth, in 1959, after he had "defeated" William Bright, an 'independent' whom they ran to create the appearance that there had been an election. He got all of 55 votes of the 500,000 allegedly cast, after a campaign that had been all show and little substance, punctuated by huge colorful rallies of Tubman's True Whig Party, some of which I attended. Besides endless speeches idealizing Tubman, there were delegations in full tribal attire from all over the country waving streamers and slogans, all sorts of native dancers, noisy bands, etc. It was great fun but not serious politics. By then Tubman had been President since 1943, was

hugely popular in spite of some criticism of his autocratic rule, and was to continue in office until his death twelve years later.

The Inauguration itself took place on an exceptionally hot and rainy day, on which we trudged through the muddy unpaved streets in white tie (!) and top hats to attend the two and half hour long inaugural morning service in a stifling church whose windows remained closed throughout. We then returned to the Embassy for lunch and to change into our morning coats (!) for the afternoon garden party at the Executive Mansion, while our houseboys urgently cleaned and pressed our white ties which were again required for the Presidential dinner that evening at 8 PM.

I remember a large hall with many card tables for four, on each of which stood an unopened bottle of Johnny Walker Red Label and some glasses. Protocol had me seated with the Postmaster General, his stolid wife and another equally uncommunicative Liberian lady of impressive proportions. Then we all waited for Tubman to arrive, when drinks could officially begin.

The trouble was he didn't. Initial awkward introductions lapsed into surreal silence which lasted for four hours until, a bit after midnight, an ebullient Tubman finally showed up, having clearly started his celebrations elsewhere, opened his traditional bottle of Black Label and offered his lengthy toast. The rest of the night was a long, weary blur, first an interminable dinner, then more toasts and then the muddy slog back to our houses.

As the paper said the next morning, a "wonderful time was had by all!"

Q: Besides political and economic reporting, what did the American Embassy try to achieve while you were in Liberia?

JAEGER: When I arrived, Bob Allen, our bright and able Political Officer, had launched his 'Young Turks' scheme, of identifying the most promising young people and sending them to American schools under the Fulbright and other programs. The hope was that, after their return, they would replace the massively ineffective and often corrupt older generation of 'Honorable' in government, at the university, and in other key social and economic roles.

Although Bob caught cerebral malaria - I had to tie him down on his bed with rope while he was lucidly arguing with God until Monrovia's ex-Nazi German doctor could be found to administer some sedatives - his concept was implemented and carried forward. It worked to an extent, until Sergeant Doe shot most of this 'Young Turk' generation of 'Honorable' on Monrovia's beach.

That life with the 'Young Turks' was not going to be all clear sailing either was brought home to me by my friend Earnest Eastman, then a young Assistant Secretary in Liberia's tiny Foreign Office and a prime example of what the next Western-educated generation might look like, who had studied at Columbia and married an African-American girl in the States. Although he had had the full American experience, he returned in a rage about American racial discrimination and hypocrisy; engaged me in sometimes bitter debates which eventually corroded our relationship; tried to treat his American wife like a native, which destroyed the marriage; and consistently debunked Liberia's relationship with the US.

I got a practical lesson in what Eastman was talking about, when I tried to take a high-level, sophisticated Liberian visitor out to dinner in Washington late in 1960. We were asked to leave three well-known restaurants and finally had our meal in a 'black' restaurant on Georgia Avenue!

The main action agency, however, was our 53 person AID mission, which through its development programs reached into every part of Liberian society. The commitment of all involved bordered on the heroic and I developed enormous respect for many of their advisors, experts, midwives etc. who were often living under very difficult conditions deep in the interior, alone or with their families. Unfortunately, as I came to understand it, the AID program, and parallel US military efforts, had intrinsic flaws which in the end contributed to disastrous unintended consequences.

Q: Can you explain that?

JAEGGER: Let's start with AID. Not too long after I had settled in, the AID Director sent us his program plan for review, the night before the Ambassador was to approve it. Bill Rush and I pawed through the two-inch thick document which outlined fifty or so conceptually unrelated projects, which ranged from gauging the flow of the St. Paul River to an experimental rice farm upcountry, via forestry projects, educational programs etc. When we argued at staff meeting the next day that the plan lacked coherence, the explanation was that the spread of projects reflected the range of expertise on the staff, and that eliminating one or more would require the expert involved and his family to be transferred or sent home!

For better or worse the tail was wagging the dog.

More serious were the issues created by AID's major project, of giving Liberia a system of farm-to-market roads, a new grid which would reach horizontally across the country and meet on a much improved north-south trunk road, from Monrovia to Gbarnga and beyond. To anchor the project, a new K 1-12 school system was to be built at each end so that people from all over could get an education.

On the face of it the project made sense, particularly for people, like many in the AID Mission, who had first-hand experience with the benefits of farm-to-market roads. The trouble was that this was not the American farm belt, but Liberia. Native villagers are not commercial farmers. Moreover, as the road crews arrived, and were followed by beer and many other trucks, the stone age tribal system simply cracked, since the villagers could see that these new forces were clearly stronger than their chiefs and witch-doctors who were the traditional glue which held tribes and villages together.

The practical result was that, within weeks, Monrovia was flooded with hundreds of young girls offering their services, refugees from the polygamous tribal life where a wife could be bought for a sack of rice; and where most of them had been the unhappy property of the villages' old men, the only ones who could afford them. Going downtown became a matter of wading through streams of opportuning girls, crying "10 cents, boss. I can do it better than my sister!"

In retrospect, what had happened was that, by penetrating the country with roads, with the Nimba railroad to move LAMCO's iron ore to the new port at Buchanan and with a growing number of other well-intentioned Western projects, the Tubman administration and we had, with best intentions, punctured and discredited the stone age culture which had held Liberia's tribal society together; a basic transformation which set the stage for the later bloody uprising of tribal people, who were increasingly adrift between their long-held traditions and beliefs and the new world taking charge around them.

The detonator for that disaster was also supplied during my two-year tour, when it was felt in Washington, that an American Cold War ally like Liberia needed something better than Tubman's rag-tag ceremonial guard evident at public events. As a result, a capable and very nice African-American Lieutenant Colonel turned up, took over a large coastal tract west of town, built a simple military camp which came to be known as the Barclay Training Camp, and attracted recruits. These eventually numbered over 5000 drawn primarily from young tribal men.

I watched them train in visits which involved wading across crocodile-infested streams behind a protective phalanx of dispensable recruits. The program was clearly a success, if only one didn't dwell on the underlying issue that we were, for the first time in Liberia's modern history and with Tubman's evident consent, arming the tribes with fairly modern infantry weapons. The incorrect assumption was that they would maintain discipline and loyally serve the 'state'. What happened, in practice, was that, once the True Whig Party's control was compromised some years later, they wiped out the Honorables under the leadership of Sergeant Doe, shooting them by the dozens on the beach, a revolution which in turn precipitated the subsequent total meltdown of Liberia.

A subset of this was the decision to give Tubman two Navy motor torpedo boats, to "safeguard" his coast. They arrived, were ceremonially turned over, and, under newly trained local command, sped off, one to crash and sink within hours on some rocks, the other to disappear while its Commander paid an extended visit to his tribe on a river down the coast.

I have often reflected on these well-intentioned mistakes as I watched us make new and even bigger ones, particularly our disastrous current forays in the Middle East. The point is, of course, that before messing with the structure of a society it is crucial to really understand it in depth, and to reflect on the impact actions are likely to have on its stability, if one is to avoid unexpected, often deadly boomerangs. Translated to a broader scale this is also Sam Huntington's warning in his pathbreaking work on the "Clash of Civilizations".

Hank Cohen, an experienced Africanist who later became Assistant Secretary for the region, has argued for the same reasons that, to be safe, development must be a much slower process of adaptation, requiring at least a generation just to adjust to the hand-operated wells and wooden plows with which one might cautiously start things off. The trouble is, of course, that it's now too late, since our disparate cultures have already come into full contact and have clashed. The ongoing turmoil in much of Africa is the result.

Q: Were there any people who really understood all this?

JAEGER: Certainly the late Dr. George Harley. He stood out as the one person I came to know who had a deep and clear understanding of the country and the effect of the then current policies.

Q: Tell us about him:

JAEGER: Harley had come to Liberia as a Methodist missionary and medical doctor in 1926, only two years after the more famous medical missionary, Albert Schweitzer, had returned to his mission at Lambarene in the Congo. It took Harley and his wife Winifred over two weeks to cover the two hundred-some miles from Monrovia to Gbarnga and then beyond to Ganta in the Mano country near the present Guinean border, which was the site of his mission selected by former President King. Native bearers carried all their belongings in chests and bundles - household goods, tools, books, medicines, as well as an American car, which Harley had disassembled on the assumption that someday a road would be built on which he could actually drive it.

Working with the local tribal chiefs, the Harleys then built a big livable stone house, a chapel and the region's first hospital in a mission compound and began catering as much to the bodies as the souls of their native neighbors. Their simple hospital was soon overflowing, as Harley became the first-ever Westerner to establish a trusting relationship with the natives and their chiefs, even though he and Winifred were at that point the only white people in this part of the interior of Liberia. Although Harley could be irritable and demanding, particularly when I came to know him in his later years, when decades of living in the tropical bush had taken their toll, the tribal people came to understand that his only purpose was to do good and learned to appreciate and respect him.

As a result, as he told me during one of my several visits to the Ganta Mission, he was increasingly accepted by the chiefs and paramount chiefs and so, being among other things an anthropologist, was able to learn a great deal about tribal customs and religion. He was, he once told me, the only Westerner ever to be initiated into the highest level of their secret society, which gave him an unparalleled insight into the forms and meaning of tribal religious practices, but got him in trouble with his Methodist superiors in America, who accused him of going native.

Q: What did he accomplish?

JAEGER: The results were remarkable. The Ganta Mission eventually expanded to 26 buildings built entirely with native labor, including a dispensary, school house, teachers' dwellings, a saw mill, a blacksmith shop, three dormitories, a guest house, and a leper colony. All the necessary craftsmen, carpenters, mechanics, masons, medical technicians etc. were trained by Harley on the spot.

Moreover, Harley's medical work was entirely self-supporting through a sort of native health insurance scheme involving over 50,000 people. Of all the missions I visited in Liberia, this was by far the most impressive, and could usefully have served as a non-disruptive model for our own aid and development work.

As it was, Harley sometimes complained bitterly that the Embassy people, although well-intentioned, were doing more harm than good, and wished they would listen to people like himself who understood the country. Perhaps because I was willing to listen, he and Winifred welcomed me on a number of visits and offered kind hospitality.

Q: Did he make any record of his findings?

JAEGER: Yes. For one he collected and then, in 1937, gave to Harvard's Peabody Museum over 350 magnificent masks and artifacts, which still constitute a central part of its African collection. He was also a major figure in Liberian anthropology as an Associate at the Peabody Museum and published two monographs in 1941: 'Notes on the Poro in Liberia' and 'Native African Medicine with special reference to its practices in the Mano tribe of Liberia'. He also made major contributions to the massive, now unavailable, report of the Peabody Museum's Expedition to Liberia, entitled 'Tribes of the Liberian Hinterland', published in 1947 - of which he generously gave me copy which I still have. Finally he wrote his fascinating 'Masks as Agents of Social Control in Northeast Liberia', in 1971.

After his retirement in the States, his wife Winifred summed it all up in 'A Third of a Century with George Way Harley' in Liberia', a book of which I only recently became aware and have not yet read.

In our several conversations, Dr. Harley told stories about his experiences, took me on tours of the mission, showed me his collection of masks and talked about their meaning. The central theme, which I found startling and important, was that the African mask in its pure form is analogous to Christian communion, the swinging gate between time and eternity.

Q: Oh!

JAEGER: Harley argued that the power of the mask was not just the juju and witchcraft of its bowdlerized versions. In its pure form, it was the door through which the deceased speak to their living relatives and vice versa. It is for these reasons that tribal rules regarding masks have, generally speaking, been so strict, although specific practices vary widely and are often distorted by local influences and traditions.

From then on, when I watched masked witch doctors dancing in a village, it was no longer just a native cultural 'show' as most Westerners perceived it. The witch doctors or their female counterparts, covered in long skirts of straw, their awe-inspiring ancient masks accentuated by striking headdresses, darting here and there, shuffling rhythmically or balancing on stilts, were really part of our universal human experience of trying to reach from time to eternity: The theme discussed so eloquently by Joseph Campbell in his "Masks of God"- in which he established that all humanity, terrified by the abyss, is led by its heroes to the other side. The mask, in Liberia as elsewhere, as Campbell too points out, is the intercom between the sides.

Q: Did you bring back any Liberian masks?

JAEGER: Dr. Harley generously gave me two Mano masks which I still have in my study. I was also able to buy a rare “small” mask, a 2 inch portable replica of a normal mask, as well as an exquisite, old Mano chief’s chair, its four stubby legs only a couple of inches high - the idea being that everyone else sits on the ground except the chief - which our Vermont visitors invariably think is some sort of English children’s chair.

I also acquired another totem on a trip Bill and I made to the northern Ge or Gio region. Its a human size grey clay head, studded on its cheeks and forehead with large protruding leopard’s teeth, eyes marked by cowry shells, the whole topped with feathers. I found it in a village which had never encountered white people before, a half days march through the bush from where the road ended at that time. It was one of at least twenty such heads kept on shelves in their sanctuary, a low palm frond-covered hut. This type of totem or three-dimensional mask is quite rare, and was at the time unknown in Monrovia. There is a reference to it, and an oversimplified illustration, on p. 316 of the Peabody Expedition’s Report. Mine, which I had acquired for \$5 in a very open negotiation with the heads’ keeper, was for some years on display at the African Museum in Washington, D.C. and is now at my home.

Q: That’s all fascinating. Was English understood widely enough in the tribal society that one could use it as the lingua franca?

JAEGER: Versions of pidgin English were spoken by at least some people in the parts of the country touched by roads. Harley, having spent a long time in Liberia, had, of course, learned Mano and a number of other native languages.

Q: Is he still appreciated?

JAEGER: I think he was then and is now a neglected prophet, even though he was legendary in Liberia when I was there. He and Tubman had a very respectful, mutual relationship, even though Harley disagreed with many of his policies. When I knew him towards the end of his time there, he was already suffering from high blood pressure, didn’t suffer fools gladly, but was kind if you showed interest in what Liberia was all about.

There is a key question his work has left unresolved: Whether even his very slow and careful intrusion into stone age Liberian culture could in the longer run have avoided the consequences which our less subtle development efforts have produced; indeed, whether any approach could have forestalled the massive impact of Western culture on Africa and prevented the subsequent meltdowns in Liberia and elsewhere on the continent.

In retrospect, I am afraid, the answer is no.

Be that as it may, I was greatly privileged to have been among those who could call Dr. Harley one of their mentors and owe him much.

Q: Well, you gained some important insights. Were there other events you particularly remember?

JAEGER: Two come to mind. The first was a lesson in integrity. It all started with our growing sense that the Liberian government was not making optimal use of the \$3 Million of aid we were making available. When it fell to me to draft Ambassador Richard Lee Jones's speech on the occasion of the dedication of a new AID building, which Tubman was to attend, I put in a polite but clear paragraph expressing our expectation that there would be improvements in the future. The text was cleared up the line, including by the Ambassador, who then read it at the noontime dedication ceremony. When he came to my exhortatory paragraph and raised his voice a notch or two, something quite unexpected happened. Tubman rose, interrupted him to say hoarsely that he hadn't come to be lectured by anyone, and without another word walked out, followed by his entire Liberian entourage!

After a stunned silence - most of the Ambassadorial corps and many other dignitaries were there besides the AID and Embassy staffs, Ambassador Jones too got up slowly and left, as the rest of us followed. No one spoke to me as I too went back to my office and closed the door. The general feeling was that I had written the speech, and that it was therefore all my fault.

At four in the afternoon the phone rang to announce an Embassy-wide staff meeting. When we were all assembled, the Ambassador opened by saying, that it had been a pretty rough day, but that he wanted everyone to understand that "George here wrote a very good speech, a speech which I fully approved and would give again. If there is any fault, it is my own in not preparing Tubman that there might be some words of criticism..."

I will never forget my sense of relief and appreciation for this unexpected act of remarkable integrity. The buck, Jones was saying, stops here!

The second, was funny and also had a happy ending. We had, among other things, financed a beautiful new Monrovia City Hall, an elegant white two story structure with lots of offices, halls and facilities. When it came time to use it, it turned out that Monrovia's small mayoral staff could not possibly fill all the new space, hence a certain embarrassment as to what to do with this white elephant. At about that time the Commerce Department sent a Trade Mission to West Africa, for which I was to be responsible in Liberia, which would require extensive exhibition space.

The fit was perfect. I "rented" the still empty, brand-new City Hall, a move which the local paper happily cited as proof of the building's usefulness, the exhibits fitted elegantly in the brand new space, and all was in place for opening night when President Tubman was in theory scheduled to cut the ribbons at 6 PM. Since senior Liberian officials were almost never on time he was actually expected to turn up later.

So it was with some horror that, just after six, I heard the sirens of Tubman's car heading in our direction, before neither the Ambassador nor the Embassy's senior staff had arrived and I, still a mere Third Secretary, was the only official presence on the floor. Well, there was nothing for it, I screwed up my courage and went out to greet the President and then started to show him the exhibit, while one of the crew was frantically phoning the Embassy to mobilize the Ambassador.

A good ten minutes later, Ambassador Jones turned up breathlessly, mumbled apologies and clearly meant to take over. Tubman let him off the hook just a bit by saying that he had had thought the invitation meant “6 o’clock white people’s time”, that is, to be on time, but then waved him off. “This young man George is doing a great job showing me around. Let’s just continue!”

So the President and I spent a good half hour together, he deliberately taking his time, while the Ambassador and a slew of others were made to follow. Even so, Ambassador Jones was again gracious and later thanked me for saving the day. From then on President Tubman always recognized me warmly at various functions, a contact which proved important some years later in Yugoslavia.

Q: Did you take trips to other neighboring African countries, besides your visit to Sierra Leone?

JAEGER: The most memorable, was our pretty hair-brained Christmas ‘vacation’ in Guinea in December 1958. Contrary to all good sense, we set off toward Liberia’s northern border in Bill Rush’s aging Chevy. By the time we had reached the high tropical forests in the Nimba range on Christmas eve, we had had all of fourteen punctures. The last, was terminal. There was nothing for it but to abandon ship.

So we sat down next to our wreck wondering whether we would come out of this alive and waited. After what seemed like hours listening to the strange night sounds of the high forest, we finally saw a beam of light from, what turned out to be, a small, merrily painted mammy-wagon, which heaved into sight and rescued us. We climbed gratefully into the back where we found an odd assortment of fellow travelers seated under the canvas canopy on two benches, one on each side, all bound for Nzerekore, the first small town on the Guinean side of the border. I remember a Catholic priest, a Lebanese trader, a couple of native Liberians, and, up front, the driver and a woman, with whom he was passionately intertwined while swigging from a bottle of beer and driving.

Then disaster struck again. A huge tree, at least five feet in diameter, had fallen across the already ‘so-so’ road, blocking our way. Some futile efforts were made to go around it. In the end we all went back to our places in the Mammy wagon, exhausted and dripping with perspiration, resigned to spending this strangest of all Christmas nights in the high Nimba. Someone produced some beer, some Christmas carols were tried and abandoned, and a prayer was said by the priest. For Bill, it was all one disaster too much. He stretched out on the floor between everyone’s feet, declared this was the end and mentally took his leave as a new wave of driving rain drummed on our canvas roof.

Maybe it was the prayer, or voodoo or the grace which comes with Christmas, but another hour or so later there was a sudden movement in the woods and a group of small, virtually naked natives, who evidently live in the Nimba forests, appeared mysteriously - how they knew we were there was never explained - and went to work cutting the tree apart with primitive saws and axes to make an opening just sufficient to let our wagon through. In the process, a wet and messy job, what with rain, mossy ground cover and tangled limbs, one of them cut off most of his big toe, which I tentatively stuck back where it belonged and taped, while the priest blessed the

proceedings. By dawn we were finally off the mountain and across the border, and, weary, hungry, dirty and wet, left our fellow travelers at a Caravanserai near Nzerekore, where we decided to rest and spend Christmas day.

The place, it turned out was run by another fugitive from the law, an outgoing, very hospitable Viennese murderer, who for reasons he did not elaborate had done away with one of his close female relatives - if I remember correctly an especially annoying aunt. He now found himself the proprietor of this single story caravanserai on the edge of nowhere, its sandy garden baking in the unforgiving sun, its stony periphery absurdly decorated with forlorn-looking Christmas lights.

He made us warmly welcome, gave us each an adequate room and let us sleep; in my case only after I had evicted a huge lizard which almost frightened me to death, since getting in bed with what, at first I thought was a large snake, is obviously not very funny. When we had marginally recovered, the Christmas celebrations proper got under way with a surprisingly good dinner, I think I remember Wiener Schnitzel 'à l'Africain', and a great deal of champagne and other wash-me-downs. I have the impression there were six or eight of us, a characteristically motley but congenial crew which had somehow washed up that broiling Christmas day on the frontier of Guinea and Liberia.

The next day, lo and behold, a spanking new red Ford pick-up truck turned up in the mid-day heat on its way to Kankan, Guinea's third-largest town some 250 miles north across flat and increasingly dry savannah, which had been the object of our expedition. We negotiated a ride and found ourselves fairly comfortably ensconced in the open back, where the breeze ameliorated the late afternoon heat. All went well until sunset when we learned that savannah can get as cold at night as it is hot during the day. Dressed only in tropical weight shirts and shorts, we froze even under the tarpaulin we had found, and were much relieved when we finally pulled into Kankan in the early hours of the morning and our driver dropped us at a small hotel.

The scene there could not have been more astonishing. For the place was jumping with Frenchmen loudly celebrating their last night in Guinea, determined not to leave behind one bottle of French champagne or tin of pate de foie gras! They asked us to join them, which we did with enthusiasm after our stark adventures, and ate, drank, listening to their song and laughter, until well after 3 AM!

We had, we shortly came to realize, run into the last phases of the French exodus from what had been a French colony since 1890; an exodus precipitated by Guinea's rejection of De Gaulle's proposed constitution for the Fifth Republic in a referendum which had been held on October 2. As a result, Guinea had become the first French African colony to gain independence under its new leader, a former labor agitator, now socialist-leaning autocrat Sekou Toure.

As it turned out, the new regime found us faster than we could have wished. At 7 AM, after only a few hours sleep which had not yet made much of dent in our hangovers, there was a loud banging on our doors, armed Guinean soldiers entered, ordered us out of our beds and marched Bill and myself at bayonet point, dressed only in our pajamas, to one of Kankan's public squares.

The scene was memorable. A little table had been set up, covered with cloth, behind which sat our three “judges”; a fairly large colorful crowd had already gathered; and we were told to stand to hear the charges that were then sonorously read out in French: That we were American spies and subversives who had seditiously consorted with French agents and provocateurs. What did we have to say?

Q: Did you know any French at that point?

JAEGER: I had only a smattering, but Bill spoke passable French.

Q: Well that was quite a situation!

JAEGER: It certainly was. Standing there in this square in front of these obviously hostile ‘judges’ cheered on by the native chorus behind us, it was clear we were in a rather serious fix.

Q: So what happened?

JAEGER: Bill Rush then put on one of the greatest impromptu performances I have ever witnessed in the Foreign Service. He drew himself up, mustering as much dignity as he could dressed in his rumpled baby-blue pajamas, looked sternly at our ‘judges’ and told them that we come from a country which had a greater witch doctor with more ‘medicine’ than anybody in Guinea, or in fact in all of Africa! He told them that our ‘medicine’ was called the atom bomb, and that our great chief did not like it when tribes in foreign countries harassed and threatened members of his tribe. In short, Bill announced, with a stern, straight face, if they so much as touched a hair on our heads and didn’t release us promptly, an atom bomb would come down on Kankan, and they would all be dead!

There was a great murmuring in the crowd and all the turbans began wagging. The judges nervously consulted with each other, while we stood there as nonchalantly as we could, trying to look unconcerned. The lead ‘judge’ eventually announced that there were mitigating circumstances, and that some lesser sentence would be applied to us, like telling us to get out town - which is what we did after a much-needed, excellent breakfast at our hotel.

We then got on the next plane and flew to Conakry, where, to our amazement, we were again arrested!

Q: The capital of Guinea?

JAEGER: Yes, where we were again arrested at the airport! There was, we were told by a not very experienced interrogator, a record, of Bill’s earlier visit to Cote d’Ivoire during which he had asked ‘suspicious questions’ about the country’s mineral production! The policeman interviewing us presumed therefore that we were both spies, in spite of our loud protestations that we were just American diplomats on a fraught Christmas vacation!

The only possible explanation for this latest crisis was that the French had left behind their files on the activities of foreign diplomats in their African colonies. We confirmed this when the

officer went to the bathroom and left Bill's 'file' on his desk! It took a couple more hours of palaver until we were released, with admonitions never to return, and flew back to the safety and comforts of Monrovia!

In retrospect what we had witnessed were the first, turbulent and awkward pangs of African independence, a historic earthquake which had begun in Guinea earlier that year and became a continent-wide flood in the 1960s, when colonialism finally met its end almost everywhere across the African continent.

Q: What happened in the second part of your tour? Were there new people?

JAEGGER: Ambassador Jones was replaced late in 1959 by Elbert Mathews, a distinguished Foreign Service Officer who struck me, both in looks and demeanor, as a model senior diplomat, whom I came to admire greatly. He and his wife Naomi, introduced a new spirit of professionalism in the Embassy which improved morale as well as our relations with President Tubman, who had grown a bit weary of Ambassador Jones' not too effectual bonhomie. Tubman probably welcomed this shift to a professional Ambassador as a sign that the US was taking Liberia more seriously and clearly liked Mathews' polite briskness.

To be fair, the groundwork for the US-Liberian Mutual Defense Agreement of 1959 was laid during Ambassador Jones' time, when Tubman decided to resist earlier temptations to play the Cold War down the middle - after the US had obliged him to cancel a planned Moscow visit in 1956. However, the relationship blossomed in the Mathews era, which, for better or worse, led to the erection of a huge VOA transmitter on the outskirts of Monrovia, and a series of new communications and defense arrangements, which made Liberia a full-dress partner in the final stages of the Cold War. To get a sense of the size and scope of this transformation, Liberia received over \$500 Million in aid by the end of the Reagan era, in spite of Sgt. Doe's flagrant human rights abuses, as compared to the \$3 Million we provided when I was there.

Whether, as I suggested earlier, all this was good for Liberia or contributed to its implosion, is a question which, as far as I know, neither Tubman nor the Embassy's leadership considered at the time.

There were other changes. Philip Narten, a competent but driven and slightly brash FSO succeeded Bill Rush as head of our two-man Economic Section. We generally worked well together, although Phil, often preoccupied with his sometimes temperamental wife Theresa and their children, spent comparatively little time upcountry, and on occasion worried us when he went for long swims, sometimes at night, in Liberia's notoriously dangerous surf. For all that, we got along well, and met again, many years later, in Paris, where he was then living by himself after leaving the Foreign Service, doing demanding, perhaps deliberately punishing, bicycle tours all over France.

There was also Allan Davis, who succeeded Bob Allen as Political Officer, a socially adept, clever, civilized young officer from Tennessee, whose finely-tuned sometimes sardonic sense of humor was matched by his extraordinary gift for understanding and remembering the complex human web which made up Liberian higher society. He was, among other things, a brilliant

dancer, usually seen with the tall, elegant daughter of the distinguished Haitian Ambassador. We briefly housed together but met only once in later years, when Allan was Political Advisor to the Army Command in Stuttgart. He remained an Africanist and eventually served as Ambassador in Guinea and Uganda.

Lastly, I should mention Milner Dunn, Paul Guest's genial successor as DCM - a lanky, humorous, consistently friendly man who chafed at spending long hours in our unairconditioned offices. Finding ourselves to be kindred spirits, we soon joined forces in building a get-away beach house some twenty miles east of town; a project fascinating in itself, since it required many trips on back roads to talk the local villagers into leasing us some beach front and then building us a small, but splendid bamboo house - open on all sides but offering protection from the scorching sun. Apart from a girl's bush school across a lagoon, there was nothing to be seen except the endless reach of the Atlantic and the wide, curving, empty beach with its fringe of palm trees, which extended for many miles in both directions with not a soul in sight. It was a wonderful place to read and meditate, a tranquility only sometimes disturbed by giggly visits from the bush school. When I finally had to leave this African paradise, the village chief, who had become a friend, asked if I would take his son to America to have him educated. Given the uncertainties of Foreign Service life, I was seriously tempted, but had to turn him down.

Q: Well, those were telling adventures. Can you describe a bit what the rest of Embassy life was like in those days?

JAEGER: We worked and some of us lived in the same compound on Mamba point, with its spectacular views of the south Atlantic, which the Embassy occupies to this day - although, judging from Google aerial views, a number of buildings, tennis courts and pools have been added.

I first shared a house there with Bob Allen, the Political Officer, but, after his departure, was assigned the ground floor apartment in a rather primitive local duplex a bit up the road, where Bill Rush had the upstairs unit; an arrangement which, led to some memorable joint culinary ventures during the long rainy season.

The most notable was our decision, on a particularly drenched and hopeless day, to prepare a 'duck a l'orange' from scratch. We pooled our two houseboys and their two 'assistants', assigned one team the preparation of the sauce, the other of the ducks fetched from the Embassy freezers, and, reinforced with sips of Brandy Alexanders, read them successive step-by-step instructions from the "Joy of Cooking", our teams reporting back as each task was completed. The end product was delicious, and became the 'piece de resistance' of a memorable and, if I remember correctly, rather liquid party.

A bit later I was given a lovely house of my own, with glorious views of the sea and a plethora of tropical trees and plants, which, among others, produced an oversupply of papayas and bananas. My kind and loyal house boy David cooked, cleaned and handed me my gin-and-tonic when, drenched with rain or perspiration I came home from work, and over time learned to make some quite excellent dinners.

David had been with me since my arrival, when he had helped me put on my first ever dinner party! The obligatory guests of honor were the Deputy chief of Mission Paul Guest, a perceptive but rather cautious man with gold-rimmed glasses and sharp pencils with which he constantly improved the grammar and syntax of our telegrams and despatches(sic); and his delicate wife who was determined not to get a suntan on the equator, so staid largely indoors, behind valuable Chinese screens, and let it be known through body language and demeanor that her stay in this God-forsaken outpost was an indignity due only to her husband's failure to make a better career.

Things that evening got off to a bad start when Mrs. Guest asked if I could make a gin-fizz, and, when I brought a reasonable facsimile, having first had to look up the recipe, asked her husband what on earth had happened to the Foreign Service, since "they no longer even know how to make a decent gin-fizz"!

Things, got worse when, as we sat down to a pretty decent Danish steak, there was loud shriek, followed by a stampede away from the table, which was being traversed by a six inch- wide army of driver ants, having come in through an open window! The crowning disaster was desert, for which David brought little plates, each with ten perfectly squared and polished cubes of hard-frozen strawberries, decorated with a squirt of whipped cream! He later explained how carefully he had sawed the tins of frozen strawberries into these precise cubes and had had the dickens of a time keeping them from melting until it was time to serve! Needless to say, the Guests never came again.

It was some much more successful dinners and receptions later, when David told me that, since he was the main provider for his extended family and I was his boss, it was now my role to settle some nasty disputes which had arisen in his extended family. Could they all come on a certain day, so that I could hear the cases and render judgment! I had, to my amazement, become their de facto chief!

Well, the day came, and I found at least thirty tribal people of all ages and shapes sitting on every available surface in my living room when I came home from work. I sat down in my biggest chair as David had suggested, opened the proceedings, and then listened to a long series of largely incomprehensible charges and countercharges, mostly involving impenetrable issues of marital infidelity, hence questions of who was to pay how much to whom, which David translated as best he could.

After two long hours of palaver I had no idea who was in the right and asked David what to do. He said, to my renewed surprise, that it really didn't matter as long as the argument was resolved. I should just decide as best I could and, he assured me, they would all be grateful and accept my verdict. I did, ruled in favor of one party and against the other, and, to my further astonishment, saw that that almost everyone was pleased and shuffled out with exclamations of: "Thanks, boss!" David said I did fine and was evidently pleased as well.

David especially rose to the occasion when he thought it counted, for instance the day our African-American Public Affairs Officer came to dinner, and David asked: "Boss, is that black white man coming tonight?", a question which underscored that it was not skin color but culture which made the difference in Liberia!

He also outdid himself, leading a temporarily enlarged team of assistants, in producing receptions and dinners while our State Department Inspectors were visiting the Embassy. Knowing that Liberian officials and Honorables tended to be casual about invitations, sometimes never showed up, or might drift in an hour late, Bill Rush and I had personally called on virtually all of our contacts beforehand and reminded them that the Economic Section had done many good things for Liberia in general and them in particular, and that this time it was we who needed help. They were to show up at our reception for the Inspectors on time and without fail - and, when the appointed hour came, they actually did! There was a long line of impeccably dressed, sober and serious-looking members of Liberia's elite lined up before our door, much to the astonishment of our old-school tie Inspectors.

Needless to say the party was a great success, our guests were much pleased with their own performance and some even asked, on the way out, if they had done OK! It was all a lovely tribute and an affirmation that we had made real friends.

The disillusionment came, when the Chief Inspector, a southern gentleman of distinguished lineage, told me on the last day how well we had done, and added that he really admired how we managed to work under these incredibly primitive conditions with all these negroes!

The guy was unreconstructed and didn't have a clue!

By contrast, David sent me a Christmas card some months after I had left Liberia with the message that he had given \$10 to his church (he only made about \$20 a month) so that they would pray for me! It closed: "You need it!" Even though David had only a second grade education, suffered from malaria, schistosomiasis and God knows what else, he was a wonderful servant and, more importantly, a loyal, valued friend.

There was only one Congressional visit during my tour, since Liberia, in those days, was clearly not on the Washington power circuit, an elderly Congressman who was a member of the Armed Services Committee. As his 'control officer' I thought it was terrific that I could billet him as one of the very first guests in the brand-new Mamba Point Hotel, an imposing, modern building put up by an Israeli firm, with magnificent views and all the latest conveniences. Having settled him in, I was to pick him up again for the Ambassador's black-tie dinner in his honor.

So it was a bit of a shock when my phone rang late in the afternoon and there was the Congressman shouting at me in a rage that "all his clothes were gone!". I found him in his room a few minutes later, stark naked and still raving, demanding that I "do something!". What had happened, of course, was that the Hotel had had to hire a virtually brand-new, untested staff, mostly young men straight out of the bush. When our Congressman's attendant saw his luggage, he must have thought that this was more wealth than he could acquire in a lifetime, and had simply made off with it and disappeared into the bush. I rang the Embassy's alarm bells and collected enough formal clothing so that the Congressman could in fact show up for the dinner - albeit, only somewhat mollified. He left soon thereafter never to be heard from again.

Q: When did you then leave Monrovia?

JAEGER: As my tour came to its end I had become so attached to Africa that I wanted to make an African career and had asked to be assigned to the African seminar at the Foreign Service Institute. However, personnel, like God, works in mysterious ways. Their decision arrived in April 1960, when I learned that I had been assigned instead to nine months of intensive Serbo-Croatian language training in Washington, for onward assignment to Yugoslavia. Although I would have preferred Russian and then Moscow, the pill had been sweetened by my second promotion, to FSO-6, earlier that spring. Although I would still be a Vice-Consul, I was now to be a Second Secretary! Almost a real person!

By July I was off, after the usual haze of packing, parties and arrangements, first to see my parents in Kansas City and then to take some leave. As the plane lifted off Roberts Field and arced out over the ocean, I looked back on Monrovia and the endless miles of palm-fringed beach which extended west and east to the horizon, and choked up with sadness. I had, to my own intense surprise, come to love this country, for all its terrible problems and its many faults. In a very real way it had become home.

**MILES WEDEMAN
USAID Africa Bureau
Washington, DC (1960s)**

Miles Wedeman was born in Maryland in 1923. He received a BA from Swarthmore College in 1943 and his LLB from Harvard in 1949. He also served as a lieutenant overseas from 1943-1946. After joining USAID in 1962, he did development work in Nigeria, Liberia and Uganda. He was also assigned to Korea, Cambodia, and Syria. Mr. Wedeman was interviewed in 1995 by John Kean.

WEDEMAN: When you mention countries, one cannot overlook Liberia. It always claimed a special relationship with the United States. While there was no formal commitment in the sense of the one to Nigeria, nevertheless, Liberia was treated as a very special case

Q: What were some of the principal projects there?

WEDEMAN: The one I remember best in Liberia was Mount Coffee. This was a hydroelectric scheme and it went fairly smoothly, at least to the point of awarding the contracts and getting it started. Later on, I understand, there were major technical problems with the grouting required to plug up gaps in the rock foundation of the dam.

Q: To prevent seepage?

WEDEMAN: Yes, that's right. It didn't work entirely. There was a great deal of seepage. One thing I do remember about Mount Coffee was that we had a visit from the Liberian Ambassador to the United States when we were in the process of completing our review of the major

construction contract for Mt. Coffee. He called on the Assistant Administrator, Ed Hutchinson, and me to see how things were going. We were just about ready to approve the contract. His name I can't remember, but I can well recall his final remark "I'm going home and pray tonight that you are going to approve it." There was a great deal of religious feeling on the part of that Ambassador. We did approve the contract, but not for religious reasons.

Q: This was a dam?

WEDEMAN: Yes, still there I gather, but who knows? Given the tragedy that befell Liberia, I have no idea. But it was a very difficult country to develop

LEON WEINTRAUB
Peace Corps Volunteer
Monrovia and Kahnple (1962-1964)

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.

Q: You were in Liberia from what?

WEINTRAUB: 1962, we arrived, we came in August 1962 and we were there for two full years, until the summer of 1964.

Q: What happened? Where's you go and how'd you- I mean, what were your initial impressions of Liberia?

WEINTRAUB: Well, it was obviously like nothing I could ever have imagined. You know, I was raised on the movies of Tarzan, so that was the period. Africa was all the jungle and snakes and wild animals all around, and people lived in villages; that was what you knew of Africa. Obviously the city of Monrovia at that time was a city of maybe 100,000 people or so and so it was urban in that respect, but once you got off a lot of the main streets much of it was unpaved, much of it did not have electric supplies or pumped water. Piped water was not available in a lot of the city so it was very much a mix of something you'd like to say was a city but yet, you know, you'd step back a little and there's a lot of the "country" that was still in the "city." I thought it interesting that apparently when people settled, when people from the hinterland, as it was called, or from the provinces, settled in Monrovia, they often settled near other people from the same area of the country. Since there were a lot of languages, a lot of dialects spoken in Liberia, very

often these people came into Monrovia with very limited English so they settled in an area settled by people from their same region if not from the same tribe. So you had little linguistic pockets which I guess is not very different from a Little Italy or a Chinatown; I mean, people are the same all over, they like to settle where they can do business, where they can survive using their own tongue, using the mother tongue.

My first year I was a little disappointed, in that when we arrived I was assigned to a school in the capital, Monrovia. We had an in-country training program for a couple of weeks to get acclimated to the climate and the health situation. I think it was at a teacher's college. In addition, there was a more intensive in-country orientation. And then we got our assignments. And I was assigned to a school in Monrovia. So I was disappointed because I came to see the "real" Africa, so to speak, the Africa of my ignorance as a child. Other people did get those assignments. But there were a fair number of us who were assigned to Monrovia. I was at a middle school or a junior high school. I shared an apartment with another fellow, another Peace Corps volunteer. I think he was at a high school. I became a math teacher, a junior high school math teacher. I walked to school on some paved streets, some dirt streets. But I had a fabulous and warm reception at the school, a very, very friendly reception.

As a matter of fact, there was another welcoming incident that happened fairly shortly after I arrived that a year or two later was written up in an issue of the official Peace Corps magazine. Shortly after I moved in to our apartment in Monrovia, one Friday or Saturday evening I was strolling around the neighborhood and walking down a lane, an unpaved street. Outside of a modest home in the front yard there was a large crowd gathered, and a lot of drumming and singing going on. So I joined the crowd to see what was happening. I was the only white face in the crowd. And gradually, people watched what was happening and then moved away to go on about their business, because, I guess, this was not an unusual occurrence. Well, for me, of course, this was the most unusual occurrence in the world. So, as the original members of the crowd drifted away I moved forward more and more until I was at the front of the crowd, kind of in a large horseshoe shape around the front yard. Basically there were a number of people seated in front of the house in what were apparently seats of honor and the drummers and singers were entertaining these people who were in the seats of honor. At one point one of the people in the seats of honor came up to me. Obviously, as I said, I was the only white person in the crowd, he came up to me and asked me, are you interested, you seem to be interested since you are here such a long time. So I explained who I was. I'm not sure if anyone in the crowd had heard of the Peace Corps, we were quite new, probably in the country only a month; and he said well, you have to be our guest, you can't just stand around with the crowd, you're an honored guest, you came from the United States. So somehow I joined the other guests of honor at this event.

It turned out that the fellow who came up to speak to me was the owner of the house where these activities – really, one should say festivities – were going on. The event – the drumming, the singing, the dancing, the drinking – was in honor of one of the country's Paramount Chiefs who came to Monrovia from the "hinterland" for a special meeting of all the country's Paramount Chiefs with President Tubman. By way of explanation, in Liberia every "upcountry" town had a town chief, and then several adjoining towns of the same clan had a clan chief, and a number of clans would be joined into a chiefdom, and the chiefdom was under the jurisdiction of a Paramount chief. Well, a number of paramount chiefs had come into Monrovia for one of their

periodic meetings with the president of Liberia, and the host of the event was simply entertaining his paramount chief from his home village. And I developed a friendship with him, this man by the name of Sammy Deemi. I came back to see him the next day in the morning, and I had a chat with him and the chief. Several weeks later, when Sammy made one of his periodic weekend visits up to his village where he came from – since he had a home there, and his wife was up there while he worked as a civil servant in Monrovia – he invited me to go up with him. I had a wonderful weekend, probably one of the most exciting weekends in my life. I mean, I got out to see the real Liberia, so to speak, beyond the paved roads, beyond the electric lines, beyond the indoor plumbing and we made a number of trips up there during that first year I was in Liberia. And in fact, I was able, for my second year, to make a transfer into this village. So as a result of this chance meeting, I finished my first year in Monrovia, as a junior high school math teacher, and then I transferred and went to the village of Kahnple and joined the local school as one of the elementary teachers. I think I was teaching third grade and fourth grade, as best as I can recall; or maybe fifth and sixth grade.

Q: While you were in Monrovia, how did you find teaching in some of the school administration?

WEINTRAUB: Well, using the term “school administration” would probably be a little bit overkill. I mean, obviously we had a principal and I remember I was good friends with other teachers, with an English teacher, Elizabeth Brewer, and with a science teacher, a Mr. Mitchell. As a matter of fact the English teacher invited me to her home at one point during the school year; she was having a birthday party for her husband. And this is a separate interesting story. Years later in the late '70s, her husband, Herbert Brewer, to whose birthday party I was invited in early 1963, became Liberian ambassador to the United States and I met them here in Washington again. But anyway, we were very friendly. They invited me on a number of occasions, I met their children.

Concerning our teaching responsibilities, there was little in the way of formal guidance. Obviously there was a curriculum but, for the most part, you were given some books (as I recall, the books were all hand-me-downs from schools in the United States) and not much in the way of support or guidance. You had to make do as best you could, given the preparation we had had the summer before as far as lesson plans, getting a syllabus, making sure you gave exams periodically. You were thrown in and it was sink or swim, you know; congratulations, you're a school teacher.

Q: Did you run across this division that I've heard about Liberia between the American-Liberians and the natives?

WEINTRAUB: Yes, the terminology is the “Americo-Liberians.”

Q: “Americo.”

WEINTRAUB: Right. These “Americo-Liberians” are the descendants of those freed slaves who had been repatriated from the United States in the 1820s and '30s and came back and settled that area of Africa and established a Republic of Liberia. Yes, that division between the “Americo-Liberians” and the “indigenous people” was still there, although it was starting to break down,

but change was coming too slowly and it was late to do that. The government of Liberia remained pretty much in the hands of the descendants of the freed slaves, the Americo-Liberians. But there was beginning to be more and more intermarriage; children from the interior occasionally were being adopted into the more established families, the families of the elite, if you will. They were sent to school and sometimes they adopted the name of their patron family. So the barrier between the two groups was breaking down, but there obviously was a division.

As a matter of fact, politically the country was divided into states and provinces, similar to the United States where we had the states and the territories before all the areas became states. So along the coast, where these settlers had established their villages and towns, there were states along the coast and each of the states had certain representatives and senators elected to serve in the national legislature. But in the “upcountry” areas, in the interior, the native jurisdictions were organized into provinces and the provinces were governed by a governor appointed by the president. They didn't have direct representation; they were ruled through the chiefs who were under the governors. But that was starting to break down. As a matter of fact, I think while I was there, if I'm not mistaken, the districts were starting to be reassembled into states and you could see more and more of this happening; for example, when I transferred to the interior for my second year, the area was part of the Central Province, but when I left one year later it was part of Nimba County. There was more political rhetoric on all the people of Liberia working together, but of course many years later there was a coup in 1979 when the established government was overthrown, the president assassinated and the whole political system was thrown into a turmoil from which they've barely recovered to this day.

Q: How did you live in the village? What was the name of the village?

WEINTRAUB: The village went by the name of Kahnple. Obviously there's no “correct” spelling, it's a phonetic spelling, but I think the preferred was Kahnple. The people were of the Gio tribe (pronounced “Gee-oh,” with a hard “G”) and spoke the Gio language – which was one of scores of languages in Liberia. And I lived on a small compound that had been set aside by the government. There was a school on the compound, there was a clinic on the compound, and there was a house for the teacher on the compound. So the house was already standing when I got there. Peace Corps gave me the minimum furnishings for the house, a bed, a dresser, a table, some chairs. We had a kerosene stove and a kerosene refrigerator. Right to this day I'm not quite sure how burning a kerosene wick got a refrigerator cold, but it did. And I remember the first week I was there a number of the students helped me and we built a latrine outside the house and that was it. For showers, hopefully when it rained at night, I stood behind the house and we had the corrugated zinc roofs without gutters, of course, so that water came running off the back of the house and that's how you took a shower, or you collected the water in the rain barrel and took a bath when you could. So it was fairly rudimentary.

Q: Were you by yourself?

WEINTRAUB: I was by myself in the village. The closest other volunteers were a couple, maybe 10 to 12 miles away. I was actually at the end of the road. I was at the end of the road right next to Guinea, kind of near where the borders of Liberia, Ivory Coast and Republic of Guinea met. You could kind of walk into either one from where I was, a walk of a few miles. But

going back in the direction of Monrovia, this couple [Betsy and Vernon Young in Zоргowee] was about 10 to 12 miles away, and then if you go further in toward Monrovia, for another 12 miles or so, there was a larger town, the provincial capital of Saniquellie, which had maybe three or four Peace Corps volunteers there [David Baur, John Acherman, Linda Foster, and – I think – Sheila Hegy]. So I was at the end of the road and learned to just be there as a school teacher.

Q: How'd you find the teaching and the students?

WEINTRAUB: Well, it was a challenge. Obviously I didn't have a wealth of resources or experience to draw upon. Considering what I saw in the other Liberian teachers at the school, though, I had no doubt I was an improvement. The other teachers, I don't think they were high school graduates. There was a lot of learning by rote, which was not surprising. We were advised that we should expect to see that -- a lot of repetition, a lot of rote. There was also a lot of corporal punishment for kids getting out of line, usually with a switch, you know. And I have no idea what the drop out rate was, what kids went on to high school. It was a challenge. The students were a variety of ages. As I recall, I may have had fifth and sixth grades. A lot of kids may have started school roughly at the age that you should start, let's say six or seven years old, so they were roughly the age you would expect for that grade, but some of the kids were in their late teens or early 20s because they didn't start when they were supposed to. Their parents kept them working on the farm, particularly girls - girls often were held back, it was not considered appropriate for girls to go to school. So it was a mix and it was all the challenge you'd ever imagine as the Peace Corps said you can expect.

Q: How'd you find the social life there?

WEINTRAUB: There wasn't much of it. I did a fair amount of reading. Peace Corps in those days gave us a footlocker of paperback books and that was a treasure. We had a kerosene lantern. But, you know, I would often go into town. Typically, I can recall, most often I would go into town on the nights when there was a full moon when you could see where you were walking because when there was no moon you didn't see anything. There were no lights, other than occasionally a candle or a kerosene lantern in someone's home. So there was one shop in town that had a kerosene chiller where you could buy a Coca Cola or a beer and people would come and assemble and chat. There weren't that many English speakers in town, so there wasn't many people for me to mix with.

Actually, there was also a small, small community of Lebanese traders in town. All through West Africa Lebanese merchants had a lot of the small retail trade. The Liberians might be little street corner vendors. I can remember Liberian vendors selling cigarettes or chewing gum, shoe laces or things of that nature, but in order to open a shop and have inventory and refrigerators and wholesalers and bank accounts, most Liberians didn't have the resources to do that. If they were educated enough and had capital, then they wanted to go to higher education and they wanted to become a professional of some sort. So typically this void, this retail void in trade was taken up by the Lebanese and obviously they were not in the smaller villages but my village or town was about as small as it got but yet still had a few Lebanese shops. And obviously there was social segregation, if you will, between the Lebanese and the Liberians. The Lebanese shopkeepers all had Liberians working for them as stock boys or traders and salesmen, but there was pretty much

a rigid social segregation between the Lebanese and Liberians. I can't say real hostility, but they just- they were two cultures that didn't mix very well together. The Lebanese, we used to joke - very often they'd come as a single young man to make a fortune and at one point they'd order a mail order bride and we'd see that happen occasionally; a young girl would appear in town from nowhere and there would be a wedding and they'd set up shop there. And they got along together, the Lebanese did business with the Liberians and the Liberians needed outlets for supplies, oils and other things like that, so occasionally I'd chat with these people as well, they all spoke English. But not much in the way of social activities, you couldn't go to the movies or to the bowling alley. Not much activity there. Not even a Dairy Queen.

Q: Did you sense any feeling of unrest, discontent or anything? I mean, were you able to sort of check the political pulse or was there a political pulse?

WEINTRAUB: Well, probably not. I was probably not particularly sensitive to it at the time. But it was kind of a- the government, I guess, was kind of- it felt as a benign, paternal type of a presence. Kahnple was, I believe, typical of a lot of the Liberian villages, the people looked to the government. The government needs to build us a road; government needs to build us a bridge; government needs to build us a school. Not much in the way of civic action, civic organization. The only kind of organizations there were the informal tribal associations. I saw instances of trial by ordeal, you know, the kind of, not exactly witchcraft kind of thing, but people were put on trial for theft of some kind or another, and they had to go through a trial by ordeal, some kind of rudimentary justice, if you will, being meted out. But there was really no government presence at all in the village, other than the school and the clinic that was serviced several days a week. The chief, if you will, the chief of the town, was the government. I don't know if they paid any taxes. This whole thing eluded me, was not part of my understanding of what went on, but certainly I didn't feel any sense of hostility toward the government.

Q: Did you get any feel for- I'm told that in that area there are these sorts of secret societies and kidnapping of small children.

WEINTRAUB: Oh yes. We were advised about this in training, in Pittsburgh about the secret societies; as I recall, the men's was the "Poro" and the women's was the "Sande." I believe they were more active along the coast rather than inland, but they existed inland as well. Occasionally you'd see a group of young girls or boys, often with some kind of white-powdered mixture on their faces, and they were going to be led away into the bush. I say "led away," but I am confident it was all voluntary, I didn't get a feeling of coercion about it at all. This was training, if you will, to be initiated into adulthood, and the children might be away a couple of weeks, and that was an accepted rite of passage, if you will, that was done. One didn't ask much about this and one didn't expect to be told much about it.

Occasionally there were stories going around, I don't know if they were rumors or not, of kidnappings of children for ritual murders, for stealing of the heart or the liver or the genital organs or something like that, and one never knows how true these are, or whether these are rumors that just get out of hand. It's obviously sensational and occasionally there'd be stories in the newspapers about searches for victims or for the people who did that, but I'm really not sure how much of this happened then. Occasionally there are stories in the paper these days until

now about this happening in Liberia particularly during the breakdown of society in the civil war that happened in the '80s and the '90s. But I never was aware of such events affecting anyone in particular.

As I said, I did witness a trial by ordeal. I don't remember what the offense was, maybe some petty theft. As best as I can recall the "trial," it took place in the main village compound. There was a pot of boiling oil, or heated oil, palm oil that was typically used for cooking. After the chief heard about the case, the person who was accused was to stand before this pot. Three stones were dropped into the oil and he had to reach in and pull the stones out one by one. And presumably if he was innocent he wouldn't get burned; if he was guilty he would get burned. Another case involved use of a machete or cutlass, if you will. The machete was heated in a fire and then it would be pressed against the calf of the accused and if he screamed out in agony, in pain, well, he was guilty. I suppose one can label this as kind of a trial by witchcraft. So I witnessed some of these but I don't have any firsthand awareness of anything more serious such as these ritual murders.

Q: Well, that type of trial by ordeal was going, up through the 15th, 16th century back in England and I think a little bit in the United- well, in the colonies.

WEINTRAUB: People were thrown into a well or into water and they were tied up. If they sank, they were guilty. So, yes, it's not like we never heard of anything like that before. And this seemed to be accepted as the way you did things.

MARY CHIAVARINI
Consul
Monrovia (1963-1965)

Ms. Chiavarini was born and raised in Massachusetts. After Secretarial training, she worked with the Interstate Commerce Commission in Washington DC before joining the Foreign Service in 1944. During her career with the State Department, Ms. Chiavarini served as secretary to the ambassador and other officers in Naples, Tirana, Manila, Seoul, Prague, Rome, Singapore and Warsaw. After her appointment in 1957 as Consul and Secretary in the Diplomatic Service she served in Palermo, Monrovia and Paris. She also served as special "trouble shooter" in Nicosia, Dublin and Riyadh. Ms. Chiavarini was interviewed by David T. Jones in 2007.

Q: Can you tell me your first impressions of Monrovia? I've never been there.

CHIAVARINI: Well, it's very African. I had an American clerk in the consulate when I got there. She didn't work out too well. Then I got this other girl whom I still see; she lives in Virginia.

Q: How nice.

CHIAVARINI: I haven't seen her recently but we exchange Christmas cards. She was very helpful, although she had never done visa work. I would help her with what papers to request and that kind of thing.

Q: Did you have friends among the Liberians?

CHIAVARINI: Oh, not many. The few I had came from the U.S. and helped to establish Liberia as a country.

Q: Did you ever encounter President Tubman?

CHIAVARINI: I did at social affairs. But I never had any formal dealings with him.

Q: Do you have any impressions of President Tubman?

CHIAVARINI: Just that we thought that he relied too much on what people told him. I would visit friends that I had made up in the rubber plantations, particularly the Firestone plantation. They were very nice to me. I remember one rainy Sunday I went out to visit them. Coming back, the girl I had gone with leaned out the door to tell me what was going on because I couldn't see.

Q: It was raining so hard?

CHIAVARINI: Yes. So she got soaking wet trying to help me. But I appreciated that. We stopped at one of the other plantations on the way back in order to get our breath. We got home all right. No problem, but it was an eerie experience.

Q: Do you remember anything about the embassy itself?

CHIAVARINI: The one lasting impression was the one I told you about. Not being allowed to represent my country at the wake for President Kennedy.

Q: The signing of the condolence book for President Kennedy.

CHIAVARINI: Right. I told you I resented it very much.

Q: I think you said earlier that you had told the ambassador that you resented that.

CHIAVARINI: Yes, I did. He didn't say anything. He didn't really care.

Q: Did you socialize with the ambassador and other members of the embassy?

CHIAVARINI: Well, maybe some of the other embassy members, but not the ambassador and his wife. She was quite a gal.

Q: Did you tell me once that they took you out to dinner?

CHIAVARINI: Yes, when I was in Paris. It always astounded me that they called and said they had arrived and asked would I have dinner with them at the Hotel Carillon. I was so flabbergasted I said, "Yes." And then that same evening I invited them to my house for a drink--not that we needed but it seemed to be called for. Well, anyway, they both are dead by now. So I hope they are resting peacefully.

Q: Did you travel in Liberia other than to the rubber plantations?

CHIAVARINI: Well, once I went to the home of one of the missionaries. She was one of the top missionaries. She had a place all set up for her. She was wonderful with the locals. I have a pot on my table in my living room that she brought me. She used to visit me here.

Q: Do you have any other impressions of politics of Liberia at the time?

CHIAVARINI: Well, they were like the politics here with the Blacks. I don't really want to go into that.

Q: Okay. Do you have anything that you want to say to wrap up Liberia?

CHIAVARINI: Only that I was glad to leave.

JAMES R. MEENAN
Trainee, Liberia Audit Program, USAID
Monrovia (1965)

Mr. Meenan was born in Rhode Island and raised in California. After graduating from Woodbury College he entered government service. Joining USAID in 1965, Mr. Meenan had a distinguished career with that Agency, serving as Mission and Program Auditor in USAID Missions throughout the world. His foreign postings include Liberia, Vietnam, Brazil, Chile, Panama, Sri Lanka and Philippines. Among his Washington assignments was Committee Staff Member in the Office of Senator Max Baucus. Mr. Meenan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.

Q: What was observed in the Liberia review?

MEENAN: It was a productive two month effort that really opened my eyes to the economic development needs of the country. As my first overseas trip, it conditioned me for my Vietnam and all future assignments.

I observed that USAID/Liberia had completed major facility construction work, using its restricted petty cash operation and without appropriate Washington approvals. A visit to the port also revealed that a Foreign Service officer's lift van belongings, that were to be transshipped

through the port of Monrovia, were mistakenly placed, some years earlier, in the Distressed Cargo holding area of the port. The contents were a total loss.

The team also documented the issues that: a hydro-electric dam being built would not function properly due to a lacking river flow; a major hospital build in Monrovia was not functional due to its over design for the country and lacked basic equipment because of General Services Administration failed procurement process; a telecommunications reform project that was not achieving needed results because the elite families of Liberia would not pay their long distance phone bills to the U.S.; and most Liberians sent for education/training in the U.S. were taking twice as long to complete the courses and/or not returning to Liberia.

ROBERT H. NOOTER
Mission Director, USAID
Monrovia (1965-1967)

Robert H. Nooter was raised in St. Louis, Missouri. He attended one semester at Purdue, joined the Marines during WW II and was assigned to a V-12 Unit. However, he graduated from the University of California with a B.S. in Industrial Engineering in 1947. He was called back into the Marines in 1951 to fight in the Korean War. In 1961, he attended courses at the Harvard Business School. He became interested in government service during the Kennedy Administration, and international affairs during his service in the military. He also served in Liberia and Uruguay. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on January 6, 1996.

NOOTER: An assignment came up in Liberia which was offered to me while I was in Uruguay. I don't know what was going on in the AID assignment process except that they thought I had learned enough by that time to be able to handle a larger mission. And Liberia, while it is a very small country, had a very large USAID program at that time.

I recall Ed Hutchinson called me and offered me the assignment, which I accepted.

Q: *But you had felt you had been in Uruguay long enough? You were eager to go, or what?*

NOOTER: I thought I had done about all I was going to do there. As I said, the Uruguayans were not really terribly keen on AID. AID was not a major factor in their economic life and while we enjoyed the time there and I found it very useful for what I learned about economic development. I don't think the question of staying on there ever really came up. This other offer came along and it was a much more important job so I don't think we ever really considered staying on another tour in Uruguay.

In retrospect, my own feeling is that two year assignments are too short. Maybe from the Agency's viewpoint a reassignment at that time may or may have not been a good idea, but I didn't have any reason to question it.

Q: So you went directly to Liberia?

NOOTER: After home leave. We spent thirty days or so in the United States and then we went to Liberia, which was an entirely different situation. Liberia had at that time about 1.3 million people. The AID organization had, as I mentioned earlier, 300 people - 150 direct hire and 150 contract people. We had programs for all aspects of their economy. There the AID program was important to their economy.

Q: This was 196_?

NOOTER: In the early part of 1965. I recall one of the Liberians saying, in a kind of artless way, "Bob, you may not be a very important person in your own country, but you're a pretty important person here." (laughs)

Q: That certainly is true in Liberia.

NOOTER: In fact, when we walked down the street, a good many of the people knew who we were. It was that significant to them. The country was divided between the Americo-Liberians, about 40,000 Americo-Liberians who were descended from the returned American freed slaves, and the native people who had to some extent intermarried with them. But the Americo-Liberian group was still quite distinct. It controlled most of the wealth and had most of the college degrees. Almost all of the ones with college degrees were from that community and they certainly controlled the politics.

Most people don't know, though, that President Tubman, who was Americo-Liberian, was not part of the inner circle of the Liberian elite. He was a kind of outsider who had come to power. He didn't belong to what was called the Buchanan Clique of Liberian politicians who usually controlled most of the government. Tubman, on the other hand, courted the tribal people because he thought of it as an alternative, or part of his power base in dealing with the Buchanan group.

Tubman was very much loved and admired by most of the tribal people, even though he was an Americo-Liberian. I heard many of them express concern as to what would happen when he left, whether the tribal people would become more oppressed and so on. He built roads and schools up into the hinterlands. He brought tribal people into the government to the extent that that was possible because of the limitations of education. He appointed the first tribal cabinet Minister, the Minister of Education. This was the first tribal person to have gone on to get a Ph.D. abroad somewhere and Tubman brought him back and appointed him Minister.

Q: Do you remember his name.

NOOTER: No, I don't. But it was an example of Tubman trying to bring tribal people into the political system.

As I remember AID had ten different programs. That included a program at the University of Monrovia, helping to run and develop the secondary school system of Monrovia. There were also programs for primary education all around the country and a health program. We were

committed to building a hospital, which, given AID's concept of concentrating on preventative rather than curative medicine was thought of by all of us as unfortunate. But it was something that President Kennedy had promised President Tubman during a state visit to the United States, and there was no way out of it. And in fact, I guess, that hospital served a useful purpose, but I haven't really followed the history of it. It was not completed until after I left.

We also had programs trying to help industry. Oddly we had almost nothing in agriculture. A lot of AID programs around the world were related to agriculture, and I've learned a lot about agriculture in my time with AID. It is quite clear, of course, that the successful agricultural developments in Liberia were the tree crops. There the plantations - Firestone was the original one, but later, U.S. Rubber and Goodyear also had plantations. Later there was successful development in palm oil. The tree crops are what are possible in Liberia given their climate and their soil. The other attempts to develop other kinds of crops of the kind that we know in this country and in most developing countries were really not successful. At the time I was there we had terminated some failed agricultural programs and were working on trying to find some new ones but had not yet succeeded.

The new attempt in agriculture while I was there was a program which U.S. Rubber undertook with some USAID funding provided in Washington (to some extent over my objection) to grow corn and other kinds of crops that really weren't suited to the Liberian climate.

Q: This was called the "large unit agricultural program"?

NOOTER: It was a private sector agriculture program. U.S. Rubber sent out a fellow to run it who was a bright young executive, but he didn't know anything about agriculture. As I said, the decision to support that program was not made in the mission. We worked with the U.S. Rubber executives to help him, but the program failed because the technology was not appropriate. It didn't work in that environment.

Also, the way they were running it was a highly mechanized approach. There was very little local impact. It was the opposite of a labor intensive approach, and if the program had been successful it would have had very little impact on the local economy.

Q: What programs did you think were working there at the time? What kinds of things did you think were making an impact?

NOOTER: I remember I graded our ten programs from one to ten, and they varied over the entire range in terms of effectiveness. I can't remember exactly what was at the top of the list but I think the secondary school program, which was run by a contract group with San Francisco State University, was the best.

Q: Monrovia?

NOOTER: Monrovia Consolidated School Systems was basically a good program. I don't know what impact it ultimately had but it was a good program. We had some rural development

programs, but at that time they were in a phase down mode, and we had just one person in each of four counties. They weren't very effective.

Q: Doing what?

NOOTER: Working with the local county supervisors to provide assistance to the primary schools and I can't remember what else. It was limited by the small amount of manpower and, like I said, did not make a very big impact. We had a primary school program that included teacher training and building primary schools up in the country. There had been a program to construct rural roads, although I believe the Liberians did that almost entirely with their own funds when they had some income from rubber and iron ore in the fifties. They used that to build roads and that opened up the country. That was very effective in trying to bring the hinterland into contact with coast.

We had a public administration program that was helping them to try to make their government more efficient. It was reasonably effective, with a lot of training of people overseas. But, as in other parts of Africa, when people are trained they don't necessarily stay in the position for which they were trained. Somebody trained to be a doctor may very well become a cabinet minister.

I remember we sent someone for training to be a librarian. And of course it cost a great deal in one of these contract programs to have a U.S. librarian filling the post until the Liberian returned from his training. After this person returned, he took a different position. Then the question arose, should we extend the U.S.-funded librarian at a cost of maybe twenty times the cost of a local librarian. I can't remember the decision, but those are the kinds of problems that came up in trying to build up a system.

Q: So, let's back up right now a little bit. Why were we there? What was our interest? What were we trying to accomplish?

NOOTER: Liberia was always thought of as having some special relationship with the United States because of the fact that freed slaves from the U.S. had been sent there before the Civil War, or assisted to get there, in order to found the country in the first place. Although the U.S. was prepared to largely ignore the country for the next eighty years or so, and it was only in recent times that we began giving them any aid. After World War II there were two geo-political interests there. One was that iron ore was discovered there in fairly rich deposits, and so there was an iron mining industry that was developed. Also, we had a big USIA station in Liberia which broadcast to other parts of Africa. In the Cold War context it was thought of as an important station.

Q: Voice of America

NOOTER: Voice of America, yes. Robert's Field was an airfield that was considered to be of some importance, although U.S. military didn't use it to any extent that I am aware of. So there were both these historic and more recent geo-political interests on the part of the U.S. However I remember coming back to Washington one time for a review of the Liberian program. There was

an inter-agency committee formed to review what was the level of U.S. interest - how important it was, and what influence that had on what the aid level should be, and so on. All of the members of this committee were asked to speak. A State Department officer spoke about the Voice of America station and so on. Finally it got around to the CIA officer's turn, and he said, "Well, I would say that this country isn't really very important to the U.S." I would say it was a mixed bag. Certainly it had some importance to the U.S. but whether it justified the level of aid we were giving it is another matter. Actually, the aid level wasn't all that big in dollar terms. It was large in staff because it had a high technical assistance component, but it was not so large in dollar transfers - I think it was less than ten million dollars a year. As I remember, maybe six million dollars a year total.

During the time I was there I did find, having built up the program in Uruguay from maybe four to ten persons, that the numbers in Liberia were excessive and in my two and half years there I reduced the number from 300 to 150 without any noticeable loss of impact on the program.

Q: What would you characterize as the main development thrusts? What were you trying to do with the program there?

NOOTER: In Liberia it really was building from the bottom up. I guess I've come to think that the fact that we draw a boundary around a piece of real estate and call it a country doesn't necessarily mean that it should have all the attributes and the abilities and skills of every other country in the world. If Liberia were, say, in the hills of West Virginia we wouldn't pay much attention to it. It happened to be called a country and so we seemed to think that somehow it should have all of the functions of a government. It should have embassies around the world. It should be able to collect taxes. It should be able to fulfill all of the functions of government.

But in retrospect I'd say it is an anomaly of history that this particular piece of real estate has a circle drawn around it. But we were trying, in a naive way, to make a functioning nation-state. To do that required education. I don't remember the figures anymore but the literacy rate was less than 10 percent- I think it was about a 6 percent literacy rate at the time I was there.

I think the emphasis on education was appropriate. Let me mention another kind of lesson. Every country is able to survive, at some level. The only question is at what level and on what basis. There is no magic number of about any particular per capita income that is appropriate for any piece of real estate.

One other interesting piece of information is that the Liberians were using the American dollar as their currency. They had no independent currency except coinage, which they could issue, and which was limited, of course, because people only could carry a certain amount of coinage. So they were prevented from running budget deficits in the same way that almost every other country in the world can. This was a godsend to them in the sense that there was always relative fiscal stability. The government simply didn't have the capacity to run a budget deficit because it didn't have any money, unless it could borrow it from somewhere. The rate of inflation was always very low. The economic situation in that sense was always very stable. It may have been stagnant, but it was stable.

Q: We had of course been having assistance programs in Liberia for about twenty years before you got there, going back to '44. Did you see any evidence of these programs or did you get any sense, or did they just sort of evaporate? What did you inherit in terms of development activities?

NOOTER: We found some evidence of those programs. There had been a vocational training program which was on its last, just phasing out at the time I was there. I would say it wasn't very effective but it was still visible. I also remember finding school buildings that had been built under the AID program ten or fifteen years before and no one remembered that they'd been built under AID programs at all.

I remember going up into the country one time on a visit and going to an office that had been part of a rural development program some few years before. That program had been phased out by AID about three years before, but there were still a dozen or so Liberian employees lying around on benches sleeping, so they could draw their government pay. The program had been phased out for three years, and there were absolutely no functions being performed by this office except that it was a source of employment for these dozen people who showed up in order to be able to collect their paycheck from the government - not from AID, but from the government.

These were the remnants of lost programs. The things that were effective, of course, in Liberia, were Firestone's rubber plantation and some of the other rubber operations. Also, the iron mines, although the biggest iron mine now has drawn down all of its reserves and I believe they are closed now.

Q: That was Lamco.

NOOTER: Yes, that was Lamco. And the old original iron ore mine had played out long before I got there. Of course Firestone started as being a kind of enclave operation. I think there was a book written about what little impact it had on the country, which is a bit unfair. It's too long a story to go into here. In one sense it was an enclave operation, but it did provide employment for large numbers of Liberians. It did provide resources for the country and it did serve as a basis for individual Liberians being able to grow rubber on their own farms because Firestone would purchase the raw rubber and process it. It provided a market for Liberians who wanted to grow rubber and that had some impact. I would say Firestone's programs had an impact on the country.

Our education program had an impact, and certainly the training abroad, where we sent people to be trained in the U.S., to the extent that they came back and stayed, had an impact. Amos Sawyer, who was the interim president recently, was one of the bright students of one of our instructors who was employed as an instructor at the University. She happened to be a woman whom I still keep in touch with. She always thought Amos was one of her brightest students. I guess there were indirect impacts that are difficult to identify but were real.

Q: How about your relations with Liberians, in working with them and socializing with them? How did you find that kind of experience?

NOOTER: Of course there we had a lot of leverage and we were very popular. I could say it was either for our good looks or for our money. You can make your own choice. We, of course, had

good relations with the Liberians at all levels. The only thing that marred that was in the last four or five months one of our local employees, who was a Sierra Leonean national married to a Liberian woman, was arrested by Tubman's security forces and locked up in the infamous Bella Yella Prison. The rumor was that no one ever returned, which isn't true because I went to a coming out party for somebody who was released from Bella Yella once, given, oddly, by the Minister of Public Works.

We simply weren't able to do anything to get this man released. It turned out it was caused by a marital squabble where the wife's relatives had told Tubman's security forces that this man was disloyal to the president. The fact that he was a Sierra Leonean was also not in his favor. It colored my attitude toward the government to see the repression that was there, but was fairly much under the surface when it hit so close to home.

That fellow was, ultimately, released. I ran into him some years later in the Johannesburg airport when I was going to Lesotho. He somehow had been released and left Liberia.

Q: Were you able to use this influence that you had, and the popularity of the AID program, in terms of trying to get policy changes in the government? Was there any latitude in that?

NOOTER: One of the most important parts of our program was to help Liberia's general financial situation. Iron ore prices and rubber prices had declined after the various wars, and the Government had spent the money that it earned during the good years on roads and public buildings. So they were hard pressed, and they had undertaken a program with the IMF. We worked very closely with the Fund on that program. It was headed up by a Japanese, who is still a good friend. He later joined the World Bank and opened up the first World Bank office in Tokyo. It was managed from Washington by Moeen Qureshi, who later became Senior Vice President of the World Bank. He came out to visit from time to time to see how the program was going.

We helped support the IMF program by giving small amounts of dollar aid at critical times. We met regularly with the government to see that they stayed within their budget. That was something that we dealt with at the level of Tubman himself. We would go over the budget with the president, in the presence of our Ambassador, of course. That was the level of influence that we could bring to bear.

The Government ran a pretty good ship, in terms of keeping their fiscal house in order. This was an effective program, also helped by the fact that they had the dollar there as their currency, as I mentioned. Charlie Sherman was the Minister of Finance at that time and a very effective person. So, yes, we had a lot of influence and we used it, particularly in that respect.

Q: No constraints imposed on you by the Embassy in terms of our other policy interests in Liberia?

NOOTER: We had good relations with the Ambassador. He, of course, always went with us on meetings to the President.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

NOOTER: Ben Brown. He was quite supportive and helpful. Another interesting note was that Harvard had a team working with the Planning Ministry in Liberia. Elliot Berg was the head of that team during the last half of the time I was in Liberia. Elliot became one of the "fathers" of Structural Adjustment in Africa some years later. I came to know Elliot and I've stayed in touch with him over the years.

Q: He wrote his book Growth without Development after that?

NOOTER: That was not Elliot's book. But Elliot had his own ideas on African development policy even before he went to Liberia.

Q: Was that planning group effective?

NOOTER: Yes, that was an effective team. The head of the planning ministry was a good person, who worked with and trained younger people, helping to bring on the next generation. Of course, a lot of that work was wiped out with the coup and now with the turmoil going on there. Some of the people left the country. Some were shot.

Q: Were there any Cold War connotations at all or was this all straight development interest, U.S. interest?

NOOTER: The one that I mentioned. I think it influenced the overall level of the program. The fact that we had such a large operation there was a result of the Cold War interest. There was a large Peace Corps group there, 350 or so Peace Corps people.

Q: Had that started before you came?

NOOTER: Oh yes.

Q: How did AID and the Peace Corps get along together?

NOOTER: We worked very closely together. One of the interesting Peace Corps operations was a group of young MBAs working in the government. They worked very closely with our people who were working on the Public Administration Program. Actually, I hired two of the people from that group to work in the mission, and then later they both became AID employees, and very good ones. That grew out of that relationship.

Doug Stafford was one of the deputy Peace Corps representatives in the country when we were there. Doug later joined AID several times in senior positions. In fact, we also had a small group of Peace Corps in Uruguay. I always maintained very close contact with the Peace Corps. They later became an excellent source of recruiting material for AID as these people came back from overseas. Sometimes they would go back to school to get an advanced degree and then would be available for employment.

Q: What did you learn from your Liberian experience? What kind of an overview would you give, having spent those years there?

NOOTER: For me this was still part of a learning process, both in Uruguay and in Liberia. I was learning about economics. I was learning about technical assistance. I was learning about how you operate AID programs - what works and what doesn't work. Of course Africa is a tough row to hoe. It is a place where it is difficult to make programs work and have them be effective. But I got a chance to see what was working and what wasn't. It was all part of a learning process for me as well as, hopefully, making the program more effective for the Agency. Those two experiences were very useful as background for the rest of my career in development.

Q: I don't mean to pressure you too much but what would you say was really the core of what you were learning from all of this experience?

NOOTER: Let's postpone that until later when we have a broader range of countries to look at and I'll make these same points with a little broader background of experience. I guess I would say here that the combination of the way the central government runs its macro economic policies and how AID is run at the grass roots level, and where they meet, is one of the things that I was observing in both countries but in quite different ways. They were entirely different kinds of programs. In Liberia we had very extensive technical assistance - Americans coming to run, train, and show Liberians how to operate things. In Uruguay they knew how to run things - by and large they just needed some money.

Q: Does that pretty much cover the Liberia piece for the moment?

NOOTER: I think so. The only other personal comment is that my wife and I learned something about tribal culture, and we began collecting African art, which became a very important part of our lives ever after.

Q: You mean the art collection?

NOOTER: The combination of the knowledge of African culture and the collecting. It worked together. I had a lot of reasons to be out in the country for our program and it gave me a first hand experience. It really plunged us into trying to understand - the anthropologists really don't like the word tribal, but they don't have any good substitute for it - about how a traditional society functions at the village level, under chiefdomships, and so on.

Q: So you gave some time, for the art collection and other things, to try to understand the local culture and history.

NOOTER: Yes, and reading some of the information on the art was also reading about the culture. Dr. Harley, who had been a missionary there, who also collected the art, wrote pieces on how the social system functioned in the country in the rural areas.

Q: What kind of impressions did you have of the society? What were your feelings about this?

NOOTER: Let's make this point. There was always a classic debate and that is: Is it in the interest of a tribal society to modernize? What would they lose in the process? The village culture isn't ideal, but on the other hand it does have a lot to be said for it. People know their role in society, they have certain social stability. I guess my rule of thumb, from my observations in Liberia, was that a village is a happy village if it had a good chief. That may be a little superficial because the role of the elders is also important in a village. Nevertheless, when the rural people move to Monrovia, for example, they live in quite a different way and the system tends to break down. Often people would question the value of modernization, and we would debate this issue.

My conclusion on that point is that it really isn't worth debating because we couldn't do anything about it. The traditional culture is going to break down whether we had a role in it or not. The only question is whether what comes out of it will be better or worse. There is no way this society isn't going to change. I remember having a chat with a fellow who had gotten a Master's Degree and was working in the Department of Education. He was observing how the transition in his society from his father, who had never been to any school, to him, who had had a Master's Degree, compared to in the United States. In my case, my grandfather had had almost no schooling, but my father had gone through ten years of school and I had gone through college, and so there was some time period over which this transition took place. But in his case the transition was in one generation, from nothing to everything. The impact of that on the society was enormous, and as a result he had trouble relating to the village, to his family, and to his social setting because of this transition.

I think these are some of the problems of Africa that we see the results of.

Q: I think maybe we should pause there.

NOOTER: When we were leaving Liberia, when our assignment was up there, I was offered an assignment as mission director in Nigeria. This was in 1967. We went back to California for our home leave. At that time the Biafran War was going on and was intensifying and families weren't allowed to go to Nigeria. Therefore I, having had a family separation during the Korean War, decided that we shouldn't go into a family separation again. Therefore, during the course of the home leave, I declined the assignment. I believe families were allowed to go three or four months after that, and it wouldn't have been a very long separation, but of course I had no way to know that at the time.

JOHN L. LOUGHRAN
Consul
Monrovia (1966-1967)

Ambassador John L. Loughran was born in New Jersey in 1921. After receiving a Bachelor's degree from Lehigh University in 1942 he served as an aviator in the Marine Corps during World War II. He later received a Master's degree from Harvard. His career included positions in Bonn, Liberia, Senegal and the Gambia,

Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Somalia. Ambassador Loughran was interviewed by Horace G. Torbert on June 22, 1988.

Q: There weren't all that many people just clamoring to go to Africa at that time--or since, anyway. (Laughs)

LOUGHRAN: There were some.

Q: There was a dedicated corps of them, I know. What was going on in Monrovia at that time? That was still a pretty stable place then, wasn't it?

LOUGHRAN: Under President Tubman it was stable. The embassy was rather large. We had many components, the Voice of America had a large station, other agencies of the government were fully staffed, some would say "overstaffed, overstuffed, and over there," but nonetheless, the mission, as a whole, was unusually large.

The role of the ambassador was clearly the most important, because Tubman was, for all practical purposes, his own Secretary of foreign affairs, and dealt with the ambassador directly. Normal calls took place with political counselors of other embassies and all sections of the foreign office. Fortunately, there was sufficient travel money for officers to travel into the interior, to see what was really taking place with the indigenous Liberians as they interacted with the so-called Americo-Liberians.

I was only there nine months. The opportunity to see what AID was doing in the field in the way of assistance was enlightening. My relationships with the missionaries, some of whom had been there for 40 or 50 years, was most rewarding. They had mastered most of the indigenous languages; they knew the people; they were aware of the major problems facing the government which was the recipient of large amounts of aid which was ill spent.

Q: That's unusual, in my experience.

LOUGHRAN: It was a learning experience. I remember well the archbishop whose advice was one of the best I had ever received in my whole exposure to Africa before and since, "John, these people are as human as others on the face of the earth. They have their ways, and it behooves all of us from the so-called developed nations to try and listen to what they know, why they know it, and why they're doing what they're doing; then, if we can help them in any way by small incremental changes to change, they will accept such changes, but do not come in with massive assistance programs which they will be unable to absorb." I thought, and I still think, it was one of the best pieces of advice I had ever received from somebody who had been there for years, never proselytizing. Forty years before I arrived, they gave up any idea of turning the indigenous Liberians Christians. They taught, and essentially tried to help them to help themselves by teaching them in their own languages, not having them learn all about Ireland. Most of them were Irish priests. They taught them about Liberia and where it was in relation to the continent of Africa, which I thought was a marvelous approach.

Q: You mentioned local languages. What was the official language? Was it English?

LOUGHRAN: The official language was English.

Q: What percentage of the people spoke English?

LOUGHRAN: I would say no more than 10%, if that.

Q: So you had to deal with a number of different tribal languages, which didn't make democracy, as we see it, a very easy process.

LOUGHRAN: Not at all.

Q: They are quite different than Somalians, as we will find out, I think, in a few moments. At least they had one language.

How long did the Monrovia assignment last?

LOUGHRAN: It was just short of nine months. Assistant Secretary Palmer had a vacancy in The Gambia. The job had been offered to a man in Australia. He was the only officer in a small consular post and he said: "No way am I going to a one-man embassy on the west coast of Africa." So when he turned it down, I was offered the job, and once again it was a great experience. United States policy had decided, under Assistant Secretary "Soapy" Williams, that when The Gambia gained its independence, it would be served by an ambassador in Senegal, and we would not physically open a diplomatic presence. A consul would come down twice or three times a month to issue visas, but other than that, we would carry out our relationship with The Gambians from Dakar.

As you may know, "Soapy" arrived on the scene for the ceremonies of independence, and when asked by Dawda Jawara, the prime minister, what the United States was going to do about diplomatic relations, "Soapy," whether he forget his cue cards or not, I don't know, turned to Jawara and said, "Of course, we're hoping to open an embassy." (Laughs) I was able to say to "Soapy" Williams years later: "Thank God you did that." Because it was, again, one of the most challenging four years to be the sole officer in our smallest embassy in the world. However it would have been impossible without the dedication and assistance of my wife.

You may recall, Ambassador, that we utilized the one-time cryptographic pad for classified telegrams.

HORACE G. DAWSON
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Monrovia (1967-1970)

Born in Georgia, Ambassador Horace G. Dawson, Jr. entered the foreign service in the early sixties. His assignments included Uganda, Nigeria, Liberia, and the

Philippines. Ambassador Dawson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 7, 1991.

Q: Then you went to Liberia as public affairs officer, where you served for another three years. With its American orientation, that appears to be the major problem, from what I gather, of Liberia. I mean, you had this sort of ruling class at that time, who had close ties to America, and then sort of the hinterland, which was sort of cut off. I mean, was this a problem or not?

DAWSON: Well, it is less stated. Something roughly like that is the history of Liberia.

It's one of the largest American presences abroad, where the embassy is concerned, and there was a fairly sizable USIS operation there. In addition to the operation itself, we had the Voice of America relay station out there, the largest in the world. And then we had, at the time that I went there, something called the African Press Center. Ed Murrow had thought that instead of bringing all the African... throughout the continent to the United States, to teach them broadcasting techniques and that sort of thing, it might be better and you could save funds and do more of this type of training to take them to this spot in Africa on the continent. And so this operation was established in Liberia. So we had what we called the APC there. But there were all kinds of American facilities in Liberia, and it was a very big and very interesting program.

Insofar as the Americo-Liberian problem is concerned, certainly the most educated people, the ones who were most in charge, had a background that they could trace to somebody in the United States. The history of it, as you know, is that ex-slaves from this country, or the descendants of ex-slaves, founded Liberia and modeled their government and political structure, currency and so on, on that of the United States. It's the only country in Africa where that was, and is, true.

You asked if it was a problem. I guess, in the sense that the British resistance was a problem in British Africa. In the sense that you were trying to influence opinions in the direction of some of our more desirable traits in this country. We were trying to talk about the American foreign policy in terms that were understandable and for which you could probably gain support. In that sense, Liberia was not a problem, nor were these folks that you were mentioning, because we were, in a sense, preaching to the choir.

Our big challenge there (and the US has always accepted this as a challenge) was to encourage the ruling classes of people to be more open and to spread their influence and the goods of society, if you will, more generously among people that they referred to as tribal people, so that the society could become increasingly democratic and increasingly stable.

Q: What were your main concerns while you were there in Liberia?

DAWSON: My main concern was pressing the notion of democratic institutions, a greater awareness of democratic institutions and their workings, among the ruling elements of Liberian society. As I said, we had a more pressing responsibility there than elsewhere to try to encourage what in those days we called national development in certain directions. And the direction we were concerned about in Liberia was toward a greater democratization. Liberians looked to the United States for assistance. In fact, they relied very heavily on the United States. And what we

were talking about for the most part was better use of these resources, more liberal use of these resources, and the advantage of an increasingly democratic society.

Q: *What was the climate when you were doing it? I mean, was it a problem?*

DAWSON: No, very friendly. This was one country where you didn't need to worry about anything. One could do almost anything one wanted to do in USIA. (It was USIS.) It was a center of cultural activity. I had forums there, I had symposiums, we had films. I remember we ran an election-night vigil for the Humphrey-Nixon election.

Q: *In '68.*

DAWSON: Yes, and the people crowded the streets. There were so many people there we had to call out the police department and the fire engines to get them out of the way. It was a dangerous situation.

**JOHN A. LINEHAN JR.
Senior Political Officer
Monrovia (1967-1970)**

Ambassador John A. Linehan was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts in 1924. He entered the Foreign Service in 1952. His career included positions in France, Canada, Australia, Liberia, Ghana, Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Sierra Leone. Ambassador Linehan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.

Q: *So you went to Monrovia. What were you doing there?*

LINEHAN: I was senior political officer.

Q: *What was the situation in Monrovia? We're talking about the period from 1967 to 1970. Not only Monrovia but Liberia as a whole.*

LINEHAN: The situation was "status quo ante." It had been the same for a long time. President Tubman was secure in his position, the country was peaceful, which is why now I feel so badly about Liberia. The Americo-Liberians were running the country. They were corrupt, but life was peaceful. There was plenty of food. You know, what do you want? There was plenty of room for improvement--no two ways about that. But, compared to the situation now...

Q: *We're talking about now...*

LINEHAN: Inter-tribal warfare, savagery, just a terrible situation. People starving, and so on. If I may digress; at that time the American School in Monrovia had about 26 nationalities. They also gave scholarships to some tribal boys. Not that they were against girls, but the tribal people

wouldn't let girls come down to Monrovia to go to school. They had discovered that the boys usually stayed with relatives, but they didn't have proper means of studying. They were used to the local custom of two meals a day, so at lunchtime they had nothing to do. The school asked for people in the community to look after these children. We took a young boy, Sam Fully, who was in the same class as my second son. I'd sign his report cards. He was in the house all the time and came to our children's birthday parties. My wife made his lunch every day--peanut butter and jelly, which was a little bit odd for an African boy, but he managed it. And we have stayed in touch with him over the years. He has done very well for himself in business. But, two or three years ago, after the troubles began, he and his family, his wife and his children, abandoned their suburban home and trekked through the woods to his native village to survive. They survived very poorly for the past two years. We heard nothing from him. Finally in 1992 he returned. His house was occupied by Sierra Leonean troops. There was nothing left in it, but the house itself was OK. We received a letter from him and sent him some money through the International Trust Company (Reston, VA) for which he worked. Then, in October or November of 1992 the rebels attacked Monrovia again. He had to abandon his house in the suburbs. When he went back this time, there was heavy destruction. He sent us pictures of the place. I mention this simply to illustrate what happened to a tribal boy who wasn't quite "upper class" and certainly not middle class. He was doing very well--let's put it that way. He built a very attractive house. But he's lost it all. Now he's a refugee in Monrovia itself.

There was nothing of that apparent when I was there. The [CIA] Chief of Station, a new one, came in about 1969. He kept telling me, "Well, there's got to be some opposition. We'll have to track it down and find it--the people that are opposed to the president. There's some kind of underground going on around here." But after he'd been there a year he came to me and said, "Jack, you know, I really don't think that there's any opposition here at all." I thought, "That's what I've been telling you for a long time." There was no opposition, per se, although there were a lot of people who weren't very happy with President Tubman.

Q: Then what would a political officer do there?

LINEHAN: Well, we were, at the time, much interested in youth. Do you remember that?

Q: Oh, yes. There were Youth Officers and all of that.

LINEHAN: They did have some unions. They had a labor union head. I was on good terms with him. There were lots of youth organizations and that sort of thing. I got to know some of the university professors, who were, in many cases, disgruntled but not in active opposition. That's it. It was not terribly exciting.

Q: Well, could you explain a little bit about how the Liberian power structure and society worked at that time?

LINEHAN: Yes. To go back a bit, when the slaves who returned to Africa from the U. S. were resettled in what became Liberia in the 1830's and 1840's, they introduced an element which was different from the natives, obviously. The families of these returned slaves had been in the States for quite some time, in many cases. Generally speaking, they had lighter colored skins than the

local people. It's sort of the same type of thing you found in Haiti, where the lighter skinned people dominated the very black population for years and years. So what you had was a nucleus of essentially foreigners who came and colonized this area and who were able to dominate all of the tribal people. They did, however, keep the peace amongst the tribes. They also had a curious way of spreading the "goodies," so that what they ended up doing was co-opting people into so-called Americo-Liberian society. One of my friends, whom I haven't heard from for a long time now, was, when I went there, Under Secretary of State. Ernie Eastman was his name. In fact, he was a tribal boy with another name. He came in, got himself educated, and was co-opted into Americo-Liberian society. That was a pretty tight circle, dominated by President Tubman, who also, I have to add, was called the "Father of His Country." And not without reason. There were many, many sprouts off the old tree that were produced during this period. But it was pretty much a tight knit circle which dominated not only the politics but the economy of the country. They made the arrangements with the various investors--always, I think, retaining a certain amount for themselves.

Liberia depended on rubber and iron ore. There were big rubber plantations carved out [of the jungle]. To a lesser extent the economy depended on diamonds. Now, they didn't produce many diamonds. The diamonds came filtering out of Sierra Leone and were sold through Liberia. The economy also depended on trees--lumber, another big factor. But these were all controlled directly or indirectly by the Americo-Liberians.

Q: What were American interests there?

LINEHAN: There were several American interests, aside from the economic interests, which were largely in rubber. Some of the mines had American investors, but there were also Germans. We had a USIS [Radio] Relay Station there. We had a big USIS establishment. We had a very large AID operation going. Subsequently, we had one of these very tall radio masts or antennas. It was about 1,000 feet tall. I think it had to do with naval navigation.

Q: Loran or something like that?

LINEHAN: No. Well, any way, we had our main station for area telecommunications, which basically was the telecommunications center for official U. S. communications throughout West Africa. So our interests were the USIS operation, the ATO [Area Telecommunications Office] operation, and the harbor, which we built during World War II for future reference. We put a lot of money into Liberia.

Q: Were we concerned at all about Soviet penetration or that type of thing?

LINEHAN: While we were there, the Soviets were not recognized and had no presence in Liberia. On one occasion the Soviets did send--and the president did accept--a variety show from Moscow, which included a great number called, "Hello Dolly." But there was, I think, a Russian journalist present in Liberia. The Liberians, I think, wanted to stay on the good side of Uncle Sam and didn't want a Russian presence.

Q: Was your Ambassador Samuel Z. Westerfield?

LINEHAN: Actually, it was Ambassador Ben Hill Brown for the first two years. He had been consul general in Istanbul. He was in Liberia for three years. A taciturn man, whose wife liked to travel up country, and she made school uniforms for children. She got materials from the States, from the Carolinas. Ben Hill was from South Carolina. She and the Embassy wives made uniforms for school children. It was my understanding that all of the Embassy wives hated doing this. We arrived just before she and the Ambassador went on leave. When he came back, he announced that they were being divorced. So that was the end of the school uniforms. So the rest of the time he was there without a wife, and various wives filled in. We had a DCM. Then his wife left. So my wife filled in at various times. It was OK. He was a quiet man, a taciturn person. But I have to give him credit. We had a very large Mission--about 250 Americans, and a lot of Peace Corps volunteers beyond that. He said he wanted all of his officers to be sure to go to the Marine Guards' "Happy Hour" at least once a month. He encouraged us to entertain people from the Area Telecommunications Office and to respond to any invitations we had from them. The ATO was composed of a large group of communicators who really had nothing to do with the local scene. They were just there. I thought it worked pretty well. He put himself out, in other words, to look after his people, in fact, and it was appreciated. He left in 1969 and was succeeded by Sam Westerfield. During the interval between them, I became chargé for the first time for a whole two weeks.

JON G. EDENSWORD
Consular Officer
Monrovia (1970-1972)

Jon G. Edensword was born in the state of Washington, and graduated from school in Illinois in 1956. After a five year teaching career, he entered the foreign service in 1968. Edensword has had tours in Martinique, Liberia, Haiti, Jordan, France, and Mexico. He was interviewed by Raymond Ewing on October 30, 1995.

EDENSWORD: I went to Liberia where I was a one officer consular section. I really liked that post: it was a one person section and I had a PIT (temporary) spouse who acted as secretary. It really was a lot of fun. I liked going into the interior and it was very difficult traveling in the interior, so the DCM was happy to let me go off every six months. I would disappear in the interior for three or four weeks. It was really fun going in there- -mostly Peace Corps volunteers and missionaries to stay with.

Q: *Were there some mining or rubber or other American interests there?*

EDENSWORD: Firestone was there. Uniroyal had a big plantation there. The Swedish had a big iron ore mine up near the Guinea boarder, and the Germans also had a couple of mines for iron ore. All of it was for iron ore: very rich iron ore at one time in Liberia. The Germans also had these pelletizing plants so they could ship it partially (not smelted, but) refined. It was an

interesting time to be there: I got there when Tubman was still president. He died after one year, and Tolbert took over.

Q: That was a smooth transition?

EDENSWORD: It was a smooth transition. I somewhere have a 8mm film of the festivities (I guess you could call them that) after Tubman's death. One of the sort of vignettes of that is the tomb: Tubman's party was the True Whig Party and out behind that building of the True Whig Party, they decided to bury Tubman. They buried him in this enormous cement covered mound, and then somebody decided that they would have an eternal flame. So they built an eternal flame, and I went down to see it one day. What it was a small brass kind of base, and you could see a rubber tube running off behind it to a Butane gas can behind a bush.

Q: It burned eternally or at least until the can of gas was there?

EDENSWORD: Well, a couple of weeks later they mounted a permanent guard: the Liberian military wanted a permanent guard on it. The Liberian military had been greatly humiliated by their performance in the Congo in the sixties. They had been part of that UN force. So, we had a fairly large U.S. military mission in Liberia that was trying to provide some training, and one day a big story appeared in the paper about a soldier who had desecrated the eternal flame. The chief of police was kind of a friend (that might be too strong a term), but a good contact. One day I was down there seeing him, and I asked him, "What's the story on this thing?" He looked at me and finally said, "Well, this soldier got drunk and pissed on the flame and put it out." That was the end of the flame. I think somebody relit it.

Q: You were in Monrovia for two years and things were still calm and normal when you left. Tolbert was eventually overthrown by Doe, but that was sometime later?

EDENSWORD: That was in what, the early eighties I think, wasn't it?

Q: About ten years or so later.

EDENSWORD: Liberia was a very pleasant place to live and a very safe place to live. My kids had started French schools in Martinique and there was a small French school in Monrovia run by French nuns and supported by the French Embassy. So they went to that school and liked it very much. I like Monrovia very, very much.

Q: There was an American School there, too?

EDENSWORD: A very big American School - a high school. There's an interesting vignette there, too. The guy who was the principal was the man who played Tom Sawyer in the original Hollywood version of *Tom Sawyer*.

Q: This was before he was the principal there or later?

EDENSWORD: This was when he was a kid. Tom something or other. No, that can't be right.

Q: Were you aware of the tensions between the Americo-Liberians and the tribals?

EDENSWORD: Yes, in fact the term the "Americo-Liberians" is a little bit misleading; because, in fact, a lot of the so-called "Americo-Liberians" actually came from Barbados. But there were a lot of Americo-Liberians who did come from the United States. There was apparently a fairly large exodus of former slaves from Barbados, and they were some of the big families also. Tubman had started a program that all the Americo-Liberians, particularly the people who were in leadership positions, had to go through some form of "the bush school," which was the puberty rites the children go through; girls and boys go through that. Some of them actually had the scarification. He tried to include more of the tribal element into the government; but, in fact, Liberia was run by the Americo-Liberians. The government was run by that group of people. I think there were a few exceptions: I think the number three man in the foreign ministry was guy named Ernest Eastman who I think was tribal. I last saw his name in connection with Charles Taylor, but I haven't seen anything about him lately. He was somehow advising Charles Taylor.

Q: As you say, the Americo-Liberians particularly, other than the ones whose families came from Barbados; those who came from the United States. In some cases, the entire family didn't go back to Liberia - some stayed in the United States, so there were always very strong connections, of course. Liberians have been coming to the United States for higher education for years. You issued the visas and was that ever a problem ever particularly? Was there pressure from the States to grant visas from members of congress or?

EDENSWORD: There wasn't a lot of pressure from the States, but there was a lot pressure in Liberia. It wasn't a huge number, but one of the big problems was that a lot of the people who were trying to go really had no money. When I got there, they had been using a form that was issued by the Liberian Ministry of the Treasury that indicated what income tax was paid of whoever was sponsoring the student. AID had been provided to this organization, the Liberian IRS, an American IRS official who was trying to modernize and work with them to collect taxes. I ran into him at a reception one day, and we began talking about these forms. I was telling him that, "Gee, a lot of these people come in, and they don't look like they have two dimes to rub together, but this is an official form and it looks really good and I've been down to talk to the officials and they say, 'Yes, indeed he has paid these taxes'." He said, "I'd like to see some of those." Well, I sent him some, he ran them down, and it turned out that they hadn't paid any taxes at all.

Q: Who was the ambassador at this period?

EDENSWORD: Samuel Westerfield, who died there, shortly after I left, of a heart attack.

Q: He was a career Foreign Service officer or a political appointee?

EDENSWORD: He had been at Harvard, I think, and he lateraled in or was brought in at a fairly high level, I think, by the Department some years before. Good ambassador though - he really had good access.

Q: Did you have a chance to travel elsewhere in the rest of west Africa or were you pretty much in...?

EDENSWORD: I did a little travel: I went to the Ivory Coast, I went to Lagos, I went to Ghana. That's about it.

Q: You flew or went by road?

EDENSWORD: Flew - the only road travel I did was within Liberia. That was difficult travel in those days and probably still. The road up to Tubman's farm which was about forty miles north of the capital was paved and beyond that it was red laterite. When it was raining, it was very slippery.

Q: Did you go in a Land Rover or a four-wheel drive vehicle?

EDENSWORD: They gave me an Embassy jeep, and I would usually pick up a Peace Corps volunteer who was going up country, and we would travel together. The first time I went up I took a driver, but I found that those drivers didn't drive as well as I did. So they let me drive myself. One time I was with a Peace Corps volunteer and we broke down. He was a mechanic, and I think we had an old screwdriver and a pair of pliers, and he fixed it. After that I always took a set of tools.

Q: Or else take a Peace Corps volunteer mechanic? Where did you stay - with the volunteers or the missionaries usually?

EDENSWORD: Yes. That was about the only place you could stay. You could stay with the tribal chiefs, and I tried that a couple of times. But it was very difficult because they would shut those houses up just as tight as a drum and you had two options: (I usually brought a sleeping bag along) you could cover yourself up and sweat or you could uncover and be eaten alive by the mosquitos. Those were the two options. After a couple of times of doing that, I usually stayed with the Peace Corps volunteers who had open windows with screens.

Q: The tribal chiefs would have guests houses that would not be used except when a guest would come through?

EDENSWORD: Sometimes, and one time I actually stayed in the chief's house. In fact, he is the one who later gave me (I didn't get a paramount chief's robe) a tribal chiefs robe.

Q: So, you are an honorary chief?

EDENSWORD: I am an honorary chief, I guess, but I didn't get the scarification though.

Q: Well, you were probably looked upon for other favors or assistance.

EDENSWORD: Well, I would always take a couple of cases of beer and about six or eight bottles of Johnny Walker Red. Then I would pass those out. One of the people I would see was

the governor up in those distant provinces. He had been a fairly important official until Tubman got mad at him for something and sent him off. He was just dying up there. I would always go see him and always bring a bottle of whisky and tell him what was happening in the capital, carry letters back for him, and what-have-you. When Tubman died and Tolbert took over, he made this guy the head of their immigration service, which was my key contact in Monrovia. That worked out very well: I had good access to him.

Q: I am sure that was helpful to the Embassy...and after you left, too. Were there tensions at that time with neighboring countries or did Liberia get along pretty well with its immediate neighbors?

EDENSWORD: The tensions were with Guinea. The Portuguese had that funny little invasion right after I got there. There was a vice-consul up in Guinea in Conakry who I used to talk to. Liberia always tried the peaceful route because they didn't have much of an army and they really didn't like confrontation. And so, they got along well enough, but a couple of times when I went up to the North, to the Swedish mine, which was right on the Guinea boarder (in fact, they could see very rich ore across the line and couldn't get at it.) The Guineans had a consul there in a little town just south of the mine and I actually went and called on him one time. This was in the days of Sekou Toure and he was very distant. One of the reasons I was up there was to check on the cholera problems, and I asked him about cholera in Guinea, and he told me that it was a capitalist lie. So I knew that I wasn't going to get much out of him.

Q: You kept your health?

EDENSWORD: I never got cholera, but I got a lot of other things.

Q: Did you get malaria?

EDENSWORD: No, but they treated me for malaria for awhile, thinking that was what I had, but it turned out to be something else.

Q: It's not an easy area of the world to serve in. There are a lot of very nice aspects to it (I certainly found,) and it sounds like you enjoyed your assignment there?

EDENSWORD: I liked the Liberians a lot. I don't know if they do this in Guinea, but the Liberian handshake is a very special handshake and it ends with a finger snap. When you come back to the United States after having done that for a couple of years, people wonder what you are doing to their hand because as you slide away after shaking hands, you try to grab their middle finger and people wonder what you are up to.

CHARLES E. RUSHING
Chief of the Economic/Commercial Section
Monrovia (1971-1973)

Charles E. Rushing was born in Illinois in 1929. He received his bachelor's degree from Augustana College in 1951 and his law degree from Duke University in 1954. He served in the US Army from 1954-1955. His career included positions in Italy, Eritrea, Southern Rhodesia, Congo, Laos, Liberia, Denmark, and Ireland. From 1985-1991 he served as an ambassador to the UN in Geneva. Mr. Rushing was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in July 1996.

Q: You left Laos in 1971 and went back to Africa, this time to Monrovia, where you were chief of the Economic/Commercial Section. Tell us how that assignment came about.

RUSHING: The chemistry between the ambassador and DCM and me wasn't good. I wasn't able to get the ambassador to define what he wanted the Political Section to do. I also wanted to go back to Africa. The U.S. had a large stake in Liberia, by African standards, with significant U.S. investments. So the idea to assume the head of the Economic/Commercial Section there was an appealing one.

Q: Were you there when President Tubman died?

RUSHING: We had arrived in Liberia only a short time before Tubman's death. We were on leave in the Canaries when I got a call from the ambassador saying, "Come back at once." So, we went back, but it turned out that there was little to do in relation to Tubman's funeral.

Q: Of course, this was the end of a whole era in Liberia.

RUSHING: The end of a whole era. When we left Laos on a direct transfer to Liberia, Mary and the kids went to Italy to see her parents, and I went the other way to Hong Kong to have morning clothes and tails made. Liberia was famous for this kind of formality. Then, after Tubman died and was succeeded by Tolbert, everything was more informal. I think I wore the striped pants once and maybe the tails twice. Now, I don't know where they are or even if I still have them. That represented a considerable investment that proved unnecessary, although I think I wore the morning clothes once later in Dublin.

Q: I hope you had some good meals in Hong Kong while you were there. How large was your Economic Section in Monrovia?

RUSHING: Two officers, an American secretary, and two national employees.

Q: Was there an AID mission?

RUSHING: Yes, a large one.

Q: Presumably, you were in touch with them on many occasions?

RUSHING: Indeed.

Q: What were the problems that you had to focus on?

RUSHING: One of the problems was that the considerable American aid was of limited effectiveness. For example, we had paid the Taiwanese to send a team of rice growers to teach the Liberians how to grow rice. That was kind of funny because rice was the Liberians' staple diet, and they'd been growing rice for years. But the yields did not provide enough for self-sufficiency. As long as the Taiwanese were there, the project went along just fine. But when the Taiwanese pulled out, the Liberians were back doing the "wrong" things again. Another example: you'd see AID-financed schools in the countryside that had been abandoned because there wasn't money in the education budget to maintain them.

Q: Certainly, this must have been known to the AID people, too?

RUSHING: The AID personnel there included some very talented people, but the unspoken emphasis seemed to be on an [inaudible] program. In addition to the USAID people, there were representatives from the IBRD, IMF, the UN aid organization. There were substantial numbers of U.S. businessmen and, of course, Liberian businessmen and civil servants. There was a lot to do. I spent a good deal of time with the Liberian Ministry of Finance and with the American businesses that were there. There were a lot of them.

Q: Was there a Peace Corps presence there?

RUSHING: Yes, a large Peace Corps presence.

Q: I gather there was a heavy American overhang in Liberia.

RUSHING: Very heavy. I think the Peace Corps probably did a pretty good job. But, again, I don't know how much was transferable, or what was transferred. By the way, a successful novel, The Zin Zin Road, was based on Peace Corps activities in Liberia.

Q: Did you have a Commercial Attaché or did you do that work yourself?

RUSHING: The number two officer was the Commercial Attaché but both of us were involved in commercial activities.

Q: Talk a little bit about the transition period from Tubman to Tolbert, whether it meant anything to the people, whether it was a revolutionary change, or whether things just went on as they had.

RUSHING: Tubman, of course, was a very popular, charismatic, almost mythical figure and had been President practically since God created the Earth. Tolbert did not have the charisma that Tubman had. But, he probably was more substantively effective. Tubman had built this huge presidential palace for himself, a \$15 million palace on the water which Tolbert then occupied. The Tubmans of this world and the Americo-Liberians, of whom Tolbert was one, pretty much had things in their pocket. The Americo-Liberians, as opposed to the tribals, profited from almost all economic-commercial activity in the country. During my time there, there were signs of the beginnings of serious clashes between the Americo-Liberians and tribal leaders.

Q: *Which today have overwhelmed the country.*

RUSHING: Yes. Tolbert was overthrown by an Army sergeant and the former's coterie, government and private, were killed, as was [Sergeant] Doe some years later and Liberia descended into anarchy and years of civil warfare.

Q: *Do you think our embassy had contact with these emerging tribal elements or not?*

RUSHING: We did with some of them. One was a professor of economics at the University of Liberia whom I knew quite well. He was a "radical" and would wear tribal dress, which was frowned on by the elite. But I would say that the embassy's contacts were, by and large, limited to the Americo-Liberians.

Q: *Mrs. Nixon came out, I believe, for Tolbert's inauguration. Can you tell us a little bit about that? Did it go well?*

RUSHING: It went well, yes. I was one of the people who took her around. She was gracious and her visit went off without any problems. Tolbert was delighted that she was able to come.

Q: *When you left Liberia, did you leave with a feeling that the country was going to come into some of the terrible things that have happened since or did you consider it to be on a fairly even keel?*

RUSHING: I thought it would carry on much as before, with the caveat that something had to be done to accommodate the tribes and reduce corruption. The names of the tribes were generally not commonly referred to in Monrovia during my time. Certainly, we didn't expect the viciousness and duration of what happened.

BEAUVEAU B. NALLE
Chief of the Political Section
Monrovia (1972-1974)

Beauveau B. Nalle was born in Pennsylvania in 1927. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956, serving in Washington, DC, Turkey, Uganda, Liberia, and Belize. Mr. Nalle was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan on April 19, 1994.

NALLE: Anyway, it was a good year. And from there I went to Liberia, which was a horse of a different color.

Q: *Another part of Africa?*

NALLE: West Africa. Uganda, among other things being 4,000 feet high had a very pleasant climate. Liberia being about 3 feet high, had a just vile climate--hot hot hot humid humid humid.

The Liberians, I am sorry to say, are just not very nice people. The so called America-Liberian class I found extraordinarily difficult to get along with. I found the corruption, the mental and the moral, as well as the fiduciary corruption, to be overwhelming.

The bitterness that exists between the city of Monrovia and the rest of the country is very unpleasant. I think Liberia is probably the only, or was the only country in the world, where the legislature still passed laws which were applicable only to, and I quote "the tribal elements that remain within the country" unquote. Doing political work was extremely difficult.

Q: Excuse me, what was your position there?

NALLE: I was head of the Political Section. I was very carefully told that I was not to call myself Political Counselor. But I was Chief of the Political Section.

Sam Westerfield was the Ambassador, he died 2 days after I arrived of a heart attack. His place was eventually taken by Ambassador Mel Manfull. He was Chief of Mission the whole 2 years I was there.

Housing in the Mission and the Embassy in Monrovia was not good. Monrovia was the only place I ever lived on an Embassy compound. Whatever the advantages might have been, and I never perceived them, they were totally outweighed by the disadvantages. The thought that anybody might pop in for a plate of tea or a sip of whisky was ridiculous. When you had to get through Marine guards, when you had to wander around through the compound with only Americans there, children and one thing or another. It simply cut you off from any reasonable contact. There was no reason for it. FBO if they wanted to, could have found some houses. I don't see much that justifies compound living anywhere in the world. Why we have it in the developed world, in Western Europe, I can't for the life of me understand.

Q: But certainly wouldn't it have been useful later when Sergeant Doe took over and they had great unrest in Liberia?

NALLE: Yeah they didn't come on board the compound, that's true enough. But if you're going to sit around building up walls against somebody who may or may not takeover, you're not doing your job, I don't think.

Q: That's a good answer.

NALLE: Sergeant Doe, was a pretty nasty piece of work.

Q: What was our principal interest in Liberia during the years you were there.

NALLE: There was what the Liberians called "A Special Relationship." The Liberians being of course the descendants of the returned slaves. They called it a special relationship, we tried to call it an Historical Relationship, but we never got very far with it.

We had some fairly substantial economic investments--Sun Oil was there with a refinery; United States Steel was there with an iron mine.

Q: *Firestone was there.*

NALLE: Firestone was there, it had an enormous operation. I mean the General Manager of Firestone back in the 20s or the 30s was probably more important than the American ambassador.

So there was the commercial and economic interest, American banks. The dollar was the official currency in Liberia. There was this sociological, historical relationship that existed. A massive American citizen population.

And the idea that Liberia, along with Ethiopia and of course the Republic down south, were the only countries in Africa that had not been ruled by some sort of colonial master--the French, the British, the Belgians or the Portuguese.

So for all these reasons. We also had a little military mission, we had a big embassy there. I forget how many people, all told, we had on the embassy staff. But it was big. We had the compound, we had the old building with the generators. We had the famous employee whose name was "Saturday." That was his only name, just Saturday. And Saturday used to wander around the grounds emptying Butt cans, and for this he got paid, I guess about 200 a year U.S., I don't know. But he was the Butt can man.

I don't think I can honestly say that I predicted Sergeant Doe. I doubt that my successor did. And I'm very certain that my predecessor didn't. I think all of us, all the political officers and all the ambassadors and everyone else, felt that major change was overdue in the country but we did not foresee this outcome.

We all felt that Tolbert, who had taken over of course after Tubman died, was on the right track. But with his campaign of, what was it "Beds to Breakfast" I don't know, he had all kinds of campaigns to exhort people to rise to higher heights. That's another one of his mottos, "Higher Heights." We all felt that he was trying his damndest to whip the system. But from what I understand, subsequent to our times there, the system whipped him. He operated I guess on the theory that: If you can't beat them, join them. Little whispers of corruption that we began to get in my day grew into a shouted chorus of corruption in the years following. And eventually led to his overthrow and brutal and tragic death. He was a nice little guy.

As far as the family was concerned, Liberia was characterized essentially by dullness. We had a pretty good American community school there, both girls were there. They enjoyed it. Sheila had fun because she, both in Uganda and in Liberia, was very active on the school board. I think Sheila enjoyed our years in Africa. There were things for her to do, school board work, she had done a lot of garden work around the houses we had, particularly in Kampala. I think she was fairly happy, the social burden was heavy. We had staff, in most cases incompetent and dishonest, but they were there anyway to rearrange the dirt.

So Liberia was not for me a particularly happy place. I found the work stifling. We had some good people there. David Gamon was DCM. I just saw in the newspaper that he died. Kind of a dry stick but a warm person, in spite of it all.

HOWELL S. TEEPLE
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Monrovia (1972-1975)

Howell S. Teeple was born in Texas in 1921. He received his BA from Louisiana State University in 1943 and served in the US Army from 1943 to 1945 overseas. His assignments abroad include Seoul, Manila, New York, New Delhi, Adana, Tripoli, Monrovia and Cebu. Mr. Teeple was interviewed by Earl W. Sherman in 1999.

TEEPLE: It was in September, 1969, to '72, and I worked as desk officer, traveled to all the posts every year. It was a very interesting job and I enjoyed it very much. In '72, I was ready to go overseas again, and I was sent to Monrovia, Liberia, as the public affairs officer for the embassy and director of USIS/Liberia.

Liberia had this unique American connection, so to speak. We'd sent back the first American slaves to Liberia during President Monroe's time, and Monrovia is named after him. The U.S. had an intimate connection with Liberia up until the recent difficulties, which I missed, thank goodness. I was in Liberia from 1972 to '76 as the public affairs officer. Again, we had a very large American presence there because of Liberia's unique position with our country. It was a regional embassy post. We had the regional doctor there. We had a big AID [Agency for International Development] mission. We had a large Voice of America transmitter site there. VOA had built 12 100,000 watt transmitters outside of Monrovia. There was a staff of engineers and technicians with families living in their compound.

Q: *What has happened to those now?*

TEEPLE: They've all been destroyed, I understand, during the terrible conflict there.

Also, we had a big communications installation in Monrovia that electronically connected with posts around the world. It was run by another agency. So we had a large American community in Monrovia.

Q: *What would you estimate by size?*

TEEPLE: Oh, by size... There was a good-sized American business community there, too, working in banks, insurance companies, etc. Many major American companies had branches in Liberia, including Citibank and Chase Bank. There was also a Firestone rubber plantation 30 miles outside of Monrovia, which was the largest rubber plantation in the world - a huge place - I

think half the size of the State of Rhode Island. Firestone had its own American community running the plantation.

Q: By numbers?

TEEPLE: By numbers, I think there were estimated to be 5,000 or 6,000 Americans in the country. We had many American missionaries there also. There was a large American missionary broadcasting facility called ELWA there. And then Liberia had a lot of iron ore, which was being mined by American, Swedish, and British companies. One large American-Swedish company called LAMCO was way up-country. It wasn't near Monrovia, but they had quite a few Americans there. In my last two posts, Libya and Liberia, we had too many Americans for the size of the local population. I was fortunate to leave Libya before Qadhafi, and I left Liberia before the terrible civil war broke out in 1980.

But I enjoyed Liberia. It was there I had the highest ranking I achieved in the Foreign Service. I was counselor of embassy and had a three-American-man USIS post, with about 35 national employees. I got to know West Africa and traveled to the neighboring posts, Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and went on leave to South Africa and to Tanzania and Kenya.

THOMAS F. JOHNSON
Assistant Public Affairs/Information Officer
Monrovia (1975-1977)

Thomas F. Johnson was born in Illinois and was educated at Union College and the Free University of Berlin. He entered the Foreign Service in 1967 and has served in various posts in Paraguay, Germany, Liberia, Mexico and Singapore. In Washington, DC, Johnson served in the USIA as Inspector, Deputy Director of Acquisitions and Area Personnel Officer for Europe. Mr. Johnson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2003.

Q: How did you like Monrovia?

JOHNSON: Liberia was not a happy assignment for me. The embassy, including USIA, was over-staffed. By the time I got to Liberia my position had been changed from Cultural Affairs Officer to Assistant Public Affairs Officer/Information Officer. I knew Lynne Martin, the USIA Junior Officer Trainee, from graduate school in Berlin. She was as restless as she was able. Soon a fourth officer arrived to be Cultural Affairs Officer, an affable woman intent upon finishing her career as soon and as comfortably as possible. Supporting us three officers was an American secretary who specialized in office intrigue. There was only enough work for one officer. There was also a lot of tension between me and both Public Affairs Officers Howell Teeple and Charlie McGee, particularly Charlie McGee, who was an alcoholic and smoked six packs of unfiltered cigarettes a day. He died of cancer in 1980.

Howell Teeple told me that my first order of business was to do whatever necessary to unburden USIA from the largest Fulbright Program in Africa. The director of the program, an American, departed for the United States soon after I arrived in country. During World War II the US had loaned Liberia \$19 million to build a port in Monrovia. By the early 60s the Liberians were hopelessly late in their repayments. Then Assistant Secretary for Africa under JFK, Soapy Williams, got the Liberian government to agree to repay the loan into a fund which would then be used to pay for a generous Fulbright program. However with increasingly leaner budgets in Washington the Liberian payments were far exceeding what USIA could afford to spend on the Fulbright program in Liberia.

Since the US Government could not renege on its agreement with the Government of Liberia, I advocated forgiving the loan as the only honorable solution. I did the necessary research and drafted an agreement, which after many edits in the embassy and in USIA Washington, was sent to Capitol Hill, where for reasons I never understood, my illustrious proposal was quashed. A few years later the outbreak of civil war in Liberia wiped out the Fulbright program and virtually everything else of educational value in the war torn country.

After a few weeks at post I committed an unforgivable breach of etiquette. I wrote a candid cable regarding the post programming. My boss accused me of trying to give the post a bad name. I suggested that in the future he do the reporting.

Soon after I arrived in Monrovia, Beverly Carter was assigned as ambassador. Carter, a former USIA officer, has plenty of previous service in Africa. He was an outstanding chief of mission. He had been ambassador to Dar es-Salaam when several Americans were taken hostage by guerrillas. Carter was ordered by the State Department to negotiate their release. However the media got wind of the negotiations and Kissinger, then Secretary of State, evidently stated that the talks to free our countrymen had taken place contrary to State Department policy and Carter was recalled. I don't know what happened to the hostages. Carter, in any case, was on the shelf for several years until he was named as ambassador to Monrovia. At his swearing in ceremony Carter turned to Kissinger and quipped, "Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for coming to my swearing in. You were certainly present for my swearing out."

Although the embassy was overstaffed with officers, it was short on wives. I think only three of us in the mission had non-working wives. Carter's wife was a high level official in the Government of the District of Columbia. As a result there were no sit down dinners at the residence. Carolyn and I and the economic officer Jim Ashida and his wife entertained regularly, but we were the exception.

In all fairness, some of my colleagues in the embassy enjoyed their tours of duty. However the more you worked with the government the more discouraging it was. We had an acronym WAWA: West Africa Wins Again, which we often used when we were frustrated and that was often.

Q: How race conscious were the Liberians?

JOHNSON: As I recall, according to the constitution, only blacks could be citizens. One day I was walking past a small group of Liberians standing in front of our embassy when one thrust an infant which was clearly of mixed race at me and said, "Take it." I thought for a second the hurried into the compound. I immediately realized that if an American diplomat had accepted a child, more Liberians would try to unburden themselves of offspring at our embassy the next day. Moreover, had I accepted the child, I am sure the group in front of the embassy would have promptly disappeared and I would have had no way to establish the parentage of the youngster and without the legal consent of the parents, I would have had a great deal of difficulty adopting and getting a visa for it. I have often wondered what happened to the baby.

Q: Were Liberians hostile to foreigners?

JOHNSON: No. They were very hospital to visitors from abroad. My two years in Monrovia coincided with the civil war in Lebanon. One night a plane load of Lebanese children arrived at the airport. Their escorts asked for asylum for themselves and the youngsters. After much "palaver" at the airport, President Tolbert was awakened. He ordered that everyone be admitted and went back to sleep. Tolbert was a very kind man. As was William Tubman, his predecessor, who was once the target of an assassination attempt. The would-be assassin emptied his gun at Tubman and missed all six shots. Tubman ordered that the man be brought before him and denounced the fellow for his poor marksmanship. The story goes that Tubman ordered him released with ten dollars to buy ammunition to practice. Another version of the story states that following their confrontation, the attacker was taken out and shot.

Q: Did Liberians treat black Americans differently than white Americans?

JOHNSON: For the average Liberian, all foreigners were "Kwis", gringos. Maury Bean, our DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) told me that Cecil Dennis, the Foreign Minister, had once addressed him as his "soul brother" and announced that therefore they needed to get along particularly well. Maury said that he responded by informing the Foreign Minister that he was first an American, second a Foreign Service Officer and third a black man. He said Dennis never raised the issue of race again. By the way following the coup in 1980 Dennis sought refuge in the home of our DCM and only left with assurances by Doe that he would not be persecuted. A few weeks later Dennis and eleven other high ranking officials of the Tolbert regime were butchered by an inept firing squad on the beach behind the executive mansion. "Life" magazine carried a photo essay on the massacre. The whole thing was a travesty of justice. The principle transgression of the condemned men was that they were sophisticated Americo-Liberians and Doe was rural tribal full of envy.

During my tenure in Liberia Alex Haley published his best seller "Roots" about the African man who was enslaved and ended up on a plantation in US. A number of affluent black Americans traveled to West Africa to look for their roots. The Liberians treated them with utmost courtesy. Ambassador Carter hosted a reception for a group of the pilgrims that had been to Nigeria where they complained of the most callous treatment. One gentleman told me that he had innocently called a Nigerian his "soul brother". The Nigerian allegedly replied, "You are not my soul brother, or any kind of brother. Your ancestors came from weakest of the tribes, otherwise they would not have allowed themselves to be captured. My ancestors helped enslave your ancestors

and sold them to the dealers on the coast. It was a very good business.” The naïve American was crushed by the man’s cruel remarks.

Q: Was Monrovia a hardship post?

JOHNSON: I received 20% hardship allowance, which provided the down payment on our house in Virginia.

Q: What is the climate like?

JOHNSON: Monrovia is six degrees above the equator so it is hot and humid. On the other hand, we often got a nice breeze off the ocean.

Q: How widely was English spoken in Liberia?

JOHNSON: The educated elite- perhaps 2% of the society- spoke American English perfectly. Back in the bush, far from the few paved roads, only the tribal languages were used. In Monrovia and in the towns the natives used a “patois” which included tribal words and was heavily accented. Particularly at first, I had a very hard time understanding. For example the word for detergent was “tieso” (Tide soap), completely logical once you figured it out. Our son Patrick, who was four, quickly picked up Liberian English from our servant Annie. He became my interpreter. Thus during a dinner party, I would ask Patrick to please tell Annie to bring more rice and he would scamper into the kitchen and rattle off something I did not understand. A few moments later a bowl of steaming rice would appear on the table. More than 30 years later Carolyn and I can sometimes still detect a faint Liberian tonality in his speech.

Q: How was the food?

JOHNSON: Great sea food. Lobster tails cost two dollars each. Lots of fish dishes. Rice is the staple. Liberians make terrific stews. It is best not to ask what the meat is. Cane rat, goat, monkey, snake all cook up just fine. Liberians love peppers-- hot peppers. In fact, Liberia used to be called the Pepper Coast.

Allow me a pepper story. Shortly before Christmas 1973 Mal Whitfield, the sports advisor for USIA, and Roberta Jones, the Liberia USIA desk officer, visited the post. I took them to Roslyn’s, my favorite Liberian restaurant, before they headed to the airport to catch a flight back to the US. Roslyn waited on us personally and give Mal and Roberta each a jar of her house peppers with a warning that they were hot. I remember clearly that muscular Mal tightened the top to his jar. Roberta apparently did not. Evidently Roberta’s jar tipped over on the way to the airport and some of the juices seeped out into the carpet of the USIA sedan. After dropping them at the airport, the driver left in the sedan in the front yard of the Howell Teeple’s house where it sat in the tropical sun for a three day weekend. The following Monday morning he jumped in the car to drive it to the office. After a few seconds the Howell stumbled out of the car howling. The juice of the peppers had eaten away part of the carpet and the fumes had etched the poor man’s eye balls. His wife Jane charged out of their house thinking Howell had been bitten by a snake. A prompt spray of cool water from the garden hose alleviated most the poor man’s suffering.

Q: Did you get sick in Liberia?

JOHNSON: I developed a small ulcer but that was from tension between me and the two men I worked for. I picked up dysentery while on a trip to Sierra Leone, which was very painful. While we were up country one weekend our older son Patrick came down with a high fever. We took him to a rural clinic. The doctor had no drugs so he put the four year-old in a tub of very cool water. Patrick protested vigorously but his temperature dropped quickly.

We were required by the embassy to take a malaria suppressant. Our sons would gross us out by chewing the bitter tablets.

Our younger son Erik was medically evacuated to the US because the State Department physician was concerned that given the large size of his head, he might have hydrocephalus. After thousands of dollars in tests, it was determined he had a big head. Some years later when he was in the Marine Corps he probably had the largest helmet on Parris Island.

Q: What did you hear about native medicine?

JOHNSON: The John F. Kennedy Hospital in Monrovia employed at least one “bone man”, native medicine men who were trained in their villages to expertly set broken bones by manipulating the fractures with their hands. These “bone men” were highly regarded in Liberian society. We were warned against using native medicine, however the herb doctors who specialized in treating snake bites were highly regarded, particularly since the alternative was often death.

I once invited an American who was married to a Liberian to dinner. He did not show up. I saw him in the port a few days later and he apologized. It seems that one of his brother-in-law had died after being treated for an illness by a juju doctor and the family had met as to what to do about the malpractice case. I didn’t ask. I didn’t want to know.

Incidentally, one of my employees asked me if the embassy’s health insurance plan covered tribal medicine men. I called the personnel officer and learned that employees were free to go wherever they pleased for medical care. Liberia was a very tribal society and in many ways very secretive. In the oral tradition of Africa learning was passed down from one generation to another by the tribal elders, including the medicine men.

Q: What was America’s interest in Liberia?

JOHNSON: Liberia never colonized. However following the end of the US Civil War, there was a half-hearted effort to return the former slaves to Africa and hundreds were voluntarily “repatriated” to Liberia, although God knows where their ancestors came from. The name of the country is obviously derived from the word “liberty”. Over the decades the United States poured many millions of dollars of economic assistance into Liberia. At one time Liberia had received more aid per capita than any country in the world.

During World War II US Army engineers built two air fields in Liberia for the US Army Air Force to ferry aircraft to Europe via Brazil. Uncle Sam also built a modern port which could have been used by our Navy, for example for anti-submarine patrols, had the need arisen. Firestone and B.F. Goodrich had major rubber plantations in Liberia, which provided an alternate source of the material. There were close cultural ties between African Americans and Liberians. We had major VOA relay facilities outside of Monrovia as well as an important diplomatic communications center. The US Coast Guard operated an Omega station outside of Monrovia. The Omega network provided an important navigational aide to ships and even trucks. The VOA receiver-transmitters, diplomatic communication facilities and the Omega station no longer exist, victims of the civil war and improved technology.

Incidentally the village at the edge of Roberts Field, Monrovia's international airport, is called Smell-No-Taste because it had been the bivouac for the black engineer battalion that built the airfield. The Liberians were intrigued by the aromas coming from the mess hall and since it was not possible for the soldiers to invite them to dine they could only smell the delicious food and thus the name of the village.

Our overall goal in Liberia during the cold war was to keep it in our camp. It was a useful ally in Africa. In retrospect when I think of the billions of dollars that were spent in Africa countering the Soviets, I wish we had retreated from much of Africa and let Moscow get more and more deeply involved in the continent. They would have wasted billions in hard currency which might well have hastened their downfall.

Q: The advantage of hindsight, but an interesting thought. Was there major investment in Liberia by other countries?

JOHNSON: I believe the Germans had a major interest in the Bong iron ore mine which produced very high grade ore. There were a number of non-US banks in Monrovia. The Canadians had a dynamite factory near the airport. The explosives were sold almost exclusively to the mines. However some Liberian fishermen fished with dynamite, which was not only environmentally damaging, but also dangerous. One fisherman was seen blowing on the fuse to a stick of dynamite. The fuse then burned faster than he expected-- one less fisherman.

Q: Were the Liberians proud of their history and culture?

JOHNSON: The Americo-Liberians considered their US ancestors "pilgrims." There was a small museum on the island in a river in Monrovia devoted to the settlers. On the wall was a framed copy of a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. The draft was in pencil and signed A. Lincoln. Later the museum was demolished to make way for a new bridge. I have often wondered what became of that document.

As for culture, the Liberians were master wood carvers. I once asked the Deputy Minister of Culture Bai T. Moore if he regretted that many of the best masks were being taken out of the country by foreign collectors. He replied, "Not at all. If the masks are in Europe or the US, I know they will be well cared for. If they stay here, the bug-a-bugs (termites) will destroy them."

Q: What did you think of the Liberian Government?

JOHNSON: President William Tolbert stuck me as decent man. He was not, as far as I know, personally corrupt. He fathered a lot of illegitimate children but that was a perk of many affluent Africans. Tolbert tolerated corruption among some of the top officials in the government. Tolbert's son, AB Tolbert, was mentally unbalanced. He once gave a speech in the Liberian Senate that was so bizarre, the daddy had all copies withdrawn. For some reason the Soviets thought the speech was important and had the TASS correspondent arrange to get a copy from a contact in the Information Ministry. The authorities were alerted and the reporter was kicked out of the country.

But in reference to the government, I dealt with senior officials who were well educated and competent. The problem was that they lacked able assistants to carry out their plans. The level of talent in the government was very thin. For example one day I was talking with the Deputy Minister of Agriculture in his office when the phone rang. The Deputy Minister spent the next ten minutes handling a minor issue which clearly should have been taken care of by a competent aide. When he hung up the receiver, he turned to me sadly and said, "I have to do everything myself."

I should also mention that the large majority of Liberians had little contact with the national government. In the bush the villages were pretty much autonomous and rather democratic. In the center of every village was an open sided thatched "palava (talking) hut". The tribal elder ran the village and served as a grass roots judiciary in daily meetings which were open to all. For example, if a man were caught having sex with a neighbor's wife, the parties would be brought before the elders, who after hearing both sides of the case, would probably impose a fine, i.e. the cheated husband was compensated with a goat. Serious crimes, such as murder, were supposedly referred to the government in Monrovia, but I gather that few crimes committed "off the paved roads" made it the capital. Villagers had their own swift penal system and it wasn't subject to a long series of appeals

Q: Didn't President Tolbert once address a joint session of the US Congress?

JOHNSON: He did. Perhaps Tolbert's greatest failing was his ego. He reportedly paid an American PR firm a hundreds of thousands of dollars to facilitate his being awarded a humanitarian prize in the US. As a part of his trip to Washington he spoke before both houses of congress. His speech was well received. Unfortunately while congress was waiting for Tolbert to make his grand entrance, Vice President Rockefeller and House Speaker Carl Albert discussed Liberia and an open mike picked up their conversation.

I don't recall exactly what was said but the gist was that Rockefeller told Albert that the Americo-Liberian still practiced some customs that were American anti-bellum. The exchange lasted just a couple of minutes but was broadcast by VOA to Africa. Sitting in my office I listened to their dialogue and of course there was nothing I could do. The Vice President's and Speaker's remarks made more news than Tolbert's speech. Albert issued an apology. As far as I know, Rockefeller did not.

Q: Were there any significant political events in Liberia while you were there?

JOHNSON: Tolbert was inaugurated for a second term during my tenure in Monrovia. Some street urchins crashed the party and tackled a waiter carrying a large platter of hors d'oeuvres at a dignified reception on the lawn of the executive mansion. The next waiter was escorted by soldiers with fixed bayonets and the kids removed from the grounds. Most of the foreign guests thought the whole scene was hilarious. President Tolbert and his countrymen were not amused.

The inauguration ceremony was simple and dignified, except for one glitch. President Tolbert was upstaged by the guest of honor, the Chairman of the Organization of African Unity – His Excellency Idi Amin. Amin arrived 20 minutes late, which of course delayed the ceremony. Half way through the program he whispered something to Tolbert who looked back at Amin with total consternation. Tolbert then announced, “The Chairman of the Organization of African Unity Idi Amin would like to say a address the audience.” Amin was not on the program. With enough medals on his chest to put Patton, Goering and Zhukov to shame, Amin heaved his bulk out of his chair and strode to the lectern. Looking out at us foreigners, he announced with a big smile, “It is not true that I am against whites.” There was a moment of silence, then everyone, including Amin, laughed heartily. Amin then went on to give his stump speech. Afterwards he basked in the adulation of the kids and young men who ran excitedly after his limo.

Tolbert liked his perks, including a motorcade that was nothing short of imperial. When the lead car appeared, clearly marked PILOT, we lesser mortals had to pull off the road and wait until the president and his entourage of hanger-ons and security passed. Sometimes the PILOT would get miles ahead of the other vehicles, leading one to wonder if the Tolbert would ever appear. One of our embassy communicators tired of this game and pulled back on the road only to be confronted by a truck full of angry soldiers, who were part of the chief executive's security detachment. The American made it to the German Embassy where he thought he would be safe. The Liberians followed him on the chancellery grounds and were about to arrest the poor fellow when indignant Germans officials intervened. The soldiers retreated and after the motorcade passed, the communicator made his escape. The following day the Germans lodged a formal protest with the foreign ministry and the communicator got chewed out by our Deputy Chief of Mission.

Q: Wasn't Tolbert Chairman of the Organization of African Unity at some time?

JOHNSON: He was indeed. To host the conference(s) he built an elaborate complex, complete with guest houses outside of Monrovia. It was an extravagance that the country could not afford and may have hastened his downfall.

Q: Was there a large USAID and Peace Corps presence in Liberia?

JOHNSON: The USAID mission had perhaps a dozen officers. Except for the John F. Kennedy Hospital, which USAID built and continued to support, I don't remember what that agency was doing to provide assistance. However, in part because Carolyn had been a volunteer in Ghana, we made friends with many Peace Corps volunteers and visited as many as we could up country. There were over 100 volunteers in country. It was one of the biggest programs in Africa.

Shortly after I arrived in country I wrote an overview of American assistance to Liberia, which included USAID and Peace Corps programs. USIA planned to publish my report. The DCM decided to clear the overview with the Foreign Ministry which vetoed its distribution. I regret the embassy accepted the ministry's edict.

Incidentally the Peace Corps helped democratize Liberian society. Apparently before the volunteers arrived young Americo-Liberians dressed more formally than the tribals in their age group. The Americans wore jeans and T-shirts, which made casual attire socially acceptable even for the elite.

While we are on the subject of Peace Corps, while I was a student in Berlin a college classmate visited me on his way home after two years as a PCV in Ethiopia. I asked what he thought he might have accomplished during his assignment to a high school. He blinked and responded, "I helped speed the revolution."

I looked my friend in consternation and replied, "I thought you were in the Peace Corps." "I was," he responded, "but in a sea of ignorance education will inevitably undermine the government of Haile Selassie"

Q: What was the dress code in the embassy?

JOHNSON: Tolbert- thank God- set an example for everyone. Most Americans would call the attire a safari suit. In Liberia the comfortable matching pants and short sleeve jacket was known as the "swear suit." Tolbert's predecessor was William Tubman, who was very old fashioned and wore formal dress at every possible occasion. However when Tubman died suddenly and Tolbert allegedly did not have time to go to don his swallow tails and high silk hat before being sworn in. Instead he was sworn in wearing a safari suit. Thereafter in Liberia safari suits were known as swear suits. I still wear several I had made in Monrovia. I understand the Taylor regime reverted to coat and ties in the late 1980s. I don't know what the current regime requires.

Women wore loose fitting dresses which were both comfortable and attractive. Liberians are masters in the art of tie dying. Both men's and women's clothing also incorporate elaborate stitching patterns. There were lots of excellent tailors all over the country. Pictures of the president and vice president were printed on cloth which Liberian women had made into dresses. It seems more often than not the faces of the politicians were on the lower back part of the dresses so when the matrons sat down, they rested their ample posteriors on the likeness of their national leader.

One story about former president Tubman and his fondness for formality: every embassy had its legends and in Monrovia one of the standard sagas concerned Richard Nixon, who visited Liberia while he was Vice President. Apparently Nixon was on a tight schedule thus he arrived on Air Force Two wearing a morning coat and high silk hat. He was whisked into the city, a journey of more than 30 miles, in Tubman's limo. The air conditioning in the big sedan apparently gave up the ghost shortly after the vehicle departed the airport. It was a typical day in the 90s with 100 % humidity. Perhaps to impress the Vice President, Tubman, who was fond of

air conditioning, had the room temperature lowered to near arctic conditions. Enter a heavily perspiring Nixon and well, the Liberian president almost spared us Watergate.

Q: So could you tell a person's status by his/her attire.

JOHNSON: Not necessarily as I once learned. Shortly after arriving in country I set off to the Ministry of Information and Culture to offer Johnny McClain, the Assistant Minister, a 30 day VIP trip to the US. His secretary pointed to the door to his office. I had never met McClain. Upon entering the office I found two men having a conversation. After standing there awkwardly for a few minutes, I nodded politely to the man wearing a sweat shirt and jeans and addressed myself to the nattily dressed gentleman. I don't why I was in a hurry but without further formalities I invited him to the US as a guest of USIA. Both men looked at me coldly. Then the man in the sweat shirt said quietly, "I am the Assistant Minister." I apologized, redirected my invitation and beat a hasty retreat.

Johnny McClain later graciously responded that he would be honored to travel to the US guest of USIA. We later worked together closely. Today (2006) he is Minister of Information and Culture.

Q: Was membership in a civic organization a source of status?

JOHNSON: The elite belonged to Masons and its women's auxiliary the Eastern Star. The Masons had a huge marble temple on Mamba Point near our embassy. I assume that Rotary was also present, but it did not have a high profile. A white American organizer for Kiwanis started a chapter in Monrovia. I was asked to join as founding member. I consented. I was the only non-Liberian member. We held our first meetings in the USIA conference room. As I recall, there were about a dozen members in all. Unfortunately Liberians did not understand what volunteerism was and thus the club did little other than hold meetings. I suspect most Liberians joined Kiwanis because they could not get into Masons. They probably also hoped that the organization would provide them with business contacts.

Q: What was the best book you read about Liberia?

JOHNSON: John Gay's Red Dust on Green Leaves. InterCulture Associates is the publisher. The little tome tells the story of twin brothers. One brother leaves the village and adopts the ways of the city dweller while his brother remains in village opting for a traditional life as a subsistence farmer. The book is full of insights about Liberia, although the civil war has changed the country. The tribal girl who assisted Gay in his research reportedly died mysteriously. I was told she was murdered by members of her tribe for revealing cultural secrets. The tribes and clans guarded their secrets zealously. I don't remember the circumstances, but USIA sponsored an exhibit of Liberian tribal art. One of my employees took me aside and told me calmly but forcefully that if one of the artifacts were displayed, his tribe would be severely offended. Apparently the object was regarded as both sacred and secret. He demanded that I remove it from the exhibit. Not knowing the consequences of offending the employee or his tribe, I complied. I knew that normally placid Liberians could turn violent if offended.

Q: You were Information Officer. What was the media like?

JOHNSON: The dailies were pathetically primitive both technically and in content. I remember two “newspapers,” and both used lead type set by hand. The printing presses were literally museum pieces. Sometimes the headlines were unintentionally humorous. For example when the bumbling president of the National University was forced to resign, the headline ran “I HAVE NO REGRETS,” HE LAMENTS.

There was one television station but its signal was pretty much limited to Monrovia. Programming consisted of canned American and British comedy and adventure programs. Our first evening in country we watched a Jack Benny Show. The studios were hopelessly antiquated. During the live broadcast of an interview with an American visitor, a camera fell over breaking off the lens. A technician reached inside the camera, which was still plugged in, unscrewed the stub of the lens and inserted a replacement. The camera was back on the air in less than a minute.

As in nearly all developing countries, radio was the most important medium. I devoted the greater part of my resources to radio. I provided them with tapes of educational programs and news features. I also had cordial relations with ELWA, an American missionary station. ELWA stood for Eternal Loving Winning Africa. ELWA also ran a hospital which was an important public health facility. I had great admiration for the ELWA staff. When the head of the Indian Hindu community died, the government refused the Indians permission to cremate his body on government land. ELWA, on the other hand, welcomed the Hindus and the patriarch’s body was burned on the ELWA and the ashes pushed into the sea.

There were also two resident foreign correspondents, AFP and TASS. The AFP reporter had a Russian name and always struck me as a bit sinister. The TASS correspondent was affable and always happy to accept social invitations. My suspicions were confirmed that he worked for more than TASS when he was expelled for “unjournalistic conduct” in conjunction with the T.B. Tolbert’s nutty speech before the senate.

Q: While you were in country did the embassy host any VIPs?

JOHNSON: I recall four: Andy Young, James Farmer, Peal Bailey and Henry Kissinger.

Young was our ambassador to the UN. He held a couple days of talks with Liberian officials regarding South Africa. What really impressed me about Andy Young was that he worked with us spear carriers in the embassy. Often Washington VIPs treat FSOs as if they were furniture. I asked him something about east Africa and he responded with a story which I thought was telling about American culture. He said that he was in a meeting with some very tough looking former insurgents of a leftist government and one of them drew him aside and whispered, “How the raiders doing?”

Young said at first he assumed that the man might be referring to a covert CIA operation that he was unaware of, so he stammered, “Which raiders?”

The African stared at him for a moment and snarled, “Man, there’s only one raiders in this world, the Oakland Raiders!”

It seems the soldier turned statesman had studied at Berkley and was a great fan of the Oakland football team. "Another triumph for US education," our envoy to the UN surmised.

I don't remember why Farmer, the civil rights leader, came to Liberia, but I arranged for him to preach at the local Methodist church. My heart sank when we entered the church. Almost no one was there. But as the service progressed parishioners filed in and by the time Farmer gave his sermon the church was full.

Pearl Bailey visited the country on a goodwill trip. She made it clear that she would not perform. "Ms Bailey" simply wanted to meet Liberians of all walks of life. I was in charge of her visit and escorted her everywhere she went, including to the John F. Kennedy Hospital where she was appalled that three or four children were sleeping in a single bed. The staff explained that these children had never had their own bed and would be terrified if they were alone, and that made sense to her. A nurse also mentioned that the hospital took care to provide the young patients only with basic necessities during their stays because if children were too well provided for, then the parents would conclude their offspring were better off in care of the hospital and not return to pick them up.

I arranged for Bailey to be interviewed on radio and television. It was during her interview, as I have already noted, that the camera fell over and breaking off the lens. Carolyn and I offered a dinner party in her honor. She begged off at the last moment, which was perhaps just as well since the elevators broke down in our building and we lived on the sixth floor. She asked to visit a jewelry store to buy some things for her friends back home. I took her to what I thought was a Lebanese shop. We soon learned that the owner was Armenian. Bailey spoke Armenian and soon his prices dropped by 30%. I admired a ring of woven gold but didn't buy it. The next day as we were saying goodbye at the airport, she slipped a small box into my hand with the admonition to give it to Carolyn. It was the ring of woven gold.

Kissinger was supposed to simply overnight in Liberia on his way to Ghana and, I believe, Nigeria. However fate intervened and Rawlings, who was president in Ghana, canceled the visit at the very last moment. At first we only knew that Rawlings was "unable to receive the Secretary." Later we learned that the air force officer turned politician had a large boil on his backside and could not sit down. Our envoy in Accra was Shirley Temple Black and she was not to be denied her meeting with Dr. K. I met her at the airport and escorted her to a reception Kissinger was attending.

The Liberians were delighted to have Kissinger for longer than expected. President Tolbert offered an elaborate dinner in his honor at the government mansion. I sat next to the physician who accompanying the Secretary. The MD was a specialist in tropical diseases and was most disappointed that not only was I not suffering from an exotic ailment but that everyone in the embassy was apparently healthy. Nor did any of the Peace Corps Volunteers provide challenges for his skills.

Although Kissinger and his staff had plenty of time to rest, we persuaded the secretary to attend a performance of the national dance troupe. The nubile dancers were bouncing around in front of

him topless. Kissinger turned to his Press Secretary, Bob Funseth, and whispered, "Robert, I am beginning to appreciate Liberian culture."

Q: Did USIA send any important speakers to Liberia?

JOHNSON: None that I recall. The daughter of Washington DC's mayor spent a week in Monrovia where she was supposed to give a series of talks on Afro-American culture. Instead she used the time to do research and made a general nuisance of herself. I sent USIA a cable severely critical of her visit. Washington responded with a warning that I could be sued for using such blunt language, because under the new Freedom of Information Act, all speakers could access their files. While the new law made government more transparent it diminished candor in reporting. Years later I referred to Joyce Carol Oats as "owlish" in a cable. A CYA bureaucrat called me and asked if she could delete that offensive term from the file of Miss Oats. I responded that the noted author looked owlish to me but if the desk officer in Washington was going to lose sleep unless he censored my work, to make the edit. The longer I spent abroad, the less respect I had for certain overstuffed offices in Washington.

One cultural program we did have that packed the university was a series of feature films about black Americans. A professor of film from UCLA, whom I was to meet again a couple years later in Stockholm, gave informative introductions to the films and stayed for hours afterwards to respond to questions. A few weeks later the German Embassy sponsored an evening of classical music in the city auditorium. No Liberians attended the performance. The German DCM remarked to me after the concert, "'Buck and the Preacher' certainly outdraws Bach."

Q: Were the Liberians very concerned with the liberation movements in South Africa and the boycott against the apartheid regime?

JOHNSON: The average Liberian was primarily worried about his or her survival and had no idea where South Africa was, nor any understanding of the plight of its black majority. The Tolbert regime on the other hand was quite vocal in its support for the boycott and sanctions against the Pretoria government. A small band of African National Congress, the anti-apartheid revolutionaries, lived in Monrovia. I became friends with one, a professor at the university. He was moderate who rejected Marxism but not violence. When I told him that I had applied for a post in Pretoria as my onward assignment, he asked me to withdraw the request. I assured him that I was totally against the current government in South Africa. He responded, "Yes, I know you are for democratic change, but I would hate for you to be hurt by one of our bombs." I thanked him for his concern. A few days later the agency informed me that I would be returning to Washington.

Q: Was there a large American community in Liberia?

JOHNSON: I am sure there were several hundred US citizens, some of them dual nationals, scattered around the country. (The best way to find out how many dual nationals there are in a country is to have a coup or a natural disaster and then they come out of the woodwork.) Firestone and B.F. Goodrich had small contingents of Americans on their rubber plantations and

the US banks employed about a dozen executives in Monrovia. The biggest concentration of Americans was the US Embassy.

We helped the number of “Amcits” decrease by four by assisting an American woman leave the country with her three children. She had married a Liberian in the US, then they moved to Monrovia. He reverted to his African ways and had a several “country wives”. He was also physically abusive of his American wife. When she could not take it any more, she came to the embassy and asked for help. Working through the State Department in Washington, the embassy secured airline tickets for the woman and her three children from Freetown to New York. Since the husband held their passports, the consular officer issued them replacements. Using money she received from her parents through the embassy, the wife hired a taxi to drive her and her offspring to the border with Sierra Leone, bought “green” exit stamps from the Liberian border guards, Sierra Leone visas and hired another taxi to Freetown. It was a two day trip over terrible roads. The husband was furious when he found out what had happened, but by that time his American family was across the border and his visa to the United States had been cancelled.

Q: Did the consular section have a high refusal rate for Liberian visa applicants?

JOHNSON: The rate was probably not that high since so few people could afford the airfare. Whenever the consular officer refused an applicant he marked the passport on a given page, thus if the applicant went around the corner to the British Embassy to request a visa for Canada, the UK consular officer would know if the applicant had already been turned down add his rejection to ours.

Q: Was Carolyn bored in Liberia?

She held up better than I did. I used to wake up in the middle of the night, and say, “I have to get the hell out of here.” I was wasting my time.

One day a Soviet diplomat asked me if Carolyn were available to teach English in the Soviet Embassy. They knew that Carolyn had taught English as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Before she could commit herself, I cleared the offer with the deputy chief of mission and the “appropriate authorities”. She gave lessons twice a week at their embassy. The Russians paid her in dollars and she enjoyed teaching. She also directed a choir which had its rehearsals at USIA.

Q: How did your sons adapt to West Africa?

JOHNSON: There were no play grounds in Monrovia so Carolyn took them to the embassy compound to swim in the pool. We had to keep the boys away from the rocks and bushes because both green and black mambas were common. The boys enjoyed weekend forays to the ambassador’s beach house. However I will never forget one day seeing our nanny with our three year-old son Erik sitting on his tricycle at the front door of our building watching the people go by. I felt terrible. I thought I was depriving the little boy of a normal childhood. I think many Foreign Service Officers have had similar pangs of conscience. Years later I actually apologized to Patrick and Erik for dragging them around the world as kids. They responded almost in unison, “We wouldn’t have had it any other way.” Their younger sister, Suzanne, once complained to

Carolyn and me that she had been born too late and had missed many of the experiences that her brothers had enjoyed. She made up for lost time, spending her junior years in high school and college in Germany and two years in Mozambique as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Currently she is working for an NGO in Johannesburg.

Q: What did you do on weekends?

JOHNSON: The Liberians retreated to their families in the countryside on weekends so the expatriate community had to entertain itself. We mixed with the Germans, Poles, Romanians, Brits and Russians whom we met on the beach. The embassy had a beach house where we could cook meals in the open and enjoy gentle waves. There were a number of nice public beaches with lagoons on one side and surf on the other. Shortly before we arrived a USAID officer died of a broken neck when he was hurled against the bottom by a breaker. I suffered a shoulder injury in a surfing accident.

Q: Was there a rip tide?

JOHNSON: Not long before we got to Monrovia a State Department officer was swept out to sea. It was assumed that he had drowned or had been eaten by hammerheads. Actually I never heard of a shark attack while we were in Liberia. In any case the guy kept his cool while being pulled ten or twelve miles westward down the coast. After many hours he was able to swim to a sand bar just off Mamba Point not far from the embassy. He hailed a passing fishing boat and was brought into town where he got a cab to the embassy. The Liberian guard thought he was seeing a ghost when the man limped out of the cab and up the gate.

Q: What was your housing like in Monrovia?

JOHNSON: We had a beautiful apartment on the sixth floor of the Chase Manhattan Bank building. There was a view of the harbor from the living room. We also had a view of the street that led to the cemetery. Liberians seemed to favor Sundays for their funerals which often included marching bands ala New Orleans. The standard marching song was "Onward Christian Soldiers." The quality of musicianship varied greatly from band to band. My young sons must have watched dozens of funerals entourage climb the steep hill. During our tour of duty Carolyn's father became very ill. She and the boys flew home to be with him during his last days. At a quiet moment during the funeral Patrick, who was five and bored, asked his mother in a rather loud voice, "When is the parade?"

Q: Did you have a reliable source of electricity in Monrovia?

JOHNSON: The source was reliable but the delivery system left something to be desired. Outages were common. Looking out of our apartment window we watched many a transformer explode blacking out several blocks. When we lost power we sometimes tuned in BBC to listen to a radio drama. It was great sitting using your imagination to fill out the plot.

Q: What was the USIA facility like in Monrovia.

JOHNSON: It was on the second floor of the Chase Manhattan Bank Building, thus I walked downstairs to my office. We had a nice library, small auditorium and ample office space. Since I lived in the same building I was the permanent USIA duty officer, not that that was a particularly onerous task.

Q: What were the Soviets diplomats like and were they in Liberia in force?

JOHNSON: There was a changing of the guard while we were in Monrovia. The Bolsheviks with stainless steel teeth were replaced by a more refined and worldly generation. They had a large embassy and their main function was to watch us Americans. The mutual indifference between the Soviets and the Liberians was clear to all. In fact, if I may tell a racial story about the Soviets, their DCM who was leaving. I looked around the room during his farewell reception and duly noted that the Soviets were enjoying the good life. They had Paper Mate pens in their pockets, were drinking Johnnie Walker, out of a Coca-Cola cooler, and driving Ford Mustangs, and I asked a Russian innocently, "Where are the Liberians?"

A Soviet turned to me and sniffed, "If we'd wanted the niggers, we would've invited them."

Q: Did you get to know any of the Soviets?

JOHNSON: Not personally. I was always wary of their motives as they were of mine. However we socialized with several of the younger diplomats. One evening we invited three officers and their wives to our apartment to see the 1966 Hollywood film "The Russians Are Coming! The Russians Are Coming!" They loved every minute of the film and insisted that I show, rewind and show again and again the opening credits which printed on an montage of Soviet and US flags accompanied by the national anthems. In true Russian fashion, our Ruski guests showed they felt at home with us by consuming two liters of vodka, a liter of gin and a half bottle of Old Grand Dad.

On another occasion, the Soviets came to my office to ask to borrow films. "Oh, you want films about American ballet or orchestras?" I inquired.

"Nyet."

"Literary films?"

"Nyet."

"Okay, what sort of films do you want?"

"Cowboy movies!"

I was able to borrow several westerns from USIA Washington, which greatly pleased both my Liberian audience as well as the Russians.

Perhaps to show their appreciation, the Soviets invited Carolyn and me to a screening in their embassy of a “Russian western”. Shot in the rolling hills of Moldova with a cast of gypsy cattle farmers, the high point of the ponderous horse opera was a torrid love scene in which an actress pulls open her blouse exposing her pendulous breasts. “See! We have no censorship in the Soviet Union!” whispered a Russian to me hoarsely.

We got to know Anatoly, a young Russian FSO. He owed his appointment to the Soviet Foreign Service to a chance meeting with a senior Russian diplomat who had served in the Red army with his father. Anatoly’s first post was at the UN in New York City. He was a one man tourism bureau for the Big Apple, which he considered the most fascinating city on earth. Shortly before we departed Monrovia for Washington he asked me if he could buy my .30 .30 rifle. Since I had not shot the gun in years, I readily consented. I told him that I had not realized he was a hunter. “I am no hunter,” he responded.

“Then you are a collector?” he asked

“I am not a collector,” he replied

“Why do you want the Winchester?” I responded.

“Do you think I want to spend the rest of my career in Africa?” Anatoly announced. Apparently personnel officers in the foreign ministry were open to bribery.

One day a senior Soviet diplomat sought me out at a reception and asked in a conspiratorial tone if we could meet for lunch. I thought he wanted to “turn me.” However the matter was almost as delicate. It seems that on the eve of their great national day the hospitable embassy had completely depleted its supply of vodka. No vodka. No national day. Perhaps I failed to understand the strength of my bargaining position when I agreed to provide eight cases of American Smirnoff vodka for cash. Actually the embassy commissary had purchased too much vodka and was glad to get rid of it. At the national day celebrations I noted that no Smirnoff bottles were in sight. My host tapped a Russian bottle with his finger and smiled slyly.

Perhaps my gesture spread oil on troubled waters regarding an ongoing problem between the Soviet ambassador and our army attaché who lived next door. Every morning the colonel’s pet chimp climbed up on the wall separating the properties and turning his rear end toward the flag with the hammer and cycle emptied his bowels onto Soviet territory.

Q: How did the Russians you knew deal with life in the capitalist world?

JOHNSON: That is a hard question to answer because none of my Soviet contacts ever really told me what he thought about Communism. I sensed that my Soviet counterparts were patriotic Russians, not doctrinaire Communists. However the TASS correspondent was a definitely a true believer. He returned to Monrovia from home leave full of genuine enthusiasm about declarations at a party congress regarding the “new Soviet man.” The Soviet FSOs must have been deeply troubled by the contradictions between their indoctrination and what they experienced outside of the USSR. They were masters of “double speak”, i.e. they mouthed

doctrines which they clearly knew were fallacious and kept their own opinions to themselves. I doubt they confided to one another. It was fun to watch their reaction to irreverent banter among Americans about the Carter administration. We told one another “Jimmy jokes” in their presence and they joined in the laughter. I never heard a Soviet diplomat make a critical remark about Moscow. They got their Brezhnev jokes from us and the British.

And while East Block diplomats were not officially targets of USIA Monrovia’s public affairs strategy, my embassy colleagues and I went out of our way to be conciliatory toward them. The Soviet Deputy Chief of Mission asked me to get him a subscription to National Geographic, which of course I did. He even reimbursed me for the cost. He simply liked the magazine.

In 1976 Time carried a feature article on discoveries of large petroleum reserves in China. The cover of that issue showed Mao in an Arab head dress. The Soviets thought the depiction of the Chinese dictator was the funniest thing they had ever seen and begged us for our copies of that issue of the magazine. Perhaps the covers were selling on the black market in Moscow.

Q: Did you ever talk to the Russians about Germany?

JOHNSON: One of the older officers in their embassy had been badly wounded during World War II. He showed me his scars and was not averse to talking about Germany. He did not trust Germans period. One evening I was talking with another Russian and I asked him, “Isn’t it true that you Russians do not really want the western powers to leave Berlin? It seems it is in your interest that any time Berlin comes up during our discussions with Pankow (the East Germany regime), we tell the East Germans that our counterpart for that issue is Moscow. We still consider the Four Power Agreement on Berlin to be in force.”

The Russian smiled and responded cryptically, “There may be truth in what you say.” He then quickly changed the subject.

Q: Sounds like fun. What were the other diplomats like?

JOHNSON: The Pole was an aristocrat and was very friendly. When he learned I was going on R&R to the US he asked me to bring back for him two intercoms from Radio Shack. He explained that he and his wife slept upstairs but their baby’s room was on the ground floor and if they had an intercom set to send in the infant’s room while the intercom in his and his wife’s room was set on receive, they could hear when the baby cried. I complied and we agreed not to term the arrangement “bugging.”

The Romanians sometimes did intelligence work for the Soviets. One night I was at a reception at their embassy and asked one of our hosts where he hailed from in Romania. “Ploiesti” was the response.

“Were you there during the war?” I asked.

“Yes, as a child I saw your bombers blast the refineries supplying the Nazi war machine,” he replied.

“Were you frightened?” I inquired.

“Not really. We were amazed,” he responded

“What was amazing about the destruction?” I asked in wonder.

“As my father explained to me, the B-17s are made by Boeing. The bombs are made by Dupont and the refineries belong to Standard Oil. They are blowing up their own property and they are making lots of money doing it.” He concluded, “Confidentially I have always wondered how we can compete with a system that makes a profit on what is obviously a loss.”

In a conversation with another Romanian, I said, “At the conclusion of the war, the Soviets adjusted your eastern border westward.”

“Adjusted,” he snarled, “the dirty bastards stole many thousands of square kilometers.” The Romanian was transferred soon after making that outburst. I wondered if a Soviet overheard him.

The Argentine charge was a colorful guy. He loathed the regime in Buenos Aires which was then headed by Peron’s second wife, Isabella. At one reception he jestingly toasted his President, “Una puta! Una cornuda! Que gobierno tan macanuda!” (A whore. A thief. What a fantastic government!) He was transferred to Tunis a few months later, clearly a promotion.

We struck up close ties with colleagues in the Germany embassy and attended many of their Sunday morning gatherings which were the social focal point of the small German community. We became friends with the first secretary who was married to a lively French woman who remained very French. We used to kid them about the Rhine flowing across their living room. The very agreeable German ambassador offered a dinner party in our honor when we completed our tour of duty in Monrovia.

Q: So was there much diplomatic life in Monrovia?

JOHNSON: Because Liberians had so many family obligations, it was very hard to develop real friendship with Liberians. Being invited into a Liberian home occurred only rarely, thus the foreigners partied among themselves. Businessmen and diplomats mixed freely with us. Once a week we had a diplomatic lunch always at a different restaurant. One day PRC diplomats joined us but didn’t talk to anyone. (Liberia had just broken relations with Taiwan and established full relations with Beijing.) The next month the Chinese talked with the Soviets but not with the Americans. Policy change: the following month the Chinese mixed with the Americans but not with the Russians. I think it was the Soviets who circulated the rumor that when the Chinese arrived in Monrovia they chose a building next to a villa sporting a red light because they assumed that the occupants were Communists. I don’t know if the story is true but it enjoyed wide acceptance and got a lot of laughs.

Shortly after Soviet pilot Victor Belenko defected to Japan with his Soviet interceptor, one of the Russians leaned across the table and said to the American naval attaché, “Why don’t we even the score by you flying an F-14 to Russia?” The Russian seemed so earnest, we were not sure if he was serious.

Once we used a luncheon to demonstrate our support for a fellow diplomat: Dale Schaffer. Dale, who was the chief of the consular section in our embassy, told a visa applicant that the letter she had presented him from the foreign ministry endorsing her application for a visa was worthless. The applicant returned to the foreign ministry to complain. Dale was declared persona non grata, which delighted him since he was due for direct transfer to the Dominican Republic and by leaving Liberia weeks early, he would have home leave. Unfortunately when Reggie Townsend, the Chief of Cabinet heard of the expulsion order, he announced that he liked Dale and that the order for him to leave was rescinded. Dale pleaded with Townsend to reinstate the order to leave. To save face Townsend convinced Dale to stay for a week or two and then depart. In the meantime we organized a lugubrious “Solidarity with Dale Schaffer Lunch” during which there were many toasts to Dale and digs at the government. Many of us envied Dale Schaffer’s early departure.

Q: Tell me something about Liberia when you got there in 1975. What was the government? How did things run?

JOHNSON: By African standards Liberia was a success story. Land was plentiful. The soil was reasonably fertile. The climate was hot but afforded plenty of rain. Huge rubber plantations offered jobs and earned exports. Liberia had natural resources, particularly very high quality iron ore and diamond mines. There were two very credible universities. Some basic medical care existed and the public school system was expanding. The US Dollar was the national currency, although Liberian coins were circulated. The government, which had been dominated by Americo-Liberians, was making an honest effort to broaden its base to include more tribals. In spite of a lot of corruption, Liberia was relatively democratic.

Q: Tell me more about the split between Americo-Liberians and tribals.

JOHNSON: As I think I noted earlier, Liberia was not colonized by the Europeans. Prior to the British and American abolition of the slave trade the little nation carried on a brave if ineffectual effort to combat trafficking in slaves. After the end of our Civil War, Americans help resettle a number of freed blacks in Liberia and it was the descendents of these freed slaves that provided the Americo-Liberian upper class. However the Americo-Liberians of course intermarried with tribals, by the middle of the 20th century, the main vestige of the Americo-Liberians was their names: Cooper, Campbell, Tubman, Tolbert, etc. The Tolbert regime, which was in power while we were there, was making a very concerted effort to fully integrate the tribals into government. One of my former contacts, Amos Sawyer, was a university professor of political science, ancestry was mostly tribal. Some Americo-Liberians tried to go native by taking tribal names. One Americo-Liberian university professor whose real name I have forgotten announced that henceforth he would be Toga Nah Tipoteh, which probably occasioned more mirth than admiration among the tribals. Some believe that Tolbert’s downfall was caused because he and

the reformers were not able to satisfy the demands of tribals for power. I suspect however that Sergeant Doe, who overthrew him, acted primarily out of envy.

Q: Who controlled the Liberian economy?

JOHNSON: The most important decisions were made by a rather small group of top government officials and foreign businessmen who represented the interests of the mines and rubber plantations. However most of the nation's economy was in the hands of subsistence farmers, who grew rice, sugar cane other basic crops. The larger stores were almost exclusively in the hands of Mandingo and Lebanese traders. The Mandingos, who were Muslims, controlled the lucrative textile and diamond trade, while the Lebanese ran the larger grocery stores. It was not uncommon to see a Mandingo deposit tens of thousands of dollars in cash in the Chase Manhattan Bank. The large grocery stores catered to the most affluent Liberians and to the expatriate community. For example, you could purchase Howard Johnson's ice cream at Abu Jahadi's Supermarket for six dollars a quart.

There was also big money to be made in cloth and diamonds. The commercial officer and I visited several cloth merchants. After gaining their confidence we learned that they were making extraordinary sums importing bolts of cloth and selling it by the yard. For example, one store which was perhaps no more than 15 feet wide and 50 feet deep grossed \$250,000 annually. Since the owner, a Moslem, paid little or no taxes, he was living pretty well.

Although Liberia produced some diamonds, most raw stones were smuggled into the country from Sierra Leone which had rich deposits. The diamond trade was later exploited ruthlessly by the dictator Charles Taylor and, according to very credible reports, helped finance international terrorism. While on our way to Freetown, my family and I overnighted in the town of Bo in Sierra Leone. I struck up a conversation with a well dressed Mandingo in the bar of our hotel. I asked him what he did for a living. He smiled and responded, "Auto sandwiches." I stared at him for a moment and asked, "I am not sure what you mean."

"Look in my attaché case," he said quietly.

I could barely lift the satchel. I lifted the flap. The case contained about 50 Sierra Leonean license plates.

"That's the bread," he remarked slyly.

I thought for several minutes and then it dawned on me. The car, probably a brand new VW, was the meat. Somewhere on his person or on the person of an accomplice was a bag of raw diamonds. The Mandingo was clearly headed to Monrovia where he would sell his diamonds to a clansman for dollars and then buy automobiles in the free port of Monrovia. Associates would drive the cars to Sierra Leonean border, pay off customs officers, and deliver them to waiting customers in Freetown. Smuggling was a lucrative but potentially hazardous business.

Meanwhile the average Liberian, excluding the Mandingo, could not successfully run a grocery store because members of his extended family would take from the store whatever they needed

without paying. If the owner tried to stop them, he was denounced as a betrayer of the family, the ultimate put down for any member of a tribal society.

The average Liberian was a subsistence farmer or fisherman who wanted simply to be left alone by bureaucrats from Monrovia who wore swear suits. Perhaps the best economic assistance program we could offer the Africans is to come up with a way to get their meddling government officials off the backs of these hard working people.

Q: You mentioned corruption. Who are you referring to?

JOHNSON: Top government officials demanded hefty bribes to facilitate business deals, including foreign investments. In so many developing countries, the “kleptocrats” represent a serious drain on the economy. Meanwhile policemen and petty bureaucrats supplemented their salaries with petty theft and bribes.

Q: How resentful were you of the corruption in Liberia?

JOHNSON: I think there are two kinds of corruption: petty and grand. I have never begrudged the policeman in the Third World who accepted a couple bucks to let some one off for a minor traffic violation or the customs officer who accepted a carton of cigarettes to allow a petty trader into the country with his items of hardware. Given the paltry salaries these people are paid, the bribed allow them to feed their families.

On the other hand, the police chiefs and government ministers who are involved in massive theft, kick backs, drug smuggling and other egregious conduct should be locked up for life. Liberia was small potatoes as far as corruption was concerned. But when I was in Nigeria on an inspection I asked a British petroleum executive how much of the nation’s oil revenues were being stolen by officials, he responded, “At least a quarter and perhaps a third.” Billions of dollars! How can the kleptocrats launder and spend that much money? Meanwhile thousands of their countrymen die because of a lack basic medical care. Countless children who should have been educated in schools built with those billions and taught by teachers paid with the loot remain illiterate and condemned to grinding poverty. How do American, European and Asian bankers sleep at night knowing they are fattening their annual bonuses derived from mass misery? Pardon my stump speech but I think these bastards ought to taken out and shot.

Q: How about crime in Liberia?

There was a lot of property crime, robberies and burglaries, but little personal crime. President Tolbert instituted public floggings of petty thieves. Culprits were tied to goal posts and flogged with rubber hoses and automobile fan belts. The events were broadcast live on television but the floggings were discontinued after pick pockets found that the stadiums to be happy hunting grounds.

One Peace Corps Volunteer was a victim of a rape-murder but such instances were rare. Liberians were as a whole not- at least before the civil war of 1980s and 1990s- a violent people.

There was some sensational ritualistic murder and cannibalism while we were in Liberia. It was a major scandal. President Tolbert called for a week of prayer. Finally the culprits were arrested, tried and hanged. Police discovered irrefutable proof in a freezer of an Americo-Liberian who earned a master's degree from Boston University. I sent the newspaper article of the trial to a friend on the staff of Boston University. I said this probably won't make it in your alumni magazine. He was not amused.

Q: Did the coup take the embassy by surprise?

JOHNSON: I don't know because we were long since gone. However, quite apart from Doe's motives, tribal Liberians were genuinely restless. The government did not and perhaps could not move fast enough to satisfy their demands for power. Perhaps it was a revolution of unfulfilled expectations. In the embassy we discussed scenarios which could lead to unrest or even an overthrow of the Tolbert regime, but I am sure no one imagined that an army NCO and a small group of soldiers could depose the government violently. By the way, I learned from files on the subject which I have declassified, Doe's action was no cake walk. The fire fight lasted about two hours. Why the police and the rest of the military stood by and allowed Doe and his men to succeed in their bloody endeavor, I don't know

Q: When did that happen?

JOHNSON: 1980. Here, I have to tell an off color story. Apparently Doe called his cabinet together and ordered each minister write a report on his area of responsibility. Doe read the reports. At a cabinet meeting he patted the stack of reports solemnly and announced, "Gentlemen, (that's plural for gentleman) we's fucked." How's that for a state of the union speech?!

While I was at post we were inspected. I don't know how well the post did, but I got along with the inspectors much better than the PAO, and they asked me if I wanted to join them as my next post. I told them that I didn't know where I was going to be, I was going back to Washington. In the summer of '77 we returned.

Q: What was a high point in your tour of duty in Monrovia?

JOHNSON: There was but it did not occur in Liberia. I took my family to Ghana to visit the village where Carolyn had served in the Peace Corps. I combined the trip with a tour of USIA Accra and the branch post at Kumasi. Upon departing Kumasi for Assin Manso, Carolyn's village, we ran out of daylight and decided to overnight in a gold mining town. I checked us into what was the nicest hotel available, but soon realized it was a cat house. Since it was a comfortable establishment and the madam was friendly we decided to stay the night. However during a walk to the edge of town we encountered a couple of British subjects who worked at the local gold mine. They insisted that we lodge at their guest house. As fellow Anglos we treated royally, and dined on roast beef and Yorkshire Pudding with the a bottle of claret. Awakened at dawn, we were served a full English breakfast. A "lorry" took us to our bus.

Arriving in Assin Manso the villagers welcomed us most graciously. The post master presented his daughter whom he had named Carolyn. The paramount chief invited us to his residence for a formal audience. Although he addressed us, we responded through his spokesman. I think pageantry of the occasion which included formal robes and carved stools was intended to honor us, really Carolyn. The boys were very proud of their distinguished mother.

Our older son Patrick, a little blond-haired boy of four, quickly sensed his power and exploited it fully. He held court every morning surrounded by village children. Patrick would say, "Bring me my stool," and they would bring him his stool. Bring me my monkey," and they would bring his monkey. His little brother Erik would follow along the entourage smiling. It was Lord of the Flies--a total power grab. The village adults and we thought it was tremendously amusing. The boys did not want to leave. Neither did Carolyn and I.

After we departed Assin Manso we spent a couple days at the paramount chief's guest house at Cape Coast. One day we toured the slave castle at Elmina. Part of the castle was still being used for a jail, however the main portion was kept as memorial to the slave trade. We entered the huge dungeon where the captives were kept just prior to the departure for the New World. This holding area was big enough for hundreds of people. A two inch thick carpet of refuse and human hair and probably body parts covered the floor. The exit to the slave ships was a narrow doorway. I had toured concentration camps but nothing I experienced in Germany or even the railhead at Auschwitz was as depressing as that dungeon with its thick carpet of human refuse and its door of no return.

Q: Do you know what happened to your staff during the civil war of 1990s.

JOHNSON: No. I have often wondered, but except for my senior assistant, a Ghanaian, I did not have much affection for my Liberian colleagues. I would love to go back to Monrovia and see what it is like but it is not worth the risk or the expense.

HARVEY E. GUTMAN
Program Officer, USAID
Monrovia (1975-1978)

Harvey E. Gutman was born in Switzerland in 1921. From 1942-1946 he served in the American Army overseas. Upon returning in 1949 he received his bachelor's degree from University of Portland and later received his master's degree from American University in 1958. During his career with AID he held positions in Laos, Paris, Thailand, Morocco, Liberia, and Nigeria. Mr. Gutman was interviewed by Stuart Van Dyke in August 1997.

GUTMAN: My next assignment was Liberia, a unique country, one of the few in Africa (only Ethiopia comes to mind) that did not have a colonial history. However, the Afro-Americans that settled the country in the last century imposed their own brand of colonialism on the native population. The country was still totally dominated by an urban elite, composed of the

descendants of the American colonists whose group had been augmented by marriages with native Liberians. The members of this group belonged to a power triumvirate of the Baptist church, the Freemasons and the True Whig Party. This group was collectively known (and addressed) as "the honorables." Their small size can be gauged by the fact that only 2-3% of the population were native English speakers. Though many people, especially in the cities, spoke Liberian English (an interesting patois), it was their second or third language.

Going back to WW II, the U.S. had important naval, airport and communications installations in Liberia. Concurrently, the country was one of the first recipients of official U.S. assistance in the post-war period. Up to that time and continuing, Liberia was a favorite for missionary activities. These included major contributions to the health and education systems, including the country's best university. Elite families, frequently with dual nationality, customarily sent their children to American universities. Many of them married Americans and their children carried both passports. The U.S. dollar was/is Liberia's official currency which further strengthens its ties with the U.S..

At the time of my arrival, our aid program in Liberia had been in existence for close to 30 years without showing commensurate results. This was largely due to collusion, corruption and venality of the officials and staff entrepreneurs involved. The GOL rarely lived up to its obligations under project agreements; there was generally a shortfall in their monetary and staff contributions. Recurrent expenses were not institutionalized in the budget so that projects ended shortly after U.S. support phased out.

In 1978 we reactivated the Washington Booker Vocational School project for the 4th or 5th time. Every time, upon project expiration, the GOL had failed to maintain the buildings; teachers went unpaid and started up workshops, stealing machinery, tools and materials that had been supplied by the project.

A similar case was the JFK hospital that resulted from a request by the late President Tubman (the current president was his son-in-law) during a call on the White House. The AID-funded construction of the mammoth plant was started without adequate planning for staffing, recurrent expenses, etc. The GOL was finally able to obtain physicians from SIDA, the Scandinavian donor coalition. They had left by the time I arrived and the hospital was understaffed and broke. The sole exception was the famous 4th floor that was reserved for treatment of the "honorables" and was perfectly equipped and staffed.

AID/W simply did not like to face up to the problems of our AID program. The key to the situation was the simple fact that the Liberian program was to an important extent a U.S. domestic policy problem. I have indicated above some of the affinities between the U.S. and Liberia. To this should be added the feeling by some American circles and officials that criticism of Liberia reflected negatively on Africa and American minorities.

Once, while I was in charge, the Mission received a request for a "frank and concise assessment of our assistance program" (sic, I recall this wording all too well). Our reply started with the sentence "Liberia is corrupt from stem to stern. There are no rewards for faithful work nor sanctions for mal-and misfeasances." Happily, I had taken the precaution of adding at the bottom

of the lengthy message "Ambassador (W. Beverly Carter) concurs with this assessment". Within hours, I received a phone call from the Office Director for West Africa expressing the AA/AFR's outrage over the negative tone of the message. I could only point to the request for a "frank" assessment and suggest that she call the Ambassador.

The correctness of our assessment had been buttressed by a personal experience, a few weeks earlier. One evening the (lady) Deputy Minister of Health, whom I knew quite well, came to my residence unannounced. "I was just in the neighborhood and thought I would drop by for a minute". The basic purpose of the visit was to let me know that the Minister was a partner in a firm that had entered a proposal for the construction of rural health facilities. The bids would be opened the following day and the contract let. I pointed out that I was not involved at all in the award phase and allowed that in America "where you spent a number of years, your bid could be considered a conflict of interest". The Minister replied tartly "you Americans always talk of conflicts of interest; in Liberia we speak of fusion of interests", an elegant way of describing local mores.

The USAID had some very good, perceptive people. We knew that the ever-widening gap between have's and have-not's, especially in Monrovia, some day, would lead to disaster as, indeed, it did. Unfortunately, this was the very period when AID had settled on a new priority: "the poorest of the poor" in the rural areas.

We had just proposed two new projects, one that would build and organize decent markets in Monrovia and up-country towns whose present facilities was incredibly unsanitary with rivers of mud running between the stalls during the rainy season and flies and cockroaches feasting on unrefrigerated meat, etc. We showed how fees for stalls would meet recurrent expenses and make this a self-supporting project after the construction period.

The second proposal called for loan financing of some agricultural processing plants in rural areas. These would provide employment/cash incomes for members of subsistence farm families and tie them into the monetary circuits. We pointed out that every society had a component of physically and mentally down-and -outs, analogous to mortally wounded soldiers. This group should be helped by charitable organizations, it would never become self-sufficient. The Mission proposed to address the walking wounded who could be rehabilitated.

A terse message from AID/W rejected the project proposals and expressed great concern about the urban orientation of the first one and the extension of the second beyond the poorest of the poor in the second as agro-industrial entrepreneurs would also benefit from the loans.

If nothing else, this shows that it is by far safer to be wrong at the right time rather than be right at the wrong time. Later developments in Africa and other areas show that revolutions are more apt to start in impoverished cities than in rural areas and that monetizing rural economies is a major key to their development.

I have pointed out earlier how important the involvement of cultural anthropologists can be. Here is another example. In pursuit of its women-in-development mandate, AID/W unilaterally dispatched a lady nutritionist who was to design a project providing better diets for pregnant

women in rural areas. She wrote a learned treatise showing that greater consumption of eggs by the target group would provide the needed protein source. She did this rather in isolation, consulting text books rather than local missionaries or at least some village elders. They all would have explained that in the local tribal area the number one "no, no", a absolute taboo during pregnancy, was the ingestion of eggs. In the local belief, children whose mothers had eaten eggs, would invariably be born malformed. Cultural values can only be modified through lengthy, broad-based educational processes. Single issue "parachutists" from Washington are rarely the solution regardless of their best intentions.

Liberia was a fascinating but frustrating experience. It was a perfect setting for a Joseph Conrad or Graham Greene novel. It is nothing short of tragic that the U.S. failed to use its influence and the millions of aid dollars to move the country toward a more open political system, attenuation of tribal tensions and a narrowing (rather than widening) of the gap between urban and rural populations and rich and poor in the cities. While AID abetted this "know-see-hear no evil" approach to Liberian realities, it only carried out higher policy.

When I read about the civil war, the massacres and return to primeval times in Liberia, I ask myself with a certain sense of guilt how our policy could have been so shortsighted. Knowing that so many people whom I knew have perished in the bloody upheavals of the past years, is depressing. Hopefully, some of the Mission's loyal employees and some of the people in whom we had invested for a better future for Liberia have survived and can contribute to the reconstruction.

BEVERLY CARTER, JR.
Ambassador
Liberia (1976-1979)

Ambassador Carter was born and raised in Pennsylvania, and was educated at Lincoln University. After a career in journalism, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965, serving first in Nairobi as Public Affairs Officer and then as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. In 1972 he was appointed United States Ambassador to Tanzania, serving there until late 1975, at which time he was named Ambassador to Liberia, where he served until 1979. Ambassador Carter subsequently served as Ambassador at Large from 1979 to 1981. Ambassador Carter was interviewed by Celestine Tutt in 1981.

Q: Shall we move on to Liberia?

CARTER: Liberia? Yes.

Q: Tell us about the years in Liberia.

CARTER: (laughs) Well, Liberia is very different country from Tanzania, not as large in geography, not as large in population, but where I did not have to start off trying to explain it to

my own Government, because my own Government knew Liberia well, had some conceptions of it that I thought needed updating, and of course, the American public had some perceptions of it which continually need updating.

Liberia has probably suffered from the poorest press of any country on that continent, and I think, now, not for the right reasons. It is a country where there's a great deal of American involvement and interest, but a country which had a higher standard of living than many African countries; where the older regime was attempting to involve all of the people in the economy and in the political process; where it was beginning to do that.

If I were going to jump quickly and respond to the question, well then why, if that was so, was there this coup? I would say that I think it's because revolutions occur as people begin to realize that they're making progress. Revolutions never occur when people are completely downtrodden, prostrate and have nothing. The French Revolution is the classic illustration of that and I think Liberia is not as dramatic an illustration but certainly one of the more recent ones.

Almost all Liberians were involved in the cash economy. There are very few African countries where that could be said. I told you that I went to Africa initially in 1952, when I went to Liberia in 1952 it was a place I decided I never wanted to go back to again because it was a very depressing place, depressing country. There was poverty, in terms of customs and exploitation, but I saw, as many Africans say, "with my own eyes" the kinds of changes that have taken place. Not just in road buildings, schools, and hospitals, and clinics and things, but in terms of, of the so-called, and I use this phrase very advisedly when I say "the so-called," the so-called emergence of the countryman in the affairs of the country.

Everyone now talks again about the so-called Americo-Liberian. When I was there that was a no-no. People didn't talk about Americo-Liberians. Western journalists talked about it but Liberians didn't talk about it. The people who went to ... who came back to Liberia were exquisite colonialists like the Portuguese. They became a part of the people and so there were very, very few families that could ever talk about even being completely country families or completely former American families because of the mixture. Every family had its involvement, its cross-fertilization, if you please. And when I was there in '52 the first so-called countryman had just become a member of the Cabinet and everyone sort of reveled in that. And when I was back there again for Tubman's funeral, in 1971, I guess half the Cabinet was made up of people who could say that they were largely country people. By the time I was back there as Ambassador, there were two or three who could say that they were more Americo-Liberian and less country, and a majority were "country people."

But the level of expectation was continuing to rise. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the speed of change and I predicted, in my own estimate, that ... that ... that there would be a change. But I thought then there'd be a constitutional change. Tolbert was supposed to leave office in '83. He had himself recommended in the legislation a limit of eight years on the presidency and his eight years would have expired in '83. He made it very clear, I thought, certainly to my satisfaction anyway, but I wasn't the one who made the final decision on this, that he was not going to stand for re-election and I thought that there would be a constitutional change and there'd be more progress as a consequence of this change. Because it's very difficult

for a man his age, and to have seen what he saw, not to believe that he wasn't doing a lot for the country. He was doing a lot for the country; it just wasn't fast enough and enough in terms of quantity.

But the Liberians as with Ghanaians and with the Nigerians were far more developed than many of the East Africans because the impact of the West had been longer on them. The West African coast, as you know, has been much traveled for many, many centuries and certainly since the 15th Century, extensively. When you have that kind of exposure, you have a great deal more development than you do in some other places. So Liberia is a very ... it's very much more developed in many ways than Tanzania and ... but the problem there was not in the vanguard of those nations that were fighting for dramatic change from the past. Tolbert used to receive Nujoma, Sam Nujoma from Namibia, and he and Sekou Toure got on very well together, but you don't ... you didn't think of Tolbert as being ... a Kenneth Kaunda or Julius Nyerere. He didn't have that capability, was not an intellectual giant. He did not even have quite the quality that Botswana's Seretse Khama had, who was not a giant intellectually the way I think Nkrumah was or Nyerere is, but nonetheless, you know he was a man with the South Africans surrounding him and almost controlling completely the economy of that country but yet having the courage to have a truly multiracial society and trying to make for change, providing opportunities for South African refugees -- blacks -- to come through on the way north kind of like the underground railroad. So Tolbert had an image problem which many of the African leaders did not have. But ... and he was not charismatic, and, so he was, I think, in many ways, his own worst enemy. But he was a man who was trying to do good.

Q: What were ... he was a man trying to do good... so I would consider it one of his great strengths.

CARTER: Uhm.

Q: Can you think of others?

CARTER: I think that's primarily where he ... where one would have to place their need. He was very active in the church. He was at one time you know president of the World Baptist Alliance. I think that was also a part of his problem, his image problem. He was, he was perceived as a man trying to do good but doing a lot of traveling, looking at problems that were worldwide sometimes rather than problems that were in Monrovia or in and around the villages of Liberia and some of the places that needed attention.

I think he also, unfortunately, had made a considerable amount of money over his lifetime because he was a businessman. And sometimes the appearance of ... of ... of your affluence can be a negative. There are many African leaders who have done just as well as he has done, but they haven't done it quite so overtly as he did. He had one of the biggest rice farms, rice plantations and (inaudible). He was a partner in Mesurado, the big fishing operation. He was a partner in the Bank of Liberia. All these things he had begun before he became President, but, nonetheless, it helped create the image of a man who-who did... He had some rubber plantations, but there were Liberians who had larger rubber plantations than he had. There are several Liberians, and this is again not to their discredit but just to point out some of the things

sometime people are not aware of. The third largest rubber plantation in Liberia was owned by a Liberian, larger than several of the American firms that had plantations there. Firestone had the largest one and this fellow had the second or the third largest. And he did not acquire it by any corrupt means; he simply was an energetic Liberian who kept adding to his ... reinvesting his profits and doing well: the sort of success story that would go down swimmingly here. But it was perhaps at the wrong time and the wrong place.

Q: How would you describe your work in relations with President Tolbert?

CARTER: I think we got on very well together. I think I was lucky in both my relations with President Nyerere and with President Tolbert. They were different kinds of relationships. With President Nyerere it was ... we used to have great exchanges on issues of economics, he being a socialist and my being a capitalist. Always in a very friendly way, but we used to have very full conversations about that. And then we'd talk about southern African issues. We were often not antagonists, but he knew that I had certain limitations because I represented my government, and he also knew some of my personal views. We had very, very stimulating constructive conversations.

Willie Tolbert and I were much more, much more on a hail-fellow-well-met-peer kind of relationship. We were good friends. And when he talked to me about what he was trying to do and sought my advice and counsel, asked my opinion on things which he was facing, I very often tried to present those views in ways which he could use to try to accomplish what he wanted to do. I think that I had something of a partnership relationship with all of the Liberians, government and business, because they felt comfortable with me and we were on the same economic, political wavelength. With Nyerere it was the kind of relationship that you have in a dormitory at night when you're engaging in a good debate (laughs)...

Q: Do you think that it was partly because of the relationship that had existed for so many years between the United States and Liberia?

CARTER: Well, I think that certainly was contributory, but there were ambassadors who did not have that kind of relationship. My immediate predecessor did not have that kind of access. He eventually left because he felt that he did not have the access to the Foreign Ministry that he thought an ambassador should have to be able to present his country's views, and asked to be withdrawn. So I think that there are two things: Yes, countries can have government-to-government relationships, a good relationship, but I think that in the final analysis this either takes off and becomes really effective for the ambassador and the head of government and his ministers get on well. Or in other cases where the chemistry is bad and I could give, if I really had to think about it, a number of illustrations where we'd send people to so-called safe countries and that just didn't work out well because of the relationship. One that immediately comes to mind is one of the countries in the north, North Africa, where our relations had been traditionally just the best. We sent an ambassador who did everything wrong with the head of government, and we finally had to withdraw that ambassador in less than a year. Ambassadorial relations become, for good or bad, often very personal... There're certain things you have to do and there're certain things that embassies have to do. But there's another dimension that an

individual can make, and I think that's hard. We have to... we countries have to work hard in picking the right people for the right jobs at the ambassadorial level.

Q: Yes. Could you talk a little about that extra dimension.

CARTER: I think it's this dimension of one, some knowledge of the country and of the players, of how it fits in our own grand scheme of things, being able to understand how to use the positives from their own experience to match up with our own ambitions and goals. Again, in just talking about Liberia and Tanzania, I'm talking about two countries where I wasn't showing up for the first time. When I went to Liberia in '52, I developed relationships with people who were head of the bank, the Central Bank, and ministries. One was a lowly person in the Ministry of Information. When I went back, he was Minister of State. When I went there in 1971, to be a part of the U.S. delegation for the Tubman funeral, I was seeing people I had seen twenty years earlier or almost twenty years earlier who were then -- two of them were presidents -- were brothers of the next President: Steve Tolbert, who was later killed (in an airplane accident), and Frank Tolbert, who was executed in that group following the coup. So when I showed up in 1976, I didn't have to start off from scratch.

Tanzania, I was there in ... in 1965 the first time. I went back -- in '70 or '71 when I had returned from South Africa -- and reported to Nyerere on what I had observed when I was in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

And so ... and I guess some of this relates to the inevitable question which arises as to whether black ambassadors in some countries have an advantage or do they have a disadvantage and my view is that an ambassador should have sensitivity and interest in having advantage. And when they're black that doesn't work against them. And when they're white it works for them. It's more a question of sensitivity, esprit de corps, concern. Very often we have some identification with this because of our own reference, our own experience, our own similar reference as we've grown up. We tend to know how it feels to be kicked in the shins (laughs). So we start off with some understanding that some others sometimes ... But there are a hell of a lot of white guys that I know who could do my job just as well or better than I can do, and I know a number of blacks who couldn't do it worth a damn. It's not just a question of race; it's a question of these other things which sometimes we have a leg up on; sometimes we don't.

Q: Did you face any special problems in Liberia?

CARTER: Yes, I think there are two problems I faced in Liberia. One, the Liberians always felt that we did not do as well for them in terms of economic assistance as the French did, for instance, in Cote d'Ivoire, you know. Every time I saw the Foreign Minister and he'd just left Abidjan, he would talk about, "You see what the French did in Abidjan?" (laughs) I said, I said, "Sure, you know how many Frenchmen there are in Abidjan? There are fifty thousand Frenchmen in Abidjan, not in Cote d'Ivoire, but in Abidjan there are fifty thousand Frenchmen." I said, "Now we have four thousand Americans in all of Liberia. If you want fifty thousand Americans here in Monrovia, we can do the same thing. But you don't want that, do you?" And he said, "no." But nonetheless, they always felt that ... First of all, you see, Liberia was never a colony of ours, but they had kind of a colonial attitude or mentality, because all of the countries

around them had been colonies. The Brits left an infrastructure in Ghana which if it had been better managed could have kept that country so far out in front. I think there was something, and I don't want to be wrong in this, but I'm just going to take the chance. In 1952 there was something like 6-1/2 miles of paved roads in Liberia and when the British left the Gold Coast, Ghana, there must have been 1,800 miles of paved road, maybe more. Just in terms of the most minimal infrastructure, they developed harbors at Tema and at Accra and Takoradi. There's a developed harbor off Monrovia because it was an important harbor for us during the Second World War. We didn't do it because we thought the Liberians should have just a developed harbor. So that was one problem on the Liberian side.

The other problem on the U.S. side was, again, trying to make the point to my government that we should have been doing more. That there are very real reasons for us to do more. One of our largest Voice of America installations (in the world) is in Liberia. Pan American (Airways) serves Liberia and the airport there is a very critical airport.

Liberia has been an ally before. If we ever had occasion to go to war and they'd still be an ally, we'd want to have good use of their facilities and sea facilities.

I don't think we've done nearly enough for Liberia and one of the reasons we haven't is because they've been more passive than they should have been about this. Governments very often will respond to the country that is giving them more hell than someone else is giving. When I was in Tanzania we ended up having a 65 million dollar economic assistance program. We never spent 65 million dollars in Liberia. Tanzania is larger, need is greater. But in terms of U.S.G. interest, U.S. Government interest, it was very difficult for me having served in both those places to justify spending 65 million dollars in Tanzania where the President's going to be giving you hell at every opportunity (laughs). And Liberia, where we're now I think, back up to 25 million dollars.

Q: I've seemed to focus on the problems you had in these various areas. Are there things you did in Liberia that you feel happiest about?

CARTER: Well, I think on the other side of the coin is that I ... we did get our economic assistance program up higher. I think the Liberians felt when I left that we had moved these relations forward more and they were a bit happier with us. We had arranged a visit ... an exchange of visits of the Presidents, which not many ambassadors are ever able to achieve. We had President Tolbert here on a State Visit during the Bi-Centennial. We had President Carter stop in Monrovia when every country in the world wanted him to visit. Only two African countries got him: Liberia and Nigeria.

We renegotiated what we had. We had to renegotiate landing rights for Pan American Airways that had been dormant for fifteen years. The Liberians were about to abort these agreements, because the Pan Americans, Pan American Airways, was treating itself differently. And that's a very critical landing agreement, because it was a gateway to all the other countries in Africa down the line: Accra, Lagos, Kinshasa, Nairobi. And that would not have been finally negotiated without my being involved on an eleventh-hour basis. So it's natural why I think the greatest disappointment in Liberia was that I was not there during the rice riots and I was not there at the

time of the coup. Not sure that I could've changed the coup. I wish that I had an opportunity to go to try to effect some of the changes that many people wanted without the bloodshed that occurred. I don't think anything has ever impacted on me quite as severely as that, because there were so many people who were killed in that change who were not only innocent, should not have died, but who were viable resources that the country will have a long time to try and replace. People like David Neal, who was Minister of Planning and Development. Just one of the great, great personalities of the world. Great planner; man who didn't, who never took a nickel, never involved in any corruption. Cecil Dennis, who was probably the quintessence of the kind of foreign minister that most developing countries need, he was out there kicking us in the pants when we needed to be kicked in the pants, and, sometimes, much to my consternation, but really an honest man. He was trying to do good for his country. Clarence Parker, who had offered a very critical study of the Government, what needed to be done to change it who was killed. Reginald Townsend, who was the first so-called countryman to be brought into the Cabinet who was constantly trying to do good. I could just go on and name ... There are some names that I have not mentioned and I have not mentioned them deliberately, because I certainly don't think that they should have been killed the way they were. But I can understand that their involvement was such that it was not likely that they were going to get much sympathy, but there were some very tragic losses in that change. Tragic to the country. None of us can afford to lose talent like some of the talent that was lost in that. I think some of the leaders of that country now realize that. But it's too late. It's like Thurgood Marshall said the other day: "When you convict a man and find that it's a mistake and you've killed him in capital punishment, you don't have a chance to correct your mistake."

Q: One word about your relationship with the other U.S. ambassadors, black and white.

CARTER: Well, I guess I had come to the place where I was sort of the doyen of the black ambassadors. I have been around now longer than all of those who are in active service, I guess with exception of Terry Todman. Terry must have been, yeah, I guess Terry Todman may have predated me by a couple of months, but I think, because of my service as Deputy Assistant Secretary where I had supervisory responsibility for ambassadors as well as having that period of time as Ambassador to two countries and then and named Ambassador-at-Large, sort of gave me an elder role, which I don't think of myself as being, but, nevertheless, I guess I am.

And with whites, I got along reasonably well with them. They recognized that I'd paid some dues and it was not sort of a token. So, to answer your question, I did not experience any great problems with them. I think most of them were supportive and helpful and one does not always know what other people think. But I certainly didn't ... I don't recall any episode that I could really cite that would be a negative one.

Q: If you had the opportunity to go back to Liberia as Ambassador today, how would you respond to the invitation?

CARTER: Well...I assume you ask that question because ... you guess that there is something to be done, especially there. I don't think that people can generally go back again and be an ambassador in most countries where they've served. It is not a good idea. I suppose if I were asked to go back to Liberia, I would have to think hard and long before saying no simply because,

see, I do know that the country is in great need now of help and understanding. And because I have great sympathy and affection for the Liberians, it would be very difficult to say no. That's about it. I just had never thought about it before. But off the top of the head reaction, I would have difficulty saying no, because I know there is a great need and I think I could be helpful. Whether I'd be willing to go back to being an ambassador anywhere again, I'm not sure I can say yes to that. I certainly would have to think long and hard on Liberia. I have a very warm spot in my heart for that country.

HAROLD E. HORAN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Monrovia (1976-1979)

Ambassador Harold E. Horan joined the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included posts in Iran, Italy, Mali, and Liberia, and an ambassadorship to Malawi. Ambassador Horan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: We might now move from the NSC. In 1976 you were appointed as DCM in Monrovia. How did that appointment come about?

HORAN: Well, Beverly Carter had been brought in by David Newsom. He was a black USIA officer. Had been brought in by David Newsom as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. In those days, I was downstairs as a Deputy Officer Director and I got to know him through that process. When he was named Ambassador to Liberia he called and asked me if I'd be his DCM. By that time, I thought that I was ready for a change from the NSC, and so I said yes. It was that simple. Those were the days -- I don't know if it's still true or not -- when ambassadors could still choose their DCMs. So it was that simple. In the summer of '76 I went out to Monrovia.

Q: What was the situation in Liberia at that time? You had a new president . . .

HORAN: We had a new president . . .

Q: Tolbert.

HORAN: Tolbert was the president. By the time I got there, relations couldn't have been better, because President Ford in 1976 had a series of state visits to celebrate our bicentennial of our Declaration of Independence. And when I was in the NSC, as a matter of fact, I had been able to convince my superiors that we had to have at least one African head of state represented in the group of heads of state who were coming over during that year to be received by the President. There was one natural candidate for this, and that was President Tolbert.

So President Tolbert had been invited to come to the United States for a state visit in the context of the bicentennial celebration. Of course, he was very pleased. So when I got to Monrovia in the summer things couldn't have been better. I got there, I think, in June. We had our July 4th

celebration and Tolbert came. Well, presidents don't normally show up, at least in Africa, at July Fourth celebrations, but he came out of the enthusiasm he had for the fact that within a few weeks he was going to leave for a state visit to the United States. So our relations were quite good.

Q: You described what our interests were. I assume they hadn't changed -- economic, military, and then the normal ties . . .

HORAN: Trade, investment . . .

Q: . . . plus the fact that you talking about the increasing influence of blacks with this. This is also about the time, wasn't it, that television series "Roots" came out, which also spurred the interest of blacks in their roots in Africa, which meant more trips to Africa.

HORAN: Plus the fact that Liberia was a steady friend in terms of supporting us on problems of international organizations.

Q: How was Liberia seen by the other African states? Was it considered sort of a running dog of America heroism?

HORAN: It was not taken terribly seriously, I don't think, by the rest of Africa. In Africa, you know, it's a club. It's a club of heads of states who all belong to the Organization of African Unity, and they tend not to criticize each other. There are exceptions, of course, but they tend not to criticize each other or to meddle in each other's affairs. As I say, there are obviously exceptions.

I think that probably Tolbert could feel pretty good about himself if he found himself in a room full of African heads of state. He would be paid due respect. It was recognized that obviously he was a good friend of the United States. You can look and see what they got in terms of economic assistance. They used to get the highest per capita. They hate for us to say this, but they used to get the highest per capita aid of any country in Africa. That really didn't impact, I don't think, greatly on where Liberia stood in Africa. It's a boys' club. It's an exclusive club of heads of state.

Q: How did you ambassador, Beverly Carter, use you as a DCM?

HORAN: As a manager. It was, in those days, probably the largest mission in terms of the numbers of personnel and the numbers of agencies represented. So the DCM really had a managerial job to do, and Carter wanted it like that, and rightly so, I think. Carter wanted to leave himself free to negotiate with the government, to know very well the players, know the President, and he was a master at that.

Q: Tell me, with the Liberian government it became apparent later, but it was known, that there was this real class difference between those that were in the city and were descendants of American slaves, I guess they were called the Americans or something like that.

HORAN: Americo-Liberians they were called. We didn't call them that, but that's what they were called.

Q: And then those who came really from the villages beyond and who weren't getting as much of a slice of the pie. Did you have much contact with the other group?

HORAN: It's really not black and white, it's not correct to say, "The other side," because when Tubman became president he married an "up-country girl." She was magnificent. Mrs. Tubman was what they call an "up-country girl." She was a native Liberian, not an Americo-Liberian. He opened up doors for people.

It's quite true that the Americo-Liberians in the city of Monrovia held the major reins of the economy. But an interesting thing would happen, and you could see this all through the society, there were those native Liberians who were brought into Monrovia, and they would live with the American Liberians and sort of be adopted by them. You could look at the Cabinet and you would here and there find somebody whose roots were as a native Liberian and not as an Americo-Liberian.

We had to watch the situation, but we had to be very careful of the sensitivities of the Americo-Liberians about this very nomenclature. They didn't like it for obvious reasons.

Q: You might explain just what that means.

HORAN: Well, an Americo-Liberian means a person who traces his roots back to those freed American slaves who went to Liberia to found the country.

Q: This is in the 1820s.

HORAN: The 1840s. From '26 to '46. So those were the Americo-Liberians. But they began to say, "Look, if you keep talking about us being Americo-Liberians, you're just ignoring the fact that there's a lot of blood being exchanged between us and the "up-country boys," as they use to say.

The problem for Tolbert -- of course, I wasn't there when this happened -- was that corruption just got too great. I remember one of his primary aides -- as a matter of fact, he was like a chief of staff in the White House -- who was one of the people who, after the coup d'état in which Tolbert was killed, was taken on the beach of Liberia and shot by the troops. I talked to his wife several years later, and she said, "I have my own personal mourning to do, and I'll deal with that." Reggie Townsend was his name. She said, "But the problem with Tolbert was," and here's the wife of the chief of staff, "they use to have a saying in Liberia -- they've a marvelous sense of humor -- that when Tubman went up in the tree to eat apples, he'd shake the branches so that some apples would fall to the ground for others. But then when Tolbert went up in the tree to eat apples, he didn't shake the limbs."

Q: How did you deal, as an embassy, with the corruption problem? I'm talking maybe on two levels. One, just reporting on it, because it's always dangerous to report the problems of a friendly country because this sometimes gets played back to you. The other one was, how did you deal with it -- aid, embassy operations, the whole bit?

HORAN: Well, the answer is that in those days -- it's almost like Marcos, I guess, in a sense -- it had not gotten that bad.

Q: Marcos. You're referring to the former Philippine leader.

HORAN: Philippine, yes. Where we finally realized that things had gotten so bad we'd better try to ease him out. Now, we didn't do that in Liberia. When I was there, I think it's fair to say that what we did was monitor the amount, and, of course, this is very difficult to do, because you get an awful lot of rumors. But you're absolutely right.

We also had this problem that we had to maintain good relations with this country because of the U.S. interests we thought were paramount. This is one of the problems of diplomacy, isn't it?

Q: Yes.

HORAN: We talk about this all the time in the New York Times, the Washington Post, and elsewhere. When do you stop supporting a right-wing dictator in whose country you have some really important assets? That's a dilemma which will never be resolved. One just has to look at it on a case by case basis, I would guess. When was it time to start saying to Tolbert, "You've got to do something about corruption." I don't know. Maybe we should have.

Q: As DCM, there must have been times when you couldn't get something done without somebody asking for money, or something like that. Did this occur?

HORAN: No, not really. It's funny though, you talk about corruption and bribe taking and this sort of thing, but it's my sense that -- and this may be terribly naive -- other countries don't ask American officials for bribes, because we're not known for given bribes.

Q: Well, if you don't play the game, after awhile it's just more trouble than it's worth.

HORAN: My experience is that I never got asked for bribes.

Q: I found this too. As a consular officer over all the years, I had one very half- hearted offer of a bribe, this was in Yugoslavia. I just said, "We don't do that sort of thing." And that ended it.

HORAN: That's the way I feel about it. I think we're seen as a country which doesn't take bribes.

Q: How about those aid programs and all that? There must have been contractors who were siphoning off money.

HORAN: At this point in time, when I was there, the aid philosophy had shifted to almost exclusively rural agricultural, health projects with a large component of American technical assistance. You can rake off money when you're building roads and building buildings.

Q: But not for a well.

HORAN: But not for a well. I guess there are some you can do, but when you're trying to plant improved forms of rice or what have you, there's not a lot there you can rake off. So I don't recall that that was ever really a problem.

Q: The Jimmy Carter Administration came in with human rights as a major policy. Was this a problem for you at all? Were there human rights violations that you could see in Liberia?

HORAN: There had been earlier on with Tubman when he was accused by the United Nations of slavery, but in Tolbert's day, when I was there, we had our human rights report, but it was not a serious one. As a matter of fact, the country was really a very peaceful country. It wasn't until, I think, Tolbert made a huge mistake and did indeed execute some politicians.

Q: This was after you left?

HORAN: No, this was while I was there. No, it may have been after I left. Yes, it was after I left. But what he did was, there had been a scandal down in the southern part of Liberia, which was the old man Tubman's home area, and some politicians were accused of a bizarre murder of a local resident to obtain his private parts for spiritual reasons. Up until that point, in modern day Liberia there had been very, very few executions. Very few. And it was seen as a relatively peaceful country, even though it was run by a autocracy. There may obviously have been some abuses by the military, surely, but nothing of this grand scale. I can't remember the numbers of people who were, I think, hung.

I think that Tolbert flipped the society over by doing this, and changed the dynamics, and introduced into the country a sort of violence. And, of course, the upshot of all this was, and this is just one of the elements of the whole scenario, that he was overthrown in a coup d'état.

Q: When was this coup d'état?

HORAN: Let's see, it had to be 1980, because I was in Lilongwe when it happened, because I remember hearing it on the radio broadcast and recognizing the names of my friends who had been shot on the beach. That was the first experience I'd had of having close friends taken on the beach and executed. Kind of hard to deal with.

Q: Did the Jimmy Carter Administration make any difference as far your relations with Liberia or not?

HORAN: Well, not really. The only crisis that happened was that Carter was going to make a trip to Africa. He started a grandiose trip to three continents and that was squelched. Then it was announced that he was going to go to Africa, but he was just going to visit only Nigeria. Well, the ambassador shot a cable back to the Department saying, "There's no way that President Carter can come to this continent and not visit Liberia." The only President that has ever visited Liberia was Franklin Roosevelt, and he had lunch at the airport on his way to North Africa for one of the talks with Stalin and Churchill. So the ambassador got into a battle with the State Department over this.

Q: Really more over it with the White House, wasn't it?

HORAN: Of course, his conduit was the Assistant Secretary, so I guess the White House. As you know, the White House is always nervous about the use of the President's time. They've got to be very, very convinced that this is necessary.

So to make a long story short, after an exchange of telegrams, and also probably after some involvement by American business interests in Liberia, it was said, "We will come, and we will stop and have lunch at the Airport."

The ambassador had to go back and say, "That won't work, because we've done that before. You've got to come to town and have lunch." The airport's about 30 miles away from Monrovia. "You've got to come to town and have lunch with the President."

Very, very reluctantly the White House agreed that yes, Carter would land, after his trip to Lagos, would land at Roberts Field, which is the airport, and get into his car with the President of Liberia, and drive to the executive mansion have luncheon, then drive back and go home. So that was seen as a real feather in the cap for Liberia. Tolbert would have been devastated if Carter had come to Africa and not come to Liberia. So it was a two-state visit.

But once again, you have the role of the ambassador. I mean, he was convinced that it was -- as you know, we get accused of localitis -- to protect American interests, and also as to how the Americans were perceived as treating their allies. Because here's a guy who's seen, as you say, as a very close friend, maybe the water carrier, whatever, of the American interests in Africa. So the United States' President comes to Africa and ignores him. So what message does that give to people who we might be trying to influence in some other aspect? So he came, had a great motorcade down the street, and he went upstairs and had lunch, and went home. And that's all he had to do.

Q: But this is an important factor in foreign relations. Often it's the lack of doing something that causes the trouble.

HORAN: That's right. Exactly.

Q: Shall we leave Liberia at this point?

HORAN: Sure. That's fine.

**NOEL MARSH
Program Officer, USAID
Monrovia (1976-1980)**

Noel Marsh was born in San Francisco in 1931. He received his bachelor's and master's degree at the University of California in 1958. His career in US AID included positions in Nepal, Brazil, Colombia, and Liberia. Mr. Marsh was interviewed by Yin Marsh in 1999.

Q: So you returned to AID in 1976 and were assigned overseas?

MARSH: Yes, I was then assigned to USAID in Monrovia. We flew from San Francisco to Washington, DC for a brief orientation and then took the Pan Am flight direct from New York to Monrovia, a trip that later became very familiar. At that time we had two children. Our daughter was only five months old, and our active son was two and a half. We were picked up at the airport and moved into temporary housing.

Q: How long was your assignment in Liberia?

MARSH: We served two full tours in Liberia plus a few extra months, so we were there for almost four and a half years. When we first arrived there, we were put in temporary housing which was adequate but it was during a time when Liberia had record rains. We had 200 inches of rain in a six month period which, in temporary housing, was a little difficult with two small children. But we were finally assigned our permanent house which was such a relief and we were able to finally get settled into our new home for the next three and a half years.

Q: What was the nature of the Liberian program, and what was your position there?

MARSH: The program was primarily technical assistance. They had a small capital development program, but they really didn't have the resources to be able to service loans, so we concentrated mainly on agriculture and health and increased government revenue through a tax improvement project. It was a fairly traditional small technical assistance program. The Mission was structured in a more conventional way. I was the Program Officer and there were two Assistant Program Officers, a Capital Development Officer, and later on, they added on a Design Officer. During the first tour the program was expanding quite rapidly. The U.S. had a longstanding and historic relationship with Liberia from the Nation's inception so the aid program had been around for a long time. Over the years it had its ups and downs but 1976 was a time of expansion. By the end of our first tour the program was moving along reasonably well, not always smoothly, for Liberia was not a particularly easy place to work and things often took a long time to get going, but we were beginning to see some light at the end of the tunnel. The Liberian government while still tainted by corruption, was beginning to show signs of widening its political base. It was and is still a society of "haves" and "have-nots," which broke down roughly into the American Liberians being the haves and the tribal people being the have-nots. Although, sometimes this distinction had become blurred because of the intermarriage between the two classes. It was also my impression at the time that although tribal distinctions were important, tribalism and tribal rivalry were not a major factor in the social structure; at least bitter rivalries and fighting between tribes was not apparent. When we left for home leave, we felt pretty good about the job and good about the post. We had settled in comfortably. We had quite a large number of friends in the international community, and we were very much looking to our second tour.

Q: When you went back to Liberia after your home leave, did you find any noticeable difference between the first and second tour?

MARSH: Not at first, but by the time we finished our second tour it was obviously a very different place. At the beginning of the second tour, things were moving along about at the same pace. We had started a new Housing Guarantee Program so there were opportunities for new innovations and ideas and this made the program more interesting. Liberia had an active Peace Corps program and I had been made the AID/Peace Corps liaison (a role I played and enjoyed in every post I served.) Also something happened midway through the second tour that was unexpected and made life even more interesting and, as it turned out, significantly effected my future foreign service career and beyond. A situation arose that resulted in the health officer having to abruptly leave post. It was over a year before we could find a suitable replacement. During this period I had become sort of the de facto health officer along with my other duties. This was significant because we were negotiating a fairly substantial health program with the ministry. The program was complex and there was a wide gap between what USAID felt it could deliver and what the Government felt it wanted. I spent a good deal of my second tour working on this program both on the design side and helping to implement the ongoing program. It was a new experience for me to be so deeply involved in a technical program, but I must say I enjoyed it immensely. Although we never were really successful in getting the program design completed during my watch, I found the experience rewarding and performing a more of a hands-on management function very satisfying.

Q: On the whole, was it easy to work with the different ministries?

MARSH: Yes and no. There were some ministries that were fairly easy to work with. The health ministry was a mixed bag. There were some members of the health ministry who were very articulate and very dedicated; there were others who were, shall I say, less dedicated and perhaps were more interested in furthering their own agendas and positions. Corruption in the government and indeed throughout the society was a problem but with patience and perseverance things could get done. There were enough able and relatively un-corrupt people we dealt with to make some forward progress possible and we were able to achieve some of the project objectives on schedule. So long as one was aware of the limitations of the system and cognizant of the various potential road blocks it was possible to achieve results, but there was always a constant struggle to avoid becoming frustrated or cynical.

Q: Wasn't the minister the daughter of President Tolbert?

MARSH: Yes. She was a medical doctor. She was married to the Minister of Defense. Her name was Wilhemina Holder. I always thought she was good at her job and very conscientious. She was well-trained and very dedicated and really impressed me as a concerned and even somewhat humble person, despite her ties with the ruling family. She was really quite ready to get out in the field and muck around in the mud and get the job done. She became the WHO representative, and after the coup returned to work in the Ministry of Health. It was in this latter context that I had quite a few dealings with her when I returned to Liberia on TDY in connection with a Regional Child Survival project.

Q: You mentioned President Tolbert and the ruling family. I presume you were there during the coup.

MARSH: Yes, we were there both during the so called "rice riot" which occurred in April of '79 and was brought about by the government cutting the subsidy on rice. There was major civil disruption at that time. Exactly a year later, the real coup d'état occurred resulting in the assassination of the President and establishment of the Doe regime. These were both fairly harrowing and grizzly experiences to have gone through.

Q: It was a very bloody coup wasn't it?

MARSH: Yes. It was extremely bloody and made even more stressful because many of the people that I had worked with closely for over three years were taken to the beach and summarily shot. I was particularly close to Minister of Planning, Minister Neal, who was a very gentle and wonderful man, a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics. He was shot along with many others the day after the coup. Many of my Liberian colleagues were jailed. Sam Green was the Deputy Assistant Minister for planning and I worked with him very closely almost on a daily basis. I was aware that he was diabetic and when we heard he was put into a notoriously harsh jail I was devastated and feared for his life. I did write letters and also contacted some of the humanitarian groups working for the release of these prisoners to make them aware of Sam Green's plight and of his exemplary record as a civil servant. Eventually he was released and I hope that I may have in some way contributed to this favorable outcome, but of course I will never know. For the most part, there was little or nothing we could do in this situation except try to think of ways to salvage parts of the USAID program and to somehow relieve the suffering and deplorable situation that the Liberian people now found themselves in. Yes, it was a really tough time to get through.

While on the subject of the coup, I think a couple of "coup stories" might be in order and give a flavor of what things were like just before and after this event. There were two incidents that occurred just before the coup. They were unrelated but had some interesting implications. I might add the coup came as quite a surprise; as far as I know, no one expected this to happen as it did. The first indication we had that something was going on was when we turned off the bedroom window air conditioner in the morning and heard the sound of automatic weapons firing in the distance. We turned on the shortwave and picked up BBC London which reported what was happening a few blocks away. Anyway, just about three or four days before the coup I had sent all our passports into the foreign office to get our resident visas extended. Soon after the coup I had to drive around to check up on all the USAID people and I must say I was a little uneasy not having my passport on me. The only identification I had was a small wallet-size plastic card saying "I work for USAID" but it worked. The other thing which happened just a day or so before the coup involved our car. I had driven home for lunch and it was raining so the roads were very slippery. On the way back to the office some old market lady ran across the road in front of my car. I slammed on the brakes and slid into a telephone pole. Our Honda Civic was really mashed up but fortunately no one was hurt; the woman never even looked back. I didn't know it at the time but it probably was a blessing in disguise for this meant that our car was immobile and in the repair shop during and after the coup. Unlike many foreigners, we did not have to endure the ordeal of having the car stolen from us at gun point.

Q: How was life for you after the coup?

MARSH: Obviously it was pretty dramatic change from what we had been used to. The Mission closed down for several days. There was a dawn-to-dusk curfew and it was fairly dangerous to drive around. At the time, the Mission Director was out of the country, and I was Acting Deputy Director so I did have to drive around and check on people. There was little or no phone communication at that time and most of us did not have two-way radios. The few walky-talky radios the Mission owned had very short range. It was pretty hairy driving around town and there were times when things got quite tense. One good thing about the coup, from our point of view, was that it wasn't anti-American or directed against foreigners in particular but rather it pitted "the haves" against "the have-nots" and much of the hostility was directed towards the upper class Liberians, but sometimes we got caught in the crossfire. Fortunately, no one in the official American community was physically harmed, but we did go through some anxious moments and faced situations that were potentially dangerous. Let me recount a couple.

We lived a few miles out of town in an area called Congo town. There was a cluster of about four or five houses right on the beach; each had its own compound and gate and were some distance apart. We were somewhat isolated from the main foreign community; ironically, our gate had been broken and was repaired only two days before the coup. One evening a bus load of soldiers who had quite a bit to drink drove by and got stuck in the sand just outside of our house. Luckily for us there had been an electrical storm and power outage an hour or so before, and everything was in pitch darkness. The soldiers may have been unaware that our house was there or just too drunk to care but they were notably disturbed that their bus was stuck in the sand. I'm sure they had been out cruising around town intending to loot whatever they could. So, in their anger, they started shooting their machine guns in the air, and bullets started ricocheting off our house at which point we beat a hasty retreat into an internal staircase that was surrounded by concrete walls. We stayed there for several hours until they calmed down and went away leaving the bus behind. We were hoping against hope that they wouldn't break into the house, and fortunately for us they never did. I must say our kids performed very well; they kept totally quiet, so that incident passed without any serious consequences. The next day another group of soldiers came back to strip the bus of everything that was moveable but they did not bother us. We were fortunate and nothing bad happened, but these were tense times.

Somewhere along the way the decision was made to quietly send all the dependents home but to avoid making it look like a panic evacuation. We tried to get the people out gradually, and used some euphemistic term like "advanced home leave" or something like that. It was in effect an evacuation of all dependents. The airport was 40 miles out of town where it had originally been built during World War II to serve the Firestone rubber plantation. To get to the airport it was necessary to go through a couple of military checkpoints and we knew these could be very hazardous, especially after dark. Since driving unescorted at night was not really an option we had to go out in the day time even though the Pan Am flight did not leave until 1:00 A.M. The logistics of getting to the airport, getting people safely into the terminals were complicated. About five weeks after the coup a large group of dependents, most of the dependents from AID, were scheduled to leave. We had done a lot of preplanning, arranging hotel rooms for our people at the Robertsfield Hotel, just across from the terminal building. We had to go to the embassy

and borrow their diplomatic plates because in those days USAID used gratis plates, and these didn't carry much weight. It was much safer to have diplomatic plates, so we used to borrow the plates, put them on the USAID vehicles, and then return them to the embassy after trip. Also to create an illusion of being in touch with our home base we carried a portable two-way radio. This radio was hopelessly out of range once you got a few miles out of town, but we took it anyway so we could fake communications with headquarters. On the particular evening that most of our people were scheduled to depart, I think there were about 25-30 people in the convoy. I went out with one half of the convoy and another AID officer accompanied the other half. Our job was to see the dependents safely on the plane. We passed through the checkpoints with our phony communications with no problems. However, just before leaving I got a call from one of the people in my office, who was married to a Liberian, telling me he had heard through his Liberian contacts that the hotel was unsafe that night. Soldiers were getting drunk at the bar and then going around to the rooms robbing people. We decided not go to the hotel and went directly to the airport departure lounge, which seemed to be fairly secure and safe. The rest of the airport had been shut up, and there were bullet holes all over the place. The idea was to get into the departure lounge as quickly as possible and wait it out there. We were almost through customs; a little money had changed hands and everything seemed to be going smoothly when my five year old son spotted a soldier guarding the entrance to the departure lounge. He was a big guy and had a very protruding stomach. This was just too much of an inviting target for my son to resist so he rushed up to him and gave him a gentle playful punch in the tummy. All of our group witnessed this event in horror until the soldier put down his machine gun, picked up my son, who fortunately spoke very good Liberian English, and started to play with him. They started talking and laughing. After that I decided to simply say "we're with him." We all got into the departure lounge safely and with a great sigh of relief.

Q: So it was obviously a pretty tense situation.

MARSH: It was very tense. Looking back at it, some of the stories seems a little amusing now, but at the time, it was quite scary. We managed to wait it out in the lounge until the plane came in. On the way back from the airport the other AID officer and myself lucked out by being able to attach ourselves to the U.S. military attaché's convoy. He had come out with his family and a group of embassy dependents, including the ambassador's wife, who also left that evening. The trip back was a snap, we just hooked onto his convoy and were even saluted to as we rolled past the checkpoints.

Q: So basically, the women and children were evacuated while you guys remained behind. How long did you remain after they had left?

MARSH: I stayed about three months. My tour was up in a couple of months anyway, so I stayed about a month beyond my regular tour of duty and then returned for a rotation tour in Washington.

Q: Obviously the coup was a terrible thing, how did you guys manage through the transition from the old Tolbert regime and the new government?

MARSH: It was pretty dicey at times. When the Mission Director, Ray Garufi, returned to Post he faced a totally new situation. Fortunately, he had always been good at keeping in touch with some of the opposition groups, so after the coup he had some contacts in the new government. People from various opposition groups would show up at his house for discussions during the uncertain and chaotic days following the government takeover. In this period just following the coup there was not much official contact between the USAID and the new government. I think the informal meetings the Mission Director had with these various concerned Liberians were useful and kept us a little more informed about what was going on. The AID program was obviously thrown into a real upheaval and we didn't know how or what to continue or even who to work with since our former counterparts had either been killed, arrested or simply dismissed. The Mission was officially closed. It took several weeks before things began to settle down to the point when we were able to start making contact with the new government. In order to keep busy and in an attempt to try to constructively think through what we should be doing next we formed an informal "think tank" group within my office to brainstorm any and all ideas that came up. It was an interesting group. It included two of our direct-hire USAID staff members who were married to Liberians, the program economist and an anthropologist assigned to the agriculture division. Both of these guys not only had professional qualifications to bring to the table, they also, because of their close family connections, gave them a lot more insight about what was going on behind the scenes than most of us were privy to. There were about four of us in the core group and we used to meet frequently and sit around the table to talk about anything that came to mind. We jokingly referred to it as the "kitchen cabinet." Other people would join us from time to time and we developed a lot of ideas. Some of these ideas were pretty far out, and some of them were quite sound. We would float and discuss these ideas to the Mission Director. When we agreed on something that was possible and might have some merit, he would float the idea at one of the daily Country Team meetings. A few were discussed and may have added something to the discussions and efforts to deal with the difficult situation that we suddenly found ourselves confronting. Must admit, a few were quite creative such as the thought that since Liberia was using U.S. dollars as its currency, it might be possible to do some tricky things with the Federal Reserve to offer a carrot to force early elections. It was probably naive to think Doe would even entertain such a notion but at that time we knew very little about him or his intentions so we felt it was something worth raising. Am not sure how much our so called kitchen cabinet notions contributed but think we did come up with some interesting ideas and it was also a good way to keep occupied until we could get back to work.

Q: How would you sum up your overall experience in Liberia?

MARSH: We enjoyed the first three years, up until the time of the coup, even though it was not an easy place to work. Unlike the other posts I served at I found it hard to develop strong social bonds with my counterparts. One reason we found it difficult to get to know the Liberians on a personal basis may have been their different lifestyles and norms of behavior. Many couples we knew tended to almost lead separate lives and rarely attended nonofficial events together. It was not uncommon for the men to have mistresses and even when this was not the case men would often just "hang out with the guys." We found, even when invited, very few couples would actually attend our parties. During the four and a half years we were there we ended up with surprisingly few Liberian friends. We did manage to interact with and appreciate the ordinary people that we came into contact with as part of our every day living, marketing, dining out, etc.

Liberians have a great sense of humor and kind of a simple charm that was very engaging. A case in point was something the common people picked up on soon after the coup. One, the motto used early in the coup was; "In the name of the people, the struggle continues." It wasn't long before you heard other versions of this coming out of in the marketplace. Their twist on it was, "In the name of the people, the corruption continues." This sort of typifies their humor and ability to make light of serious and often desperate situations. We were also very moved when my wife went down to the market place to say goodbye to the various market ladies she had dealt with over the years. Many of them were in tears and some were actually sobbing in what we can assume was a genuine display of affection and sadness to see her leave. Your question was what was our overall impression of Liberia. It was my first assignment in Africa and during the time we were there I grew very fond of Africa and the Africans. I continued to have close association with the region for many more years after living in Monrovia and traveled and worked all over the continent up until 1997 when I decided to retire from consulting. The Liberian experience was quite an introduction and, in many ways, it was a tough post. I know people who served there did not like it at all, but we, for the most part, enjoyed our stay and, on balance, I think it was a positive and good experience.

JULIUS W. WALKER JR.
Deputy Chief of Mission
Monrovia (1978-1981)

Ambassador Julius W. Walker, Jr. was born February 21, 1927 in Plainview, Texas. After serving in the United States Marine Corps, he received his bachelor's degree from The University of Texas. His career has included positions in Malta, Burundi, Chad, England, Liberia and Upper Volta. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: You left the heady world of dealing with the White House to move on to Liberia where you served from 1978-81. How did that assignment come about?

WALKER: Personnel had called me and said, "Julius, you are going to be coming up for reassignment before too long and we are going to put together some lists of deputy chiefs of mission for various places. The first one is Liberia. Would it be all right for your name to be on that list?" I said, "Sure. I would be delighted." About three days later I had a telephone call from Monrovia. It was from Beverly Carter, then Ambassador to Liberia. He said, "Julius I just got a list of five names from the Department and yours is on it. I said I didn't need the other four names, that one was all I wanted. Will you come?" And I said, "I sure will."

I worked at IO in my office until about 8:00 on Friday night before leaving at noon on Saturday for Monrovia. I went home, packed. Savannah stayed here. Our son was to come with us. Our middle daughter stayed in the US to continue ballet training in New York. Our older daughter was at college. So only the boy came. But Savannah couldn't leave because she was working for George Mahon, a member of congress. Every time we would come back to town, she would go back to work for him. Mr. Mahon was retiring and wanted her to stay with him through the end

of the session. So I went out in June and she came along in October. She didn't stay until the end of the session but long enough to get him organized.

I worked until late at night, came home and packed. Got up the next morning, mowed the lawn, took a quick shower, changed and went to the airport. I took the family dog with me so I would have some company. Got on the plane and Sunday morning I got off at Roberts Field in Liberia. I had been there before and I was astounded at the changes. Not only was the airport much larger and looked better, but there was a fully paved road all the way from Roberts Field into Monrovia. That had been a distance of 70 miles but the paved road cut it down to about 55 miles. The city had grown out of all proportion. It wasn't until I was in the middle of the town, the business district, that I began to recognize one or two things from my visit there in 1957. It was a bustling metropolis - a wonderful place.

I arrived at 6:00 AM, got some breakfast and got a driver to drive me around town to see how the city looked. I got back and went to bed, got up the next morning and went to work. For the next two weeks I called the secretary in Liberia by the name of the secretary in Washington. That was really no way to change jobs. It was way too quick. But Bev wanted me out there because he had a lot of traveling he had to do. He was on a commission in Geneva and was up country in Liberia a good bit.

I ran the office virtually from the second week I was there until Beverly left. As I recall he departed about November to come back to the States to run the Office of State and Local Governments. Then I was Chargé d'affaires for a long period until Bob Smith arrived sometime in August or September of the following year. I was Chargé d'affaires through a OAU conference there in Monrovia and at the time in April of the rice riots of 1978.

The Liberian government proposed increases in the price of rice so farmers would have enough incentive to grow it. But people in the city looked on this as a benefit for the President who was the larger rice grower in Liberia and they rioted. The riot was led by a fellow named Gabriel Baccus Matthews, who had been a student. He was a young fellow and had been in the Foreign Service and was kicked out, I think, because he was a dissenter. After the rice riots he was locked up along with other leaders of the group.

There was a period of about three days when Monrovia was an utter shambles. There was no government. Nobody was doing anything. A number of people had been killed during the riots. The government was shaken severely by it. The President, William R. Tolbert, was holed up doing nothing. There were looters on the streets and everybody including the military was out of control. It was a very frightening time. And was a forerunner of what would come the year following during the coup d'etat.

During that time, my first interests were in what was happening to the Americans and their safety. I was also concerned for the safety of other expatriate elements. In particular, the Lebanese community. The Lebanese performed the great service in Liberia of middlemen who got the goods out all over the country for sale. They suffered heavily in all of this. Their ambassador had no staff. He was a good friend and I helped him make representations and actually got some of his citizens out of harm's way.

I worked closely with our military contingent there. We had a Defense Attaché, and a military mission to Liberia which helped in the procurement of materiel, brought training missions and gave any other any assistance they could. They helped the Liberians in bringing order during this time. Not to the degree that was done later, but some. After the rice riots, things calmed down and the government went to work very hard to prepare for the OAU conference. This was a tremendous financial burden on the country because the government built a big beautiful new conference center which couldn't be used for much else later. It also built a big hotel which I don't suppose was ever filled again. They brought in a cruise ship to use as a floating hotel because they couldn't get all of the people in to the conference center cabanas...each head of state had his own cabana, there were about 50 of those built. Housing went this way: those just below top level were in the hotel and those below that were put in the ship. The ship had been the USS America. It had another name by the time it pulled in, but you could see on the bow "America" had been the name. I had crossed the Atlantic on that ship once going to Burundi. It made me nostalgic when I saw it.

During the conference I had the responsibility of dealing not only with the host government but also with the other heads of state that were there. For instance, the US government decided to invite the President of Guinea to the United States as an official visitor. I called on him at the conference with the formal invitation. While it was fun, it was not what I was in Liberia to do.

I also had several discussions with the Foreign Minister of Egypt who was, I believe, leading his delegation. And there were others I got to talk to. It was quite a busy time.

The city looked beautiful, many streets were paved for the conference, including the one in front of our house. It was a beautiful house on top of a ridge at the highest point in the area. On one side we could see a marvelous mangrove swamp and on the other the open Atlantic. The house was named Sea View Villa. It was large, perfectly made for representation. We had a big kitchen, big dining room, big living room area, lots of porches that went around three sides of the house, beautiful gardens and we did one heck of a lot of representation there.

Q: How did you deal with the Liberian government when Beverly Carter was there?

WALKER: The government was similar in setup to the government of the United States. They had only recently changed the names of the various governmental departments from departments to ministries. And they had changed the names of the people in charge from secretaries to ministers. So, from time to time, Cecil Dennis, who was the Liberian Foreign Minister, would forget and refer to himself as the Secretary of State or refer to somebody else as the Secretary of the Treasury, whatever.

Beverly dealt directly with Tolbert. He told me to cover the Foreign Ministry and have good relations with the Minister. I set out to establish those relations straight off. Cecil Dennis was a tall, handsome, intelligent, outgoing person with a good sense of humor. He had a bit of a chip on his shoulder about the United States. He felt the US didn't give the assistance it should have, but he was always charming with me and helpful.

When I first called on him he said something I'll never forget. We had been talking for a while and he looked again at my card and said, "Now, let's see, your name is Julius Waring Walker, Jr." And I said, "That is right." He said, "You know, that sounds like a good Liberian name." I said, "It sure does." His name was Clarence Cecil Dennis, Jr. And there were so many names like that in Liberia. He went on to say, "You know there are a number of Walkers here. Where are you from?" I said, "Well, I am from Texas but my people came from Alabama and South Carolina." He says, "I bet you some of those Walkers are kin to you." I said, "I bet they are." I said, "And I bet there are some here with other names that are probably kin to me too." He laughed uproariously. He liked to play on things like that and on the ties between the United States and Liberia. I appreciated that. I thought it was good. I liked to play on those too. We needed to keep in mind the historical relationship between the two countries.

I saw a great deal of Cecil. I got into deep trouble with him at one point. A consular officer did it. Our consul was a good officer. He was hard working, but had a short temper and was in a high pressure job. The Liberians thought they had a God-given right to come to the United States and that the consul was simply a stumbling block. This gentleman didn't have much sense of humor and really had a lot of problems in the job. It seems that one day he received a visa application from a Liberian family to go to the United States for a visit. The backup paper for this was signed by the Vice President, Benney Warner. The consul placed the paper on the table and proceeded with the interview. When he was refused the visa, the applicant maintained the consul had shown disrespect to the Vice President by throwing the paper on the table. He may have thrown it. I wasn't there. I don't know. He said he didn't mean disrespect. I am sure that he didn't.

Dennis called us on the carpet. He was upset both by "disrespect" non-issuance of the visa. He said failure to issue the visa was disrespect to the Vice President.

My approach to an office is to back my officers totally and I stayed with the consul on this. I said there was nothing disrespectful, these people simply did not meet the qualifications. We argued it back and forth and were asked by Dennis to go see the Vice President. When we got there, the two of us again, it was obvious this was a major issue.

At that point the consul on his own said he would be glad to look at the problem one more time. I did not lean on him. I did everything I could to keep the pressure off him, but sometimes these things happen. Finally he decided to issue the visa. The applicant was a pilot and he got visas for his wife and two sons. The consul's initial finding was correct. They never returned to Liberia.

Nevertheless it became a point of honor with the Foreign Minister who threatened persona non grata proceedings if the visas were not issued. I talked to him later, when it was just the two of us, and told him I hoped we were not going to have to handle every visa case personally. I told him we would be in the visa business up to our eye teeth. I said, "My consular officer knows what he is doing and is applying our law as fairly as he can." Well it was the only case I got from the Foreign Minister.

Nevertheless I was relieved when the consular officer's tour ended a bit early for an urgent assignment to Manila. We got another consular officer who was able to handle Liberians much better. She didn't allow any more people to go to the United States, but she found a way of telling

people "no" without making them angry. Have you ever noticed some people can tell you "yes" and make you mad? And others to can tell you "no" and make you happy? She had that ability. She worked long and hard, and did a wonderful job. Her name is Barbara Tobias. I nominated her for outstanding consular officer and she got runner up that year. She has been runner up a couple of other times, at other posts. She is a marvelous consular officer. She was in charge during the coup, when we had to make some very fast decisions about a lot of people because many were running for their lives and wanted out of the country.

She came to me just once. Again, I was Chargé. She said, "I don't want to have to bother you about every case, but I need guidance. Should I apply a strict consular policy on Liberians that want visas at this point, particularly the Americo-Liberians?" (They were the descendants of freed slaves who established Liberia and the ones who were being persecuted.)" I said, "No ma'am. Please follow a liberal policy." That was all she needed.

From then on she handled it and there were no squawks. Of course there were problems -- there were long lines, etc. But the way she handled it was outstanding. And that is the difference between a really excellent consular officer and the run-of-the-mill consular officer. But you have that in any field - consular, admin, economic - whatever. In an emergency you have to be able to count on your people.

Q: Before we come to the coup, what was your impression of how the embassy was dealing with the situation in Liberia where you have Americo-Liberians who were sort of the upper class and running things and another group who were more indigenous to the country with more tribal roots? What were our ties to both these groups? How did the embassy fit into this situation?

WALKER: The embassy fitted with both sides. We had good political officers and good econ officers. But the political officers dealt with this, as did the front office...the Ambassador and DCM. The Ambassador knew so much about the country it was unbelievable. He had gone to college with Liberians. He helped start an organization in Liberia, a Greek letter service organization. Bev's ties were basically with the Americas. They ran things.

There were also a few indigenous Liberians in the group at the top. We didn't differentiate between them. We tried hard to know everyone. I left most of the social things on that level to Bev because he was so well "wired in" to them. I established twice-weekly meetings for Bev to sit with embassy officers and respond to questions. They got lots of political and economic information he had picked up and didn't have time to report. We "milked" him regularly.

I set out to establish good relations with the members of the legislative assembly. I started with a reception for them and got to know several very well. Here I made good contacts with a lot of indigenous leaders who were in good with the party in power. Most remained influential after the coup.

There was a tremendous amount of blindness about what was going by the Liberian officials. Cecil Dennis at one point invited the diplomatic corps to a play written and produced at the university. It was ostensibly about apartheid in South Africa. We went. Dennis had already seen it. The chiefs of mission were there and quite a number from the American embassy in particular

as the invitation was for all the Dip corps. When the play was over a couple of the guys from the political section said, "Julius, we can't believe Dennis invited us to see this." I was of the same opinion. You see, everything said in the play about "South Africa," was equally applicable to in Liberia between the ins, (the True Whig party) and the outs, basically the indigenous Liberians.

There were some indigenous Liberians in the True Whig party and some had positions of power. But they were the only indigenous Liberians with power. All the rest were out. In many ways Liberia was a minority tribe running the affairs of the nation, as in South Africa. The minority in South Africa being the white tribe. Similar situation but with a minority black tribe in Liberia.

We had good contacts with many of those people. This fellow Baccus Matthews, who I referred to earlier as leader of the rice riots, was one of the very first Liberians I met. A political officers was having a party and had invited Baccus to it and asked me if I wanted to come. I said, "I darn sure do." This was only two or three days after I arrived. I met him then and I saw him fairly often afterwards. Of course Baccus had been "on the inside" with the True Whigs but fell out and identified totally with the indigenous Liberians. During the rice riots he came to the embassy and asked if he could be given asylum. I sat with him in the lobby of the embassy and explained our policy of asylum as it had been given to me by the Department of State. I said, "Gabe, I will be glad to bring you in here, but I want you to know what constraints I have. I can bring a person in to save him from imminent physical danger by a mob but by directive from my government I must turn that person over to the appropriately constituted authorities at the earliest possible time. This is not the place where you want to come. I cannot really offer you succor." He went back out on the streets and subsequently was picked up and arrested. I didn't see him again until a year later when the coup took place. He showed up at the embassy to conduct me to see Samuel K. Doe...to give me safe passage to see Doe. He had been in prison all this time and came out wearing his prison clothes plus a prison shirt that he had borrowed from some one. He was wearing shorts and a shirt. No shoes. He had a heavy beard and really did look terrible. I knew he had been treated roughly.

But all of that served me in good stead because he knew our policy on asylum and I didn't have to explain to him as I did to other Liberians. I said, "If you are in imminent physical danger from a crowd we can bring you in, but we will have to turn you over to the constituted authorities as soon as we decide who they are."

Q: What was our policy towards Liberia, pre-coup time?

WALKER: Our policy, once again, was to encourage stability and continuity in government...democratic process in Liberia. We gave support to the Liberian government. In the year prior to the coup we gave about \$5 million for development and a certain amount of military assistance. One thing we did was train a group of non-commissioned officers. As it happened many in the coup d'etat that overthrew Tolbert had been in the contingent we trained. My daughter, who came that summer and was given a job in the military mission, typed training certificates and one she typed was for Samuel K. Doe.

We wanted the Liberians to rely less on us and more on themselves. We felt our presence there was stronger than it had to be - that Liberians could and should rely on themselves more. There

were those in the mission, and I was one, who felt we could have given more assistance than we did. But most felt we were doing about what we should. The US was certainly the powerful influence in Liberia. I had served before in Francophone areas in Africa and in a British area in Malta so I found it unusual to be working in the number one embassy.

The French Ambassador always joked that the Americans sent two ambassadors to Liberia. The Deputy Chief of Mission had historically gone on to ambassadorial appointments and he said this proved that the US took Liberia very seriously. I think he was right and we were then taking them more seriously than we had. I remember a comment from Mrs. Tubman, the widow of the former President of Liberia, William V. S. Tubman. She laughingly said at one point that until about 1950 or 1955 the Liberians more or less ran the American embassy because the U.S. had sent people there who were heavily sympathetic to them and the Liberians could dictate the information that went back to the US government. Of course she said that in jest, but only somewhat. There was some truth in it. But from the mid-50s on we began to look with increasing concern on Liberia and with increasing hope that Liberia would become a strong influence on the west coast of Africa and throughout the continent. For a while that was the case. Certainly it was during the Tubman era.

But Mr. Tolbert didn't have the same strength or the understanding Tubman had. I remember after the coup there were groups of people who called for "Baby Shad" to take over. This was the son of William V. S. Tubman, Shad, short for Shadrack. Shad Tubman was educated in the US, was very well-known, lives here now. He was something of a playboy but very popular. And there were people who were on the streets shouting for him to lead their revolution.

I asked an indigenous Liberian friend why Tubman's memory was bright in people's minds and Tolbert's so dark...Tolbert had just been assassinated. He said, "Well, Julius, I'll explain it this way. Liberians feel that out of every dollar Tubman stole he kept a dime and gave 90 cents back. But of every dollar Tolbert stole, he kept 90 cents and gave a dime back."

We thought something was going to happen - possibly a coup. Too many people were unhappy with Tolbert. The True Whig party, itself, was upset with him. We expected a change of government in the summer of 1979. We didn't know quite how it would take place, but thought it would probably be a palace coup. The last thing we expected was for the armed forces to do something because the leadership in the armed forces was historically weak and inept. We never thought the non-commissioned officers would mount a coup. It was oversight on our part. I guess we should have had contacts with the NCOs, but I don't know where we would have established it. The coup was also a surprise to our military who dealt closely with the Liberian military.

Q: Let's stop here.

Q: Today is May 4, 1992 and this is a continuing interview of Ambassador Julius Walker. We were talking about the coup in Liberia.

WALKER: Yes, that the coup itself was not a shock to us but that it came from the NCOs was. We expected either a palace coup in the True Whig party or, at most, something which involved the university and the liberals.

The night the coup took place was weird. I was Chargé again. We had been to a party Friday night and had been asked to stop by the home of the Guinean Ambassador, the Dean of the Dip. Corps and was leaving over the weekend, a permanent change of station. We stopped at his house, had a few drinks and danced some. We got home around midnight, got into bed and I had just gotten into a really sound sleep when the telephone rang. It was the Agence France Press fellow. He said, "Mr. Walker there is a lot of shooting at the Executive Mansion. Do you know anything about it?" I said, "Lord no, why would I know anything about it?" He said, "Well, the Americans seem to know about everything that takes place here in Liberia. I just thought you might know about that." I said, "No, I don't."

I was really groggy. I sat on the edge of the bed trying to get my wits about me when the phone rang again. It was Frank Catanoso, our public affairs officer, who also lived in the Executive Mansion area. I recognized his voice and said, "Frank, you are going to tell me there is shooting down there and I know that. I don't know what it is or anything else, but I am going to the office and you ought to get there too if you can." He said, "I don't think I can get out of the house. The shooting is heavy here and my house is taking rounds from time to time. I can hear them hit and see the plaster drop." I said, "Well, then you and your wife get on the floor, pull the mattress off the bed and don't get above window level at all." They didn't. For two days they stayed on the floor and crawled everywhere they went because of the heavy shooting.

I got in my car and started to town. Monrovia is on a peninsula and its narrowest point is where the Executive Mansion sits. In the Mansion locale, there were only two roads that ran between my house and the chancery building. I took the one the farthest from the Executive Mansion and was sailing along nicely thinking everything was okay. I had a distinctive car, a big red Ford. I rounded a corner en route to the chancery but still a mile from it, and suddenly there were dozens of soldiers in front of me shooting. I threw on the brakes and started to back up. Before I could, a big sergeant came running toward me with his gun at port arms. I stopped. He poked his head into the car and said, "You from the American embassy sir?" With no idea as to whether we were at the top of his hunting list I said, "That is right." He turned to the men and yelled, "Cease fire." They stopped shooting and he bowed and waved me ahead. The thought went through my mind that he might tell them to start shooting when I got in front of them - but he didn't. When I got about a block beyond I heard, "begin fire" and they started shooting again. I later learned the house was empty but they thought it was full of armed Americo Liberians.

I got into the office. We didn't know anything as to what was going on. We just knew there was shooting all over town and we were short on information. None of our regular sources had much information. We telephoned virtually everyone we knew. Embassy staff were trickling into the office so that by 4:00 we were fairly complete. We established an open telephone line to Washington. The rebels were not well enough organized to cut off outside communications. We retained regular telephonic communications throughout the coup period. Had they cut the lines, it would have made no difference to us as we had the area telecommunication relay office run by the Agency, this gave us full potential for communicating with Washington.

But I had an open Washington telephone line. When we needed anything we would whistle into the phone and somebody in the Op Center would pick it up and answer.

About 7:00 in the morning the martial music stopped. By the way, that is one of the things I have learned about coup d'etats in Africa. The radios play absolutely the worst military music anyone ever heard and they play it over and over and over. It is almost the worst part of the coup. Well, the music stopped and they announced the government was in the hands of Samuel K. Doe, a Master Sergeant. We were stunned. No one ever heard of him.

We were busy sending information in, doing short telegram and sitreps, bringing the Op Center up to date when about 10:00 the music stopped and the announcement was made that Samuel Doe wanted to see the American Ambassador and the Russian Ambassador. No sooner was the announcement made than my phone rang. It was my Soviet colleague who asked if I was going. I said, "Not until I get an escort because there is too much shooting on this side of town." He was on the other side of the Executive Mansion. I said, "How is it over there?" He said, "It is just as bad over here and I, also, am going to have an escort before I go."

I had no sooner hung up the phone then word came that Gabriel Baccus Matthews, who was one of the leftists, one of the leaders of the opposition groups, one of the very first people I met when I got to Liberia, was down at the gate to see me. Gabe Matthews, I think I mentioned him in talking about the rice riots. I went down to see him and asked what I could do for him. He said, "I have come to escort you to see Samuel Doe." I said, "Fine. I will be ready in five minutes." None of our local staff had come in that morning for obvious reasons so there was no one to drive the official car. I didn't want to drive through the shooting and then be faced with the interview on arrival, so I found a junior political officer who said he would be delighted to drive. He brought the car around. He was so nervous that he scraped the side of the car on a wall. Nevertheless, we drove down with Matthews in the car with me and a sergeant in a taxi in front of us. The Sergeant stuck a rifle out the window as a sign to anyone in the area not to shoot.

We went down the road without problems, obviously there was no traffic. We got to the Executive Mansion and found it had been shot up during the night and the automatic sprinkler system had come on, drenching the building. I met with Doe in a large gazebo. He and his committee were there to meet me.

It was warm, hot. Liberia is hot and steamy. This building was full of the odor of perspiration and fear. I don't know how to tell you what fear smells like, but once you smell it you know what it is. It is overpowering. Doe and his group sat on one side of the large room. A chair in the center of the room was indicated as the place for me to sit. I sat and Doe started to talk then seemed to decide we weren't close enough. He began hiking his chair closer as he sat in it. He would hold the chair, jump a bit and move forward. I began hiking mine towards him. And for a while we looked like a couple of turtles bouncing along the floor until we were almost face to face - only two feet apart.

Doe was scared. He had not really expected to be where he was, but once there he didn't intend to give it up easily. He was certain forces were coming from all corners to attack him and he

wanted America to send him strong support. I told him I had no idea what we would be able to do. That I would relay his request, but I was certain the United States wouldn't support any regime killing its own people and the killing had to stop. The Liberian people had to be treated humanely.

I should have mentioned this earlier. Before we left the embassy compound, I picked up the phone, whistled and got George Trail, our desk officer at that point. I said, "George, I have to go see Sergeant Doe, is there anything you want me to tell him?" This was about 6:00 AM Washington time and Saturday, at that. George said, "I don't think I will be able to get anything but I will try." He checked around for a minute and reported back, "I'm sorry, Julius. You'll have to wing it." I said, "All right I will, but I'm going to report fully what I said and I expect you sobs to back me up." He said he would do the best he could.

An amusing thing happened driving back to the chancery. There was one spot where the road widens to four lanes. When we got there a car wrecked car was on one side with the windshield wipers still going and the windows shot out. There was a broken wine bottle, sitting on its bottom in the middle of the road. I could tell at once that, if we ran over it we were certain to blow the tire. I thought, "as wide as this street is I'll bet that kid hits that bottle and darn if he didn't. He hit it head on and blew the tire. He said, "Oh, Mr. Walker, I am so sorry. I will get out and change the tire." I said, "The hell you will. You will drive slowly so you don't ruin the rim but we are going into the compound before that wheel comes off. I am not going to sit out here with bullets whizzing around while you change a damn tire."

Q: Do you have any feel as to whom they were shooting at?

WALKER: The shooting was coming from the soldiers who were shooting up homes of prominent Americo Liberians, those who were in power or in positions of influence. It finally became clear what they were doing.

During this time we had a number of contacts with people who had been in the government. I talked on the phone with Cecil Dennis, who had been the Foreign Minister. Cecil knew what our policy was on asylum because I had explained it to him the year before when Gabe Matthews had sought asylum. Thus he didn't ask for assistance from me. However, at that time, he was in the home of an American. He had decided he wanted to give himself up and to try to get his status regularized. The fellow in whose home he was staying in, Jim Dunn, helped him do this. He found some people who said they would take him into custody without harm. Others contacted us and would have been interested in permanent asylum had we been in position to offer it. But we couldn't.

Later on, Congressman Solarz was told erroneously that we had refused asylum to these people. He had a big open hearing here in Washington and my name was mentioned prominently. I was in a tough spot as a result. But I had a stroke of luck. Leon Dash, a reporter from the Washington Post was in Monrovia covering the events. He got word of the hearing and asked me if I would like to talk about it. I did. I told him the entire situation just described ...what had happened during the time and that we had not refused any requests for asylum. His story ran the same day

as the hearing and effectively pulled its teeth. But Solarz would have used me or anyone else he could as a whipping boy, to further advance his political career.

During the aftermath of the coup, we had a lot of problems. Telephone communications within Liberia got very bad. Circuits began to go bad. We were dependent to large extent to our walkie talkie radios. One of the problems we soon saw was that Americans and other expatriates would be harassed badly if we didn't get support from the government. So I got down to Doe and talked to him about it and got his permission to post an embassy officer at the Executive grounds with a radio so that we could contact Doe anytime we got word Americans or others were in trouble. Soldiers would then be sent to bring calm.

Q: Did you have the feeling at this time that Doe and his group were pretty much in control?

WALKER: They were more in control than anyone else. They were the government. The Tolbert government was gone - its members had been locked up or killed. Tolbert, himself, had been awakened and was disemboweled by these guys...by a fellow named Penue, one of the group. He took a bayonet and slashed the man from stomach to throat. It was really a tough time. A lot of people were killed.

I was in the car about four days after the coup and was stopped at an intersection near the cemetery. I watched a dump truck tip its load and dozens of bodies went into an open grave. A backhoe had been working there working for some time and I wondered what it was doing. When I saw those bodies going into it I understood. I later learned Tolbert's body was in the group. It was a tough time.

The fellow in charge of the U.S. military group, an American colonel, Bob Gosney, also a Texan, had been in my class at the War College. He mobilized his seven or eight officers. They were unarmed but went out in vans and station wagons with the Liberian military. They stopped people who were armed and asked them what they were doing. If they couldn't explain their presence the unarmed Americans took their weapons, put them in the vehicles and when they got a load they took them to the Barkley Training Compound and had them locked up. They did this for many days - until the rough treatment ended. They got looters and shooters off the street. The amount of courage this took was enormous because they were unarmed. There was so much respect for the American presence there that the soldiers followed the American's orders without question. None of them were seriously threatened.

I probably was involved in one of the most threatening situations the day after the coup - Sunday morning. I was driving to the office and was stopped by a soldier wildly pointing a rifle at me who forced me off the road. He was vibrating, shaking so badly he could barely speak English. He saw my briefcase and wanted to know what was in it. I said, "Papers." He had me dump it out on the ground and I did. He was pawing through it and I heard a car come by and the brakes squeak. Somebody shouted out "That is the American Chargé d'affaires." That really surprised me because Liberians normally didn't use that title. But this guy not only knew who I was but knew the function I had at that moment. He was in a taxi with some other soldiers. They jumped out and came running over with rifles at port arms to learn what was going on. They immediately accused the soldier of insulting me and insulting the United States. They grabbed him and took

him off to Sergeant Doe insisting I go with them. It was a good thing that I went. I told Doe that I understood that the fellow might have been drunk or something else and not to be too hard on him.

However, I had been called earlier by Edward Martins, the Nigerian Ambassador, who asked if I could help. On Friday, his Foreign Minister and the Foreign Ministers of Togo and Benin had arrived to pick up Cecil Dennis for a peace-making mission in another part of Africa. They were to have left on Saturday but their chartered plane couldn't get out as the airports were closed. He asked if I knew any way he could get the delegation out of Liberia. I said, "You'll have to see Doe. He's the only one making decisions." The Ambassador replied, "Well, I can't get in to see him." As a result of the incident with the drunk or doped up soldier I found myself again in front of Doe. I told him of the problem and explained, "This is an embarrassment to you and your country. You need to get these people out at once." He saw the situation at once and asked, "Who knows about it?" I said, "The Nigerian Ambassador." He said, "Bring him to me."

I turned around and with three taxis with rifles at all angles sticking out the windows we roared up to the Nigerian Ambassador's home and threw on the brakes. Poor old Ed came out of his house with in his bathrobe and slippers. His eyes as big as saucers. "What's going on, Julius?" I said, "Ed, you can see Sergeant Doe about the Foreign Ministers. Get your clothes on and these fellows will take you. You will be all right." He did. However, it was all day before they left the country.

Q: Including Cecil Dennis?

WALKER: No, no, Cecil didn't go. He was in prison and remained in prison through the kangaroo court trial they had and he was subsequently in the 13 that were taken to the beach and executed.

Q: During this time you were Chargé our Ambassador was Robert P. Smith. He was where?

WALKER: He was at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. He was having a problem with his leg that they couldn't figure out, it is a serious problem. It was a week or ten days before he could get back. But he finally did get back and needless to say I was glad to see him.

Q: During this week to ten days what were you getting from Washington as far as instructions, advice? Liberia is not just another African country. It has its ties to the United States and the people who were being thrown out had good ties in the United States.

WALKER: That is true. Almost all had been educated in the United States and considered themselves almost American citizens. That was one of the problems for our visa officers. Liberians considered that they had a God given right to come to the United States anytime they want.

We worked very closely with Washington and Washington did, I think, everything it could to give us good support and guidance. Guidance was difficult to give because it was hard for us to tell them exactly what was happening. Our communications had dried up somewhat. So many

contacts were locked up and we were trying to establish new contacts. I never felt uncomfortable about the support from Washington - it was always there. We kept that open telephone line for three or four days and finally closed it because it remained easy to call Washington. They were there for us. They couldn't always do everything we wanted, but we couldn't always do everything they wanted either. I felt we got good support and we continued to get good support.

Q: How about the problem of recognition?

WALKER: Well, the U.S. gone through various cycles on recognition of new governments and at that point we were in a cycle in which we were saying that recognition was really not a question, we will do business with whatever government exists and is in effective control. We had no recognition problem that we had to deal with. We went straight ahead doing business with Doe because Doe and his group were the people in charge. Baccus Matthews was very quickly named Foreign Minister and for a good while we thought...we were told by many, many different sources that Matthews was going to bring Cecil Dennis, the former Foreign Minister from jail and make him a consultant to the Foreign Ministry. We were told this by two different sources the morning of the day he was executed. All this shows that decisions were made on an ad hoc basis, they were made quickly and not always in the best interests of Liberia. There was a sincere feeling Dennis was going to be freed, he and some of the others. They were among the 13 locked up and tried.

The day of the execution Doe announced a press conference, his first, and all the reporters went. When it ended, he said, "Oh, by the way, we are going to have an execution down at the beach and any of you who would like to see it can come and watch." Frank Catanoso, our PAO, was at the conference. He saw the entire execution. He was as white as your shirt when he came into the office. I have never seen anybody more shaken than he was. He said, "Julius I have just come from the grizzliest sight I have ever witnessed." He told about the execution. The officials had put nine telephone poles in the sand at the beach but they brought 13 in the bus. They took nine out and tied them to the posts. Then the soldiers, who were on drugs it appeared or drunk, started shooting at them. They shot a long time before they killed all of them. One guy, Frank said, looked as if he had a heart attack and died before the shooting began. Anyway they shot the nine while the four still in the bus watched and waited. Then they cut down all of them, dragged the bodies off and brought the four out and executed them in the same fashion. Dennis, Frank said, stood tall, erect and proud to the very last. He was one of the last actually to die. I knew all of those fellows. One of them was the moderator of my church. I am a Presbyterian and he was the moderator for the Liberian Presbyterian Church. It was tragic, an awful waste of talent.

Q: By this time Doe would have had a chance to understand a bit about repercussions. Did you talk to him about that?

WALKER: I'm not sure he fully understood. It was awfully hard to tell when you were getting through to that guy and when you weren't. Particularly in the early days. He spoke Liberian English, a pidgin-English. He had a great poker face. His facial expression seldom changed.

Q: I might add just for the record, we had a young man who was working here, a Liberian, who said he used to play poker with Doe and some of his friends before any of this happened.

WALKER: It was hard to tell what he fully understood. The hatred was so deep, the anger was so deep and all pervading among the military that I think they were probably going to kill those people no matter what anyone said.

Now you might ask why they were so angry and it is not too hard to see. The Liberian military was at the bottom end of society. Their housing at Barkley Training Center and others places was way below standard. They flooded. About eight months after the coup we were taken to see the house Doe and his wife had lived in. It was three quarters full of mud from all the flooding that had taken place. He and his wife had been able to keep it clear while they were living in it. But with no one in it, it filled quickly. The military for years been forced to pay money for a chapel under construction on the Barkley Training compound. Construction had ceased years before and there was no money in the fund, although each month money was taken from the soldier's pay for the construction. Someone just took the money. They forced those soldiers to pay money for nothing.

Q: We had a military training mission there didn't we?

WALKER: Yes, and it did everything it could but you can't tell people in another country how to do things. You can't do it. And you certainly couldn't do it in Liberia where they were proud and going to have it their way. It was a shame. It was embarrassing.

The Liberians did silly things. I remember Dennis called me in at one point to complain about one of the two boats that we had paid for the Liberian Coast Guard Navy. He said, "We can't take that boat out because the davit is broken." Well, I am from the north central part of Texas and didn't know what a davit was. I got back to the office and looked it up. A davit is the little boom used to raise and lower a life boat. They could have gone out with a broken davit because they never got out of sight of shore anyway. And furthermore, these were not boats we had suggested they buy. They cost much more to operate than the ones we had wanted them to take, but they wanted these so they took them. But they wouldn't do anything with the boat until the davit was fixed. They fiddled around for a year before they even told us the davit was broken. In the meanwhile spare parts for the boats were being stolen.

There were a lot of problems. We didn't always understand one another, I guess, in the way we would have liked. I think the government of Liberia, that particular government, was interested in getting everything it could from the United States. I don't fault them for that but at the same time I think it hampered relations at a time when they didn't have to be hampered.

Q: What were you doing before and after the Ambassador came? What does one do in a coup of this horrendous nature?

WALKER: Oh Lord, there are so many things you do it is unbelievable. I won't be able to scratch the surface. One of the most important things was protection of Americans. We had about 5-6,000 Americans in Liberia at that point. There was a fair-size American investment in Liberia, about a billion dollars. The world's largest rubber plantation was there. Firestone had

that. It has since been sold to Bridgestone and is now closed. There were banking, insurance interests, etc. And a lot of missionaries.

All these communities were scared, uptight and nervous. They looked to us, naturally, for leadership. One of the worst things that happens in a situation like this is the rumors. The first thing I did was to invite the heads of the American communities to the Embassy. I couldn't invite all 5,000 to 6,000 Americans, we couldn't cope with them. So we asked the heads of the different organizations to come. We could handle 50-75 people and talk to them. They could then go back and talk to their people. We did this and actually had them come back three or four times to tell them to keep calm, to be very careful about repeating rumors, not to give too much impetus to them. If they heard a story they felt was peculiar to call us and let us know about it and we would either try to put it straight or look into it and get back to them. They seemed to find this reassuring. We tried to keep information flowing as freely and openly as we could without being controlled by rumors.

Nevertheless, crazy things would happen. I remember one was the day some American woman called the embassy and said, "Do you folks have a plan for evacuation?" The Marine Guard was answering the phone and the Marine thought the woman was asking if the Embassy had asked people to evacuate. So the Marine said, "No, Madam, there is no plan for evacuation." And the woman decided the embassy had no plan on how we would evacuate people in case of an emergency. She began telling people didn't have an evacuation plan. Well, of course, we had a plan. Our plan had been updated just a few months before the coup took place. The Marine has simply misunderstood her question. We had to be very careful what you said. We had to be absolutely certain what people were asking.

Q: On the evacuation...later on we did have to evacuate...

WALKER: There was a form of evacuation that took place a few weeks after the coup in which we suggested to organizations that if their people were going to go on leave anyway, they might have them go on leave early and stay away until the situation looked better. That decision came from the State Department, not the embassy. Remember, this was when American hostages were being held in Iran and the Carter administration was worried about anything that might lead to a similar situation. So we drew down American personnel. After a while most of them came back. But there was no emergency evacuation at any time. It was just people going out of the country and being away for a while.

Q: But with these soldiers running somewhat amuck, I would have thought that the Americans being sort of close to the Americo Liberians would have been a natural target.

WALKER: Yes, this was one of the things that worried us terribly at the outset. Are they going to start shooting at us as well? We didn't know. We just couldn't tell. We took every precaution we could, but it soon became apparent that although indigenous Liberians were running the coup they were not angry with the United States. They felt the United States had tried to help them but where it had gone wrong was in the Liberian government.

Baccus Matthews called three or four nights after the coup, was saying Sergeant Doe was terribly worried about something and wanted to see me. I said, "Fine, I will get down to the Executive Mansion." He said, "No, he doesn't want you to come to the Executive Mansion, he wants to meet you at the American embassy." I said, "He doesn't have to do that I will be glad to come..." "No, no, he wants to come." And he did. About 3:30 in the morning here came a motorcade, Doe and all the committee members and hangers on. They piled into the embassy, with their submachine guns. Meanwhile, I had been forced to race to the embassy from my home nine miles away.

Doe was worried that Liberia would be invaded by a force from the Ivory Coast. He was frightened that Houphouet-Boigny and others that he didn't know were going to do something. I could see a cause for concern because Tolbert's son, A.B. Tolbert, was married to a "daughter" of Houphouet-Boigny. I put quotes on daughter because she was of his family and had been raised as though she was his daughter, but she was not a blood daughter. In Africa you learn to use family terms carefully. When they say son or daughter or brother or sister you ask "same ma, same pa?" to make certain that they are really siblings. It may be simply that they are kin in spirit.

Anyway, he was worried about this. I got off a cable immediately...sent to Nancy Rawls, our Ambassador in the Ivory Coast, an immediate cable. I said I regretted waking her but we needed some assurance and explained the situation. I got a cable right back. All this took place while Doe was still in the building. One thing was amusing after he came in, the Ambassador's secretary, Jane Jazyuka, whose husband was the Admin Counselor, looked around and found a number of photographs hanging on the walls of Tolbert on a visit to the United States. While Doe's men weren't looking she quickly either turned them around or took them off the wall.

But this man and his group, seemed exceedingly pro-American. That really astounded me. He was pro-American because of the training he received earlier the U.S. Army and the people he had known such as Colonel Gosney and his officers. He knew they were good people. He knew they were doing everything they could for Liberia and if there were problems it was not the fault of Americans.

Q: Did you use your military officers as contacts?

WALKER: They were very useful. They were willing to be used. You can run into situations like that where the military will say, "No, that is not our job. We are not going to do it. We may jeopardize our position." But Gosney didn't do that. He was as helpful as he could be. They helped us gather intelligence, as did everyone in the Embassy, so we could understand what was happening and what might happen next.

Q: Was there concern that a Marxist or Soviet inspired...

WALKER: Yes, we worried about that - at first more than later. That first day when the announcement came that Doe wanted to see the American Ambassador and the Russian Ambassador, and that was what was said on the radio...not Soviet but Russian...we didn't know whether he was going to throw us in the pot down there, so to speak, and turn to the Soviet and

say, "Look how good we are. We are getting rid of these damn Yankees." So it was a nerve-racking time.

Q: Were the Soviets involved or concerned at that time or were they just sort of keeping their heads down too?

WALKER: They really kept their heads down. They had some pretty rough incidents during that time in which some of their people were hurt. They were held up by the soldiers. They got into fights with them. It was a hard time for them. I think they suffered a good bit because the coup people were basically as anti-Soviet as the former government.

Q: To get a feel for how the dynamics of an embassy in crisis works...coups traditionally happen when the ambassador is out of country, it just happens that way. But here you had been running things and had established rapport, etc. and the ambassador comes back. Was this a difficult time personally for both you and the ambassador?

WALKER: No, it was not a difficult time at all and I lay that to the wonderful attitude of Bob Smith and the great relationship we had. He and I had been in the A-100 course. (A-100 is the junior officer course). He had been in the Service two years longer than I had been and was taking the course in preparation for going overseas. I was taking it in preparation for a Washington assignment. It was actually through Bob Smith that I got wind of the possibility of a job in News Division.

Q: Oh, yes, you mentioned that.

WALKER: I replaced him. And he is a fellow Texan. His home was 90 miles north of mine. We got along beautifully as did our wives. We were much more friends and colleagues than we were supervisor/supervisee. I was delighted when he got back because it cut the load on me by half. No, I didn't feel displaced. The only problem was in getting him up to speed on things. I couldn't remember what he knew and what he didn't know. He had read all of our cables and I had talked with him on the phone. It took about a week to get him fully caught up with events. But once he was up there was no problem at all.

Q: What happened after the execution on the beach? This took place about when?

WALKER: This took place about three weeks after the coup. Bob was back by then.

Q: Had we any intimation that this was going to happen?

WALKER: No intimation.

Q: Had we been making representations?

WALKER: Yes, we had. We told the government several times that...we knew that the trial was taking place because there were news stories about it...we had told the government several times this looked to us to be more of a preliminary hearing and we expected they would have a full

courtroom procedure with regular courtroom rules, etc. We had been assured that was what they were going to do. We felt this was only preliminary. We reminded Doe these people were well known. Not just in the United States but around the world. Cecil Dennis at the time of the coup was the Dean of the African Foreign Ministers. He had been Foreign Minister longer than any in Africa. He highly regarded. It was the same way with the other people. We didn't think they would be killed. However, they were.

Q: This set the tone for the rest of the thing until Doe was killed in a civil war just about a year and a half ago. This set the tone for our relations. No matter what happened in Liberia everybody thought, "Oh, that execution on the beach."

WALKER: It was tragic. Did I tell you in an earlier tape about the photographs and how they happened to have so many excellent ones?

Q: No.

WALKER: It was interesting. WBAP, the Fort Worth television station had sent a team to Liberia to film Baptist missionaries in action. It was the first time that station had gone overseas. They had television and still cameras. They attended Doe's press conference so when the execution took place, they were on the beach and photographed it. The pictures ran in Life magazine and they got a Pulitzer Prize for their photographic coverage. It was a pure fluke they were there. But their photographs were telling. They showed what happened with bloody accuracy. What was amazing was how they had come to do one job then ended with a prize for another.

At the time of a coup, though, one is so unsettled he doesn't know quite what to do. You must protect American interests and lives. You have to look after the safety and security of the embassy and its personnel. I, for one, during these coups, and we had two in Burkina Faso, was afraid each time something would happen to the Marines. Those young people are well trained but they make excellent targets. I was afraid one of them would be involved in something but fortunately nothing happened.

Q: In many ways the Marines are almost more trouble than they are worth because they really can't...other embassies sometimes used retired master sergeants or police officers which seems to work better. These young Marines are in more peaceful times tend to drink or get involved with ladies.

WALKER: They can. They have problems. And, of course, at the time of the coup was when the Marine Corps had sent out women Marines. We had two women Marines there, one was acting in charge of the detachment then. She was the senior NCO when the Gunnery Sergeant was away. I was delighted she was in charge because she was so level-headed and her boss was a nut. It was good he was away. The Marines covered themselves with glory in the coup. They did a superb job. I mentioned the mixed-up telephone conversation but that could have happened to anybody. They kept their cool and helped us project a positive image. But you are right, the Marines can be more of a problem than help. They aren't always and I liked having them. They really do look

crisp and impressive and do such a good job in handling people coming in and out of the mission. So, over all, I think they are an asset.

Q: How did you find the staff responded?

WALKER: They were superb. Every branch, every part, every group I dealt with, and we had a lot of people there. You see the ATO (Area Telecommunications) had about 80 officers; the Voice of America had its big relay station there with about 35 or 40 people; the AID mission was large. The only breakdown that we had was in the office of the Defense Attaché. I am embarrassed to say that shop did not cover itself with glory. This is not the Military Mission, but the diplomatic side. They discussed classified matters on the radio. They were nowhere to be found when we needed them. Everybody else did beautifully.

Q: Was there a black American community there that had become part of the establishment by becoming involved in the community?

WALKER: Yes. That became a problem. One was Mrs. Henrys, the wife of the Speaker of the House. He was among those executed. Mrs. Henrys was an American citizen. She thought her citizenship had been taken away because she had worked in the government of Liberia and had voted in an election. She was told her citizenship was revoked. She came to our house, four or five days after the coup. Her house had been ruined by the troops and she had been living out of town with some people. But they couldn't keep her any longer and she was brought to us. I wasn't at home. Savannah took her in and called me to ask what to do. I said, "We can't kick the woman out." At that point I thought she had Liberian citizenship. But I got home and talked to her and got the information and went back the next day and sent a cable to the Department. The quick reply was that, although she had gone through a process of having her citizenship revoked, cases which had been decided after hers took place made clear her citizenship had been revoked in error and she was, in fact, an American citizen.

We went to work to get her back to the States. Although she returned, she died not too long afterwards. Her health problems were neglected during the coup because she couldn't get the necessary medicine. However, I think so she died of a broken heart.

We had a number of Americans in that category. It was hard dealing with them because the Doe group looked on them as Liberians. But we made certain they understood that these were Americans and they were treated properly after we finally got things straightened out. This didn't mean that there weren't incidents, and indignities and all the rest, but we did everything we could to protect them. I was delighted we were able to get Mrs. Henrys back home. She stayed with us for two or three nights. There was a man, a "son" she had raised who was in the Ministry of Education. Once she established contact with him, he took care of her.

But this, the black relationship and relating to the old regime, was a problem even in the official American community. One officer in the Military Mission was a black American and he and his wife, very attractive people, had great relationships with the Americo Liberians and were very well known and highly regarded by them. They had a number of problems. They were not treated by the Doe government in same way as were other members of the Military Mission. For a while

they harbored some Americo Liberians in their home. They were afraid for their lives on a number of occasions. We ended up getting them out of the country as soon as we could, mainly because they were so darn uncomfortable. We didn't want anything to happen to them. Nothing actually did happen. They were stopped a few times, but there was never an incident of major proportion. But that was the kind of thing that did happen with black Americans in Liberia. We did everything we could to take care of those people, to protect them and to see that they didn't have any major incidents. And, so far as I know, there weren't any.

Q: The coup happened when and when did you leave?

WALKER: The coup happened in April and I left at the end of June of the following year. So I was there about 15 months after the coup.

Q: How did relations work out particularly after the executions? It must have been a very cool period.

WALKER: It was. It was a tough time. I think we were able to impress on Doe that he had done the wrong thing and that it should never happen again. I believe he understood because there was very, very little of that sort of thing after that. But there was the possibility of a great deal more because these were only 13 out of a large number of people that they could have gone after.

Q: You mention Doe and you mention a committee.

WALKER: There were 17 in the committee. They had all been involved in the coup. But Doe was very much in charge. Doe was the one who gave the orders and made the decisions. They looked to him. I believe all those people are now dead. They have either killed one another or themselves in car wrecks, etc. But Doe was in charge. When he gave an order it was respected, they followed it. So he was the one we had to influence.

The most wanted person after the execution was A.B. Tolbert, the son of the former President, a legislator himself and quite a figure. He was flamboyant and either well known, or infamous, around the country. They couldn't find him. They looked and looked and couldn't find him. After several months he was found in the residence of the French Ambassador.

It was an amusing story. By that time the wives and dependents of Americans were gone and Bob and I were invited to lunch at the home of the Lebanese Ambassador on a Saturday. The French Ambassador and his wife were there and others, I think about a dozen in all. Mid-way during lunch I was called to the phone. It was the Embassy duty officer reporting a lot of shooting at the French Embassy, a scant block from ours. I asked what was causing it and he said, "They say they found A.B. Tolbert there." I called Bob and told him. Then we called Louis Dollot, the French Ambassador, and gave him the report. For a long time we suspected he was harboring Tolbert from hints we had gotten. He said, "Yes, that is true. It is now out."

What had happened? They kept Tolbert in the upstairs part of the residence. The ground floor was where they had receptions, etc. - the official part. They had kept him up there and when they went out they always told him to be very quiet and told the houseboys not to go to that floor.

Well, Tolbert was moving around up there making noise and it frightened one of the houseboys who happened to be in the lower part of the house. He heard the noise and went to investigate. He thought it was a burglar. He saw a figure, ran out, got a policeman and told him there was a rogue (Liberian English for a bad man) in the French embassy, and to come in and get him. The policeman entered, went up the stairs and found that it was A. B. Tolbert. Well, when this report got out, people came from all around and soldiers were shooting for joy. They didn't shoot Tolbert. They took him and kept him in jail for a couple of months. Finally one night he disappeared. We know a member of the committee took him out and did him in. They were determined to kill Tolbert.

Q: Now during this period...ten years later another group came in...did you have the feeling that there were counter-coup forces working away out there?

WALKER: No, at the beginning there were no groups working against Doe. There were a lot of Americo-Liberians who were terribly upset, as you can imagine, because their property was being taken from them and they were terribly mistreated. Just a few days after the coup I got an anguished telephone at noon from Dr. Nehemiah Cooper who had been pulled from his car and beaten almost to death. He was going to the hospital to see a patient and had stopped his car to make a left turn. The truck in front of him had a group of soldiers. One of the soldiers saw him and said, "You used to be the doctor for Tolbert." With that they all jumped from the truck, grabbed 'Miah and darn near beat him to death. I immediately called Doe and told him this sort of thing had to stop. Anytime we got word of a similar happening we would let Doe know about it. Usually he indicated he was appalled by it. He said, "I will find out who these people were and will deal with them." I don't know what he did. He may not have done anything. But when we got word of people's rights being destroyed like this we did everything we could to see to it that it stopped.

When the Dollots got word that A.B. Tolbert had been taken in their home they were justifiably worried about what might happen to them. Bob and I suggested in a way that made it easy for them that they come and stay at the American Embassy until such time as we could establish communications with the Foreign Minister. Baccus Matthews was out of the country but coming back later that day. They came to our compound and stayed for several hours. Other members of the French community came and several stayed for a night or two. Nothing was said about this but I know the French were grateful that they could stay in safety with us.

The Ambassador's wife, Simone Dollot, was a witty, bubbly, out-spoken woman with a penetrating sense of humor. During the time they were at the Embassy, she spoke a bit about A.B. Tolbert. Knowing that he was an ordained minister, she had invited him to pray with her. In the evening they would kneel with a trunk between them. They would hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer. She said he would repeat every part of it except "Thy will be done." She said that not once, in two months time, would he say that phrase. She didn't know for sure why, but she felt he was genuinely afraid of the Lord's will actually being done.

A.B. had a lurid reputation in Liberia. There were stories of him running through the center of Monrovia with no clothes on, of him taking large amounts of public money for his personal use, and of him attacking his mother so violently that she now has the use of only one eye. He had the

reputation of being an active womanizer. At the same time, he had great personal charm. Shortly before the coup Governor Brown of California came to Liberia as A.B.'s personal guest. He brought with him Linda Ronstadt and a couple of "foreign affairs advisors." The trip was quite revealing of Brown and, in a way of Ronstadt. Of him because he seemed totally in her control and of her as she wore either "see-through" blouses with no bra or dresses with narrow strips of cloth over the bosom and no bra.

Q: Were there any other major things dealing with our relations with Liberia that took place in this period after?

WALKER: A lot of things. One, we increased our aid to Liberia by a factor of ten in the year that followed. We went from \$5 million to something over \$50 million in that period. We tried to show support for Doe. We thought in the first year to two that by supporting him that we could help him see what needed to be done. We always tried to impress on him the fact that if he really was to be the savior of his country he would have to establish elections and have a freely-elected government. And during this period he gave great lip service to that idea. But that was all he gave - lip service.

One thing we did was just before the first anniversary of the coup. Doe called me in and said, "I would like to have a real American presence at the first anniversary." I asked what he wanted. He said, "I would like to have a Navy ship and the Rangers." We arranged it. We got a brand new Navy ship--an electronic affair. It was called a destroyer but was the size of a cruiser. It developed more than enough electricity to run all of Monrovia. We also got the Green Berets from Fort Bragg. Their first experience with Liberia was landing by parachute. That was my suggestion. It made quite an impression.

Our aim in doing this was to get on Doe's good side and influence him to have elections and do things in a progressive manner.

Q: Now this had to be a very difficult decision. The normal look at what Doe did, particularly after his beach party, was one of repugnance in the United States and all over the world. One can understand the rationale for us deciding to make the best of it and give more aid, but to some it must of seemed that we were rewarding this monster.

WALKER: We were not rewarding the monster. I can see how there could be that feeling, but he was all we had. There was no way for us to do anything other than through him unless we were going to put troops in there and wipe him and his group out. There was never any thought of that, I can assure you. So it was either work through him or leave Liberia totally alone...back away from it as a bad job. And we simply had too much interest there, not only in money, but emotionally and family ties and all the rest. We had to stay there to make the best of a bad situation.

Q: Well you must have been getting fire within the United States as well as outside. How did this manifest itself where you were?

WALKER: There was congressional reaction to what we were doing. And there were some in the press who wrote about it. But by and large it appeared that people in the United States realized what we were trying to do. That we were trying to make the best of a bad situation in the only way possible. So there seemed to be acceptance, not only on the official side...officially I have to say that the Carter administration fell in behind us and worked with us very well. Dick Moose, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, was out there several times, talked to Doe, and was most helpful. But there were some who, through letters to the editor, editorial comment, programs on television let it be known that they were upset that we appeared to be supporting a monster. This was not an overwhelming voice or movement. People generally appeared to accept what we were doing and to realize that it was either this or cut bait. And we weren't about to cut bait in Liberia. I don't think we should ever cut bait in Liberia. The ties between the two countries go back too far. The United States has an emotional and blood commitment to that country that exists nowhere else in Africa for us. Whether we like it or not, the rest of the world looks on Liberia as an American creation. Not an official American creation, but nevertheless an American creation.

PARKER W. BORG
Country Director, West African Affairs
Washington, DC (1979-1981)

Ambassador Borg was born and raised in Minnesota and educated at Dartmouth College and Cornell University. In 1965, after a tour with the Peace Corps in the Philippines, he joined the Foreign Service and was posted to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. During his career, he served in Vietnam and Zaire, and in the State Department in senior positions concerning Vietnam, West Africa and Counter Terrorism. He served as US Ambassador to Mali (1981-1984) and to Iceland from 1993 to 1996. Ambassador Borg was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

Q: Let's go to Liberia. How did this thing burst upon you? Was this sort of something that had been looming?

BORG: Liberia and Sierra Leone had a history that was different from the other countries in Africa. Both of these nations had been settled not by foreign colonialists but by freed slaves who had come back from the United States in the case of Liberia and some of the English colonies in the Caribbean in the case of Sierra Leone, and these people established governments in these respective little pieces of geography where the freed slaves were the masters and the native populations were clearly second-class citizens. So you had a similar colonial situation in each one of these countries that existed in other places in Africa except that the elites were black and not white. Sierra Leone has erupted on the scene in more recent years, but the Liberian problems began in 1979/1980. President Tolbert, who was the last president in the line of what were called the America-Liberians, came to the United States, met with Jimmy Carter, talked about assistance programs and so forth, and things seemed to be moving as well as they might be expected to in this country where there was a great divergence between the elite who ran the

country and the people out in the villages. We had offered military assistance training among other things and we trained various units in how to work together more effectively in close combat, and one of these groups decided that they didn't like the government and so they used the military training which we had provided to overthrow the Tolbert government. They took all of the cabinet ministers that they could round up. I think they issued a call for people to turn themselves in, and eventually after much anguish various ones did. The one who is best known, about whom more history has been recorded, is Cecil Bennett, the foreign minister, a very elegant, decent man. I think he spent some time at the ambassador's residence anguishing over what he might do before he turned himself in. He turned himself in, and the Liberians decided that the only reasonable way to bring this thing to an end was to kill everybody, and so they brought them down to a beach, tied them to a post, invited Life magazine to take pictures, and killed them all on the beach outside of Monrovia. We then had to deal with a group of the platoon level at the beginning, maybe 15 or so illiterate soldiers, who were suddenly in charge of this country where the United States had no critical interest but we did have important interests. There was the VOA (Voice of America) relay station for Africa located there. The Coast Guard maintained a LORAN (Long Range Navigation) facility for navigational purposes there. We had an agreement with the Liberian government that, if we ever needed to use the airport in Monrovia for military purposes, it was always available to us. There were all of these things that suddenly made us pay attention to Liberia in a way that we hadn't in the past. It was interesting to reflect on our relationship with Liberia in that most Americans don't really think at all about Liberia - it's just another country in Africa - but the Liberians look to the United States as their mother country in the sense that the Senegalese or the Ivorians might look to France, and many, many Liberians had family in the United States, many had dual residency in the United States, dual citizenship, and could not understand why the United States didn't pay more attention to Liberia and its problems. I remember one conversation with a young man, an official but I can't remember in what capacity, when he said, "Look at Abidjan, look at Senegal, look at Dakar. Look what the French have created in these places, and look at Monrovia. Monrovia's a dump, and it's your fault. Why haven't you built the buildings to make Monrovia a nice place like the French have done in Dakar and Abidjan," to which I responded, "You've been an independent country now for over 100 years. You've got to take responsibility for your own destiny. The fact that you don't have nice buildings in Monrovia is a reflection on the state of your management of the economy and the fact that you've never made foreign companies feel particularly welcome to come there and to invest. You don't have any indigenous reasons. There's nothing going on for the place." Anyway, they lined everybody up and they shot them on the beach, and we then had to try and put together a package of assistance which was going to help these relatively illiterate people to come to grips with the fact that they were now in charge of the country. Our desired strategy was to try to convince the leaders of this group...

Q: At this point it wasn't clear who was leading?

BORG: Yes, there was one person by the name of Sammy Doe who was the clear leader, and there were two or three others who were more prominent. Our interest was to try and convince him that he could be the great savior, the great hero, of Liberia, having thrown out the colonialists and established a new sort of government. What he needed to do was to set up institutions for democracy, for a fairer government, a government that provided for the people in the rural areas, and that they had to overlook and forget about retribution for the past but to focus

on the future. That did not work at all. They were not in a position to think about these things. These were our sorts of thoughts. Their interests were in trying to preserve their own power to the extent that they could. There were internal squabbles among the sergeants that erupted, and they eliminated each other one by one so that pretty soon it was down to only a few, and then there were some outsiders who came in and pushed them out. We told Sammy Doe that he had to recognize that, since he had thrown people out through a coup, he was likely to be thrown out by a similar coup unless he could make himself the hero of the country. In the end result, our policy was much more providing dribs and dabs of assistance to sort of buy them off and keep them friendly.

Q: Did we send out a mission there or anything like that?

BORG: Dick Moose had several interesting sessions. We brought the Liberian leadership back here to the United States, and we had meetings with them and sent them over to the Pentagon. It was quite a scene, these people who were barely literate trying to discuss things in this country. We were trying to impress them with our interest and the importance of trying to work out a settlement to these problems. Dick Moose became involved. He met with the generals, the leaders, on several occasions. I remember we found a Peace Corps volunteer that had worked in the same village where Sammy Doe came from, and we organized a meeting one evening where Dick Moose could sit with this guy and learn about the people in the villages of Liberia, where were they coming from, what were some of the myths of their village, so that we could try to reason with these people in a way that we had not succeeded in doing in the past. Dick was very intrigued with this. He liked this sort of activity. He did go out and talk with Sammy Doe using the analogies about "You've got a hole in the pocket and that's where the money goes" and some other humorous stories like this, but it was all to little effect.

Q: Were we concerned about getting our people out? We must have had quite a few people there, didn't we?

BORG: We had quite a few people. The threat at this time was not to the Americans as much as it was to the Americo-Liberians. There was fighting up in some of the rural areas where people were in danger, but we continued to maintain our various facilities for the most part despite the problems.

Q: Did we have any special program to help the Americo-Liberians get out, visas, refugee-type things?

BORG: We had very little, but we didn't need very much because most of them seemed to travel quite easily back and forth to the United States. We met on more than one occasion with Americo communities. I think there was a heavy group of them in New Jersey. Those that could, fled; those that couldn't, didn't have the ties with the United States, generally weren't so prominent that they were threatened. But there was a big exodus, as there are in many countries when such things occur.

ROBERT P. SMITH
Ambassador
Liberia (1979-1981)

Ambassador Robert P. Smith entered the Foreign Service in 1955. His Foreign Service assignments included positions in Lebanon, Ghana, South Africa, and Pakistan. Ambassador Smith was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 28, 1989.

SMITH: To go back to Liberia, the shift over there was simply "good luck," because Bev Carter had left some time before.

Q: *He had been ambassador?*

SMITH: Yes, he had been ambassador in Monrovia. And Liberia, like Ghana, is a class two mission, or was a class two mission. I don't know whether you even use the phrase anymore. And the Department and AF, the African Bureau, felt very strongly they did not want a rookie ambassador in Liberia, but rather someone who had had African ambassadorial experience. My number was just coming up. I was then about two and a half years into my Ghana tour, so it worked out most fortuitously.

We went on to Liberia very happily. Very different from Ghana. To be blunt about it, I never found the Liberians, with all their American ties, nearly as charming as the Ghanaians or, indeed, the Ibos. This isn't to say I disliked the country or the people.

Q: *Well, it has that reputation. It seems like it always has been the exception or the side show and something that is basically overlooked when you think about Africa.*

SMITH: Yes. Of course, they were the exception to the rule, too, in that they had been independent for so long. They are widely regarded by other Africans as kind of an appendage to the United States or, indeed, a colony of the United States. That may be a bum rap but there's enough of a grain of truth in it to make one uncomfortable at times, particularly when I arrived there and found the Monrovia Police Department dressed in uniforms that could only have been hand-me-downs from the Los Angeles Police Department, the black shirt and trousers, caps, and so forth. All the armed forces uniforms were also our own secondhand stuff.

But I was greeted very warmly by a very distinguished African leader, President Tolbert, and we got along famously. I had a few squabbles with the foreign minister, Cecil Dennis, largely on human rights issues, and so forth, because, while a democratic nation, they also ruled with a pretty heavy hand. The indigenous people up country did not fare too well under this, what we called, Americo-Liberian regime--the descendants of American slaves that went back to Liberia to found the country. But the relationship, basically, was one of warmth and cordiality. The president went out of his way to be personally cordial to me, even taking me up with him on a week-long jaunt through the provinces in Northern Liberia as his honored guest, riding with him every step of the way in his limousine.

Q: *What were our interests there?*

SMITH: Many. We had certain rights that remain in the classified area concerning the use of Roberts Field, the international airfield there. We have our largest communications set up anywhere in Africa at the embassy in Monrovia, large numbers of communications technicians, and other interests, as well, strategic and otherwise. And, of course, a long, long history of ties to the United States. Many Liberians did, in fact, consider themselves sort of the 51st state, like it or not. And because of corruption that was rampant there, that often was downright embarrassing at times.

But President Tolbert was very nice. At the same time, we would have to fuss at the foreign minister or the president several times about human rights violations, imprisoning people and then keeping them without charge, that sort of thing. But the main problem was that the Americo-Liberian clique, and they were a small minority in the country, in fact, ruled the country. They controlled the court system, the police, the armed forces, the parliament, everything about life in Liberia.

And, again, inevitably perhaps after my experience in Ghana, I had come back to the States on a medical evacuation and was an outpatient at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, when I got the inevitable call at one o'clock in the morning from the desk officer in Washington saying, "Mr. Ambassador, the Secretary would like you back in Liberia like yesterday. There's been a coup." And we did not anticipate that coup. I would like to be able to say we saw it coming. We did not. We knew there was great unhappiness.

In this case, in April of 1980, a group of enlisted men in the armed forces were down on the beach near the presidential palace drinking beer and they had their weapons with them. One thing led to another and, to make a long story short, they got a group together and went into the presidential palace and murdered President Tolbert. They tracked down virtually the entire cabinet, senior parliamentary leaders, and other prominent Americo-Liberians, and it was a blood bath.

I got back in the next day on the first flight in. The young man who had taken over the country was a 29-year old master sergeant named Sammy Doe. He was semi-literate, could barely read and write his own name. Could, in fact, barely speak proper English. I literally, at times, would resort to pidgin English to communicate with Sergeant Doe after he became head of state. It was a real body blow, not because we had anything against the indigenous peoples of Liberia, and we knew the faults of the old regime, but at the same time, the blood bath that followed was inexcusable.

There were a few frantic days, and they were frantic because this unleashed this latent hatred which was there on the part of the enlisted men in the armed forces, and the first order Doe gave was that you no longer have to obey the orders of your officers either in the police force or in the army. You can imagine the kind of chaos that resulted from that. So they were stopping people on the street, dragging people from their beds and murdering them. In the case of the cabinet, tying them to stakes on the beach and executing them by firing squad.

This, despite the fact that in the morning I had again gone to see Sergeant Doe and given him a personal appeal from President Carter to spare their lives. He heard me but made no commitment. That afternoon my public affairs officer burst into my office and said, "Mr. Ambassador, my God, they have done it. They've shot all of them. They've killed all of them, eight or nine lined up on the beach tied to a stake." So it was a bloody mess.

Worse yet, we had the obvious concern about these ignorant, poorly educated, almost illiterate enlisted men being gotten to by the other side and being turned around and having Liberia wind up as a communist state.

Q: *Who were the other side?*

SMITH: Well, the Soviets were there and very interested in all this, although they were completely nonplused by the coup. But they immediately saw an opportunity here and tried to move in on it. And I must say, I think one of the major things that saved us there was not, certainly, the charm or good looks of the American ambassador, but rather the presence of a U.S. military mission that had been there for decades, headed, in my tenure, by a tough, charming Texas full colonel in the Army named Bob Gosney who was the head of the U.S. Military Mission and who, in that capacity, had helped train Master Sergeant Doe. Master Sergeant Doe adored Colonel Gosney, and called him "Chief." He referred to him always in the third person as "the Chief."

I very quickly became cognizant of this and I started taking Colonel Gosney with me when I went to see Sammy Doe. This helped enormously because he respected and had total confidence in Colonel Gosney. He knew little and cared less about communism and the Soviet Union. There was nothing ideological. This was a genuine tribal upheaval to get rid of the hated upper classes and to bring more privileges to the underprivileged. So Sammy Doe was not then and is not now a politically ideological person. But I can't emphasize strongly enough how helpful it was to have this small group of American Army officers, consisting of a group of lieutenant colonels and majors who had, instead of lording it over the enlisted men of the armed forces as their Liberian counterparts did, the Americans, being Americans, would learn these fellows names, including Sergeant Doe, and so forth, and they were warm and cordial to their underlings. And, as a result, Sergeant Doe quickly passed the word that whatever the chief says, goes.

So I had the members of my military mission out in their vehicles literally patrolling the streets. And when they would see a drunken or doped up Liberian soldier holding a group of civilians at gunpoint or something, trying to rob them, or rape them or whatever, one word from one of my American officers would stop that dead in its tracks. They would stop, salute, and say, "Yes, sir," and go on about their business. It saved lives, literally saved lives, this personal relationship that they had established. And that really sustained us for a very lengthy period before their government got formed and Sammy Doe came up with a foreign minister who was bright and well educated that we could deal with.

The problem was that Sammy Doe and his immediate cohorts, to me, were, of course, in a very personal sense, murderers. They had murdered William Tolbert, who was a very dear friend of

mine, and the other members of the cabinet with whom I had been very close. And yet, here they were, the new government. It was clearly not in our national interest to see the country go down the tubes, so it fell to me to do what we could to sustain this young man in steering along a certain course, which we managed to do with great difficulty.

But that led to a situation in which he came to lean on me and the embassy almost too much. He would summon me at all hours of the night to say, "Mr. Ambassador, we have a problem." He would state the problem and wait for me to come up with a solution. So at times it came very uncomfortably close to running a country that you really don't want any part of, and always putting out fires and fears that he had. He had a fear that Houphouët-Boigny, President of the Ivory Coast, whose daughter was married to Tolbert's son, with the help of French troops was going to invade Liberia.

So it was a question of hanging in there and doing what we could to moderate the behavior of Sergeant Doe and his government. And I think we were relatively successful, as was my successor, Bill Swing, who had a long tenure there, about five years, pumping in a great deal of American aid, especially to the military, since the unhappiness of the military with their lot in life was one of the main causes of the coup.

It was an exciting time. The Secretary ordered me to evacuate American dependents. We had to get them out of the country right after the coup when the troops were running wild. So it was, perhaps, the most exciting time in my Foreign Service career, but not the most satisfying.

Q: Were you under any other pressures? You found the situation repugnant to you, I mean, dealing with people whom you had to deal with, but there had been Pulitzer Prize winning photographs of these leaders being executed and all this, there must have been a lot of pressure from Congress, and from the news press, and all that. Did this translate to you at all?

SMITH: Yes. We felt we were really operating in a goldfish bowl or under a microscope, I should say. Human rights pressure inevitably came into this picture after the coup. But strangely enough, not a great deal of congressional pressure. Everyone was sickened, of course, by what happened out there. But you can't reverse that and I think everyone saw that what we had to concentrate on was where do we go from there. And I had to keep reminding people of some of the things that the previous government had done and why the depths of anger being felt by these people was quite genuine.

Q: Were you getting any pressure from the black caucus one way or another?

SMITH: I had a number of visits out there. Congressman Bill Gray came out, Julian Dixon, those two members. I had Andy Young, then at the UN, come out a couple of times before the coup. He also visited me in Ghana a couple times. But not undue congressional pressure. I had more congressional pressure in South Africa than anyplace else, in particular from Charlie Diggs. He did not like our policy in South Africa. Indeed, he would not have been happy unless we had broken relations, I think.

But I've talked long enough. It's been a fascinating and very satisfying career. I retired in January of 1981, sort of in the middle of all this, but I felt, for a number of reasons, that I had to. One, the Department offered a monetary incentive to do that. Secondly, I developed a medical problem which was beginning to worry me. After a couple of times when I stumbled going up the steps to the presidential mansion I realized, hey, I've really got to do something about this. These trips back to Mayo didn't get to the bottom of it. My right leg was deteriorating. To make a long story short, only after I retired and got back here and started running the African Wildlife Foundation did they discover that I, in fact, have multiple sclerosis. So it's just as well I retired when I did because I just didn't have the stamina.

Q: And strain is a major factor.

SMITH: Stress, as the doctor says, is contraindicated for MS patients. And in those last two posts, particularly Liberia, I had more than my share.

Q: In these interviews we try to ask two questions. One, what do you consider your greatest achievement or what did you do that gave you the greatest satisfaction?

SMITH: I would have to say, I guess, in my last post, keeping Liberia, quite literally, from going down the tubes. I know countries don't go bankrupt but Liberia came about as close as any country could, I think. We had to resort to some pretty imaginative policy initiatives to keep that from happening in Liberia. To keep Liberia from going down the tubes and basically, to retain the feeling that Liberians continue to have toward the United States despite all that happened out there. I think to keep that ship on a steady keel was perhaps the greatest achievement.

PETER DAVID EICHER
Desk Officer
Washington, DC (1981-1983)

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

Q: What were the situations in Liberia and Sierra Leone when you took over the desk?

EICHER: Liberia turned out to be 99% of what I worked on. I had a deputy desk officer who covered Sierra Leone under my general supervision, but even he spent almost all his time on Liberia. There was far more to do on Liberia than Sierra Leone because Liberia was "our" African country – that is, of all the countries in Africa, it was the only one that was generally regarded as primarily an American responsibility. In the years I was on the desk, Liberia was

also something of a disaster, which required constant crisis management for us. There had been a coup in Liberia just a year before I took over the desk. The long-time rulers, the Americo-Liberians (who were descendants of freed American slaves who had gone back or been sent back to Africa from the U.S. in the 1800s), were ousted by a group of young, poorly educated, low-ranking soldiers from eastern Liberia. The most prominent was Samuel Doe, a sergeant, who became head of state after the coup, or the revolution, as they called it. During and after the coup, Doe and his cohorts had murdered, or executed, a bunch of very good friends of the United States who had previously been in power, lining them up on a beach in front of a firing squad. There was a real fear at first that he was anti-American and that he was toying with the Libyans and might fall under their influence. People were afraid that we might “lose Liberia,” the African country that was most identified with the U.S. and where we had a lot of investment and facilities, as well as prestige, at stake. So, a policy decision taken even before I arrived at the desk to try to “save” Liberia. To do this, we had to recognize that our friends the Americo-Liberians were a political force of the past. We would have to try to keep the country afloat economically and to transform Samuel Doe into a responsible, respectable U.S.-leaning leader. I was trying to follow the very early stages of this process from California while I was at UCLA, and then I took it over when I arrived at the desk.

Q: Everyone was still shocked by, I mean, I'm being awfully facetious, the “beach party” and everything that had happened. This has lingered to this day.

EICHER: It really was in some ways a disaster and it was very sad. But maybe it was inevitable. Liberia had been ruled since the 1840s by the Americo-Liberians; the capital city, Monrovia, was named after President Monroe. They had established a basically stable, mildly prosperous society, considering the circumstances and what they had to work with. They were very close to the United States for all kinds of reasons of history and even family connections. But, in some ways they were perhaps not all that different from white settlers in other parts of Africa. The Americos controlled most of the political and economic power, while the indigenous groups, or “tribes,” in many cases had little to show for a century and a half of independence. There was growing disaffection among the indigenous groups, and this group of young enlisted men saw an opportunity to take over the government and did so quite brutally. A lot of prominent leaders were tied to stakes on the beach and gunned down, so it was quite dramatic and traumatic for the United States as well as for Liberia.

These gentlemen who took over the country – Doe and his pals – pretty much came from one tribe, the Khrans of eastern Liberia, one of the poorest and most remote groups. The Khrans were a fairly small percentage of the population – maybe 15% if I remember right – and so their takeover also sowed the seeds for further ethnic strife later on in Liberia. But they were able to hold it together for a while, more or less. The coup-makers were a fairly small group and some of the members of the group soon fell out with each other. In fact, one of my amusing African possessions is a T-shirt I bought in the marketplace in Monrovia when I visited, that has the pictures of the “heroes of the revolution.” The shirt has printed across the front six photographs of the six enlisted men who led the coup and two of them were overprinted with big “Xs” because in the meantime they had fallen out with the others and been executed themselves, so they were no longer “heroes of the revolution.” But the shirts were still for sale in the market. In good African fashion, they didn’t want to waste good T-shirts just because the people in power

had changed. So they just Xed out a couple of faces and went on selling them. I guess it was maybe the African version of the Soviet practice of painting past political leaders out of pictures, after they had fallen out with the regime.

So, this was the situation when I came and took over the desk in 1981. Sergeant Doe was really not capable at that point at all of trying to run a government effectively or to run an economy. I mean, he needed a lot of help and when the Americans went to him and offered help, he gladly accepted it. In fact, he turned out to be very well disposed towards the United States. He was not ideologically driven at all.

Q: Was there any help from the UN?

EICHER: No, the UN didn't really get involved. There was no international crisis surrounding the coup, no threat to international peace and security. That was before the days of big UN missions in Africa and elsewhere. Liberia was seen internationally as sort of an American responsibility, in the same way that France might be expected to help out one of its former colonies that was having problems.

We learned about Doe as time went along. He was pro-American partly because one of his teachers when he was a boy had been a Peace Corps volunteer who he had stayed in touch with and was quite close to. This American fellow, I can't remember his name, would go back to Liberia from time to time to visit with Doe. Once or twice we tried to use him to reinforce messages we were trying to instill about the economy, or whatever, but he was really more of just a personal friend to Doe. In fact, when Doe visited the United States a while later, one of the main things he wanted to do was go visit his Peace Corps friend.

The Liberians needed help on many fronts. A lot of the tiers of government had been wiped out. The economy had previously been pretty solid, with big foreign investments in rubber and iron ore, but investors were very frightened and there was even talk of pulling out. We wanted to reassure them by showing that a responsible government was going to be taking over. The government, and Doe in particular, seemed to turn to us for almost everything, for almost every decision from the biggest to the smallest things. At one point, Doe promoted himself from sergeant to five-star general – that shows you something about him – and he came to us to ask for the five-star insignias because they didn't have any in Liberia. Could we get those for him, please? We did. At the other end of the spectrum, his foreign minister came to me on the desk once and wanted to have a discussion with me about defining the goals of the Liberian revolution and in what direction it ought to go.

We worked hard to get them more assistance. I spent a lot of time working on that. One of the biggest challenges I had was working on an IMF (International Monetary Fund) program that would stabilize the economy, and then keeping the program on track by finding ways to help the Liberians meet their quarterly IMF targets, sometimes through sleight of hand. Every three months I'd arrange for the release of a tranche of Liberia's ESF (economic support funds, a U.S. assistance program) at a proper moment so they would have money in the bank on the day they had to meet their IMF targets. The IMF would then release more aid, which would keep them going for another three months. I also dealt a lot with some of the big American banks. When we

couldn't release the ESF on time, we arranged with the banks to provide bridge loans to Liberia with our next ESF payment as collateral. We were very anxious to keep Liberia from defaulting on any of its international economic obligations, its loans. We worked with the so-called "Paris Club" and "London Club" of lenders to restructure the country's debt so it wouldn't default. There were a lot of cliff-hangers, where we worked hard to get things done before default deadlines. I learned a lot about the IMF and the World Bank and international economics.

There were all kinds of other U.S. interests in Liberia that took a lot of time and effort from the desk. The U.S. had a Coast Guard facility in Liberia, sort of an antennae farm, that was just one of three around the world that was, I think, the first global positioning system, used to guide ships using satellite navigation. There was a big Voice of America station there that transmitted to much of Africa. The main Firestone Tire and Rubber plantation was there. Another American company had a big iron mining concern up north. There was also the Liberia flag registry, you know, almost every merchant ship in the world flew the flag of either Liberia or Panama. The Liberian flag registry was actually based in Washington, run by a bank with offices across from the White House. We dealt with them from the desk regularly, you know, running interference for them with the Liberian government and being reassuring that people could continue to register their ships and that the Liberian government was not suddenly going to cause problems for international shippers. So, there were a lot of different things going on.

There were also a lot of high-level visits back and forth which we had to organize. Official Liberian visitors to the United States caused an endless series of problems and amusements. Doe himself wanted desperately to meet with President Reagan and our ambassador judged that he might react very badly if we couldn't produce a meeting. The White House wasn't enthusiastic about meeting Doe, and we had to make all the usual arguments about how important Liberia was to U.S. interests. The first time we tried, with great effort, we got him an invitation to meet with the vice president (George H.W. Bush). Doe rejected this in a funk. It started to become something which honestly threatened relations, you know, if the president couldn't find time to meet with him, why should Doe keep taking our advice on policy issues. We finally made the visit happen and it happened on very short notice. I think another foreign leader must've cancelled for some reason and Doe was given his slot, with only a couple of weeks notice. We had extremely little time to prepare for his visit, which was termed an "official working visit." By the time the visit was approved, we were already past the normal deadlines for getting briefing papers done and making arrangements with the Secret Service, and Protocol and so forth. We had to work around the clock to get everything done.

Q: Was there a problem or concern, press concern, or public concern and repugnance about Doe?

EICHER: There certainly was, at first, and that lingered on. But, as I said, there was a policy decision to try to rehabilitate this guy rather than the alternative of cutting him loose. So, the point is that we cared about Liberia, and while Doe wasn't the person we might have chosen, he was what we had to work with. We didn't feel like we could or should abandon the country. And, Doe was turning out to be pro-American and trying to keep things moving generally in direction we wanted, albeit amidst lots of corruption and self-enrichment and so forth. We had to struggle constantly against this, which we did with middling success.

When Doe finally did get to the White House, we had an interesting anecdote. After we worked all those late nights and weekends to put together all those perfect briefing papers, as is required when a head of state visits the White House, President Reagan apparently didn't read any of them. He introduced Doe to the press corps as "Chairman Moe." We were mortified! It's not as if it was a complicated name or anything. There was the president, who we had worked so hard to brief, making a huge gaffe right in front of the press. We were afraid it would be an irritation and detract from the visit. We figured that Reagan must somehow have associated him either with Chairman Mao or, more likely, with Curly, Larry and Moe, the Three Stooges. Anyway, despite the blunder, Reagan apparently very much impressed Doe and the visit was a big success.

Some other Liberian visits went even less smoothly. While I was on the desk, I got a call one night in the middle of the night from the New York police department. They said they had arrested a fellow who was in an altercation with a prostitute, and the guy was claiming to be a cabinet minister from Liberia. I had to admit that yes, there was a cabinet minister from Liberia by that name who was in the United States on a visit. That, unfortunately, was kind of typical of the quality of some of the Liberians who visited us on the desk. In this case the matter resolved itself when the woman declined to press charges against the minister, maybe because she would have gotten charged, too. Or maybe, as the DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary) laughed when I told him the story in the morning, she didn't want to hang around the police station any more since in her business, time is money.

To be fair, there were also some good people in the government. I think of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf who is now President of Liberia, and there were others, too. But we did have to deal with a lot of clowns.

Q: How did Liberia fit into the African Bureau? Did people giggle or what?

EICHER: Yes, of course, for some of them Liberia seemed like a joke. In fact, in retrospect much of it seems like a joke to me. Even at the time, you couldn't help laughing about some of it. But we were working hard and were much invested in trying to make Liberia a success, so some of it was depressing rather than funny.

If I didn't have so many Liberian visitors to my office, I would have put a sign over the door that said "Colonial Office," because we seemed to be involved in everything. It was so different from what my colleagues in West African Affairs were involved in with their countries. But again, Liberia was "our" problem, America's problem. We did get a fair amount of attention from senior people. The White House visit was just one example; not many African leaders made it to the White House. The assistant secretary for Africa, Chester Crocker, was focused very heavily on Southern Africa, so we would only occasionally get his involvement in Liberia. But from all the deputy assistant secretaries and elsewhere in the government we could always get a little bit of attention for Liberia when we needed it. Generally people would roll their eyes as if to say "Oh, no. Not Liberia again. What do you want us to do this time?" If it was Liberia, it was almost certain to be bad news of some kind. But for all the eye-rolling, they would usually agree to do whatever it was that needed to be done to help keep Liberia on track. Although it was a

struggle, we could usually get the resources we needed, unlike my Africa Bureau colleagues, who were always struggling for a few extra AID dollars and usually could not get them.

Q: Had the issue of blood diamonds come up at that time?

EICHER: No, that was before blood diamonds became an issue. The terrible civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone didn't come until long after I had left the desk. There was a little bit of diamond smuggling going on, but it wasn't being used to fund conflicts. Liberia was not a diamond producer but diamonds were produced next-door in Sierra Leone and I think also in another neighboring state, Guinea, and then were smuggled out through Liberia. So there were certain things going on with diamonds, but not to pay for civil wars the way it happened later.

Q: Was anybody messing around in Liberia with Qadhafi? The Soviet Union?

EICHER: Qadhafi was certainly trying get some influence there. Right after the coup he made a big overture to Liberia, which was apparently well enough received that it scared the U.S. into taking a friendlier attitude toward Doe rather than a hostile one. So it could have ended up quite differently if we had adopted a different attitude towards Doe. As for the Soviets, they were not a factor in Liberia; it was too much of an American sphere of influence. I'm not sure they even had an embassy there.

Q: But during your time was Libya pretty well out of the picture?

EICHER: Libya was pretty well out of the picture. Liberia was really very, very solidly in the American camp while I was there.

Q: How about the black caucus in Congress or the African-American movement in the United States? Was there an affinity there?

EICHER: There was. There were a lot of ties going way back between the African-American community in the U.S. and the Americo-Liberians; these were some of the things which had suffered from the coup. I think the Black Caucus generally, by the time I got there, which was a year after the coup, took an attitude much the same as the administration did. You know, we don't like what happened, but we need to work with this fellow as long as he continues to be pro-American; there is a long history of American ties and contacts in Liberia and we need to keep them alive and rebuild them. In fact, people used to roll their eyes whenever I wrote one of my memos saying "Liberia, our oldest and closest friend in Africa..." It was such a cliché, but it was true and I had to keep reminding people who didn't deal with Africa that Liberia wasn't just another African basket case. It was our basket case.

Q: Was Charles Taylor at all a factor?

EICHER: No, not at all. Not yet.

Q: Was there anything going on in Liberia in terms of a movement against this group that took over?

EICHER: Not that I knew or that we could discern. Doubtless there was already some grumbling by people who still weren't getting their piece of the pie. And Doe had set a bad precedent, established the model, you know, by staging a coup. When one group of sergeants takes over, another little group of sergeants starts thinking "they did it, so why can't we?" On top of that, there was a growing feeling that Doe was favoring his own Khran people, so that set the stage for other groups to be dissatisfied. In short, while I was on the desk there didn't seem to be any immediate threat to Doe, but the government was far from efficient and it didn't take a deep analysis to figure out that the same thing could happen to Doe as he did to the Americos. In the end, a few years after I left the desk, he was ousted and very brutally tortured and murdered. The one thing that seemed over was that the power of the Americo-Liberians had been smashed and it wasn't going to come back. In that sense, Doe's coup was indeed a revolution; it changed the social order as well as the government.

Q: You were doing that from when to when?

EICHER: From the middle of 1981 to the middle of 1983.

Q: Today one thinks of Liberia that if you don't have an evacuation of the embassy, you are falling down in your job but there was nothing like that when you were there?

EICHER: Nothing in Liberia, no. But it was one of the quirks of working in West African Affairs that there always seemed to be a coup somewhere or an evacuation somewhere else. There were lots of precipitous turnovers of government in the region. So, there were continually, it seemed, task forces set up in the State Department Operations Center to deal with Ghana or whatever other country might be having a coup at the time. Everyone in the office would get dragooned to help work on these task forces, so I did my share of weekends and night shifts on the Ghana task force or whatever task force.

Q: Was Liberia also sort of a safe haven at all because of these, a place where you brought people to?

EICHER: Well, it was certainly our biggest overall establishment in West Africa so I wouldn't be surprised if we did, but I don't recall any specific instance of it.

We did also have a lot of American visitors to Liberia, which we encouraged. We had a very activist ambassador, Bill Swing, who would try to drum up visits from as many prominent people as possible, to help people understand Liberia and to build ties. He was very good at that. So there were, for example, a lot of congressmen going, from the Black Caucus and the African Affairs Subcommittee and others, who we would have to brief. Swing also managed to get people like the commandant of the Coast Guard to go out and visit since there was a Coast Guard facility there. He even got the U.S. postmaster general to visit; I remember that because I was in Liberia at the same time as he was; we were both staying at the ambassador's residence together. I think the idea was to get help for the Liberian postal system and to encourage them to get some extra revenue by printing stamps that collectors would want to buy. All the visits did broaden the number of U.S. friends of Liberia and the base of Americans who knew about and were

interested in Liberia. It was a very skillful policy by the ambassador and I admired him for it and learned a lot from him about how to work the system.

Q: Was Liberia used as an entre point? Did people come to Liberia and then go off to see other parts of Africa? I'm talking about people who were important politically or economically or something.

EICHER: I don't recall. Perhaps being an African desk officer, you get kind of parochial. So maybe people were using it as a jumping off point, but I guess I wouldn't have cared much about where else they were going. On the other hand, if I ever heard someone was going elsewhere in Africa, I would get in touch with Swing right away and see if we could convince them to add Liberia to the trip. Swing and I got along very well and started to think alike on Liberia issues. If he needed something from Washington I could usually get it organized for him and if I needed a boost on something, I could always get him to send in a cable at a crucial moment to help sway policy discussions in the Department.

Q: What about trying to attract investment there?

EICHER: It was really more a case of trying to keep the existing investments there during a tenuous period; getting big new investments at the time I was on the desk was not really in the cards. The embassy was trying to get the government people to stop harassing the business people, to adopt policies that would keep the business people there. We spent a lot of time trying to pressure the government on those kinds of issues.

There were also some other big economic issues that we spent a tremendous amount of time on. Liberia still used American currency, which was actually one of the things which saved the economy. They couldn't print their own money and that kept the currency stable and to some extent kept the deficit from getting out of hand. But, contrary to our advice, they started minting their own dollar coins. They tended to be called "Doe dollars," they had a picture of Sammy Doe on them. They were supposed to be the equivalent of U.S. dollars and started out as such, but very quickly declined in value. Nevertheless, the big transactions were still done in U.S. dollars and that did help the foreign investors and protected the local people against runaway inflation.

Q: By the time you left in 1983 were things fairly solid?

EICHER: They were fairly solid. At least within the African context. You couldn't say that this was a wonderful, responsible government but it was a government that had done a lot of things that it might not otherwise have done to try to stabilize itself. It was slowly becoming respectable. Doe was wearing suits and ties rather than fatigues. He very much wanted to be seen as a respectable player on the world stage. Some university – in South Korea, I think – even gave him an honorary doctorate and he started calling himself "Dr. Doe" instead of General Doe. The investors were starting to settle down. The IMF program was working, more or less, most of the time. So you could be reasonably hopeful that Liberia was going to get back on track. You know, we didn't "lose Liberia" on my watch, which was actually something of an accomplishment. Things there tended to improve, quite a bit, actually, during my two years on the desk. Still, you couldn't say that it was solid yet.

Q: Did Liberia have representation at the annual United Nations get-together in the fall?

EICHER: Oh, sure. They were always there and they even sent their vice head of state one year. His name was Podier. His visit to New York was another wonderful Liberian travel story. Podier arrived in New York and the Liberian mission had done virtually nothing to prepare the logistics for his visit. They expected his very small security detachment, provided by State Department diplomatic security, to do all kinds of things for him which were way beyond their mandate. I got lots of complaints from DS (Diplomatic Security) about these “miserable Liberians.” The best story, I think, was when Podier was to have his courtesy call on the secretary-general of the UN, who was Javier Perez Cuellar at the time. Podier and six companions showed up downstairs at their hotel and the only vehicle there was the security vehicle. The limousine that the Liberians were supposed to supply didn’t show up. So, all of them piled into the DS car for the trip to the UN. As they are driving to the United Nations, they spotted an army surplus store on the side of the road and yelled “Stop, stop, stop!” Remember, these guys were basically young corporals and sergeants from the bush, who hadn’t begun to grow into their roles as statesmen. So, they piled out of the DS car and into the army surplus store and started trying on fatigues and checking out the gear. A couple of them wandered into the peep show next-door. Podier finally selected his fatigues or whatever he wanted to buy, and then they had to assemble everyone else, and go find the guys at the peep show, and finally pile back into the DS car and resume their trip. They ended up being way late for their appointment with the UN secretary-general. We got these and other, similar stories from the DS agents who accompanied them. DS was so mad that they threatened to cut Liberia off, but of course they couldn’t. Fortunately, aside from Doe and Podier, no other Liberians asked for security escorts.

Q: After this, which was, in a way, not quite sideshow because there were significant issues at stake, I mean, it was a country where we had assets then, where did you go?

EICHER: I had another tour in the Department. I went to the office of the United Nations Political Affairs, where I was the officer in charge of African affairs.

JOHN D. PIELEMEIER
Deputy Director, USAID
Monrovia (1981-1984)

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: That would have been in 1981, when we were transferred to Liberia.

Before we leave southern Africa, let me just mention one other thing that has just come to my mind. I should mention Bob Friedline, who was the AID Representative when I arrived in

Botswana. I think that he did a very good job. Then, when we became an AID Mission, Lou was appointed Mission Director. He was somewhat cantankerous but was otherwise an excellent Mission Director who really knew his job and did it well. I've always admired Lou a lot as a Mission Director and learned a lot from him.

Another thing that I also wanted to mention is that when I was moved up to be the Assistant Mission Director, taking on managerial responsibilities, I realized that I didn't have any particular management training. Most people in AID had had no such management training at that stage.

So at one point I went back to Washington, went into the Training Office, and talked with Dan Creedon, who was the head of a part of the Training Office, if not of the whole office. He had been involved with my IDI [International Development Intern] training, and I had a great deal of admiration for him. I asked Dan where I could get some management training. He said: "We don't offer management training, but if you can find a course, we'll fund your attending it. Use the catalog for the United States Civil Service training programs or executive leadership programs. Here are a couple of other catalogs as well." I said: "I've heard about a program in North Carolina called the 'Center for Creative Leadership.' Have you ever heard of that?" He said: "No, but if you have any material on it, bring it in, and we'll look at it."

The Center for Creative Leadership is one of the premier management training organizations in the United States. It has what is called a "Looking Glass Program," which it helps you to look at your management style. It had been going for about 10 years at that point. To AID's credit, I was eventually given AID funds to attend a course there, the first agency employee actually to go there. My fellow students in the course were from Proctor & Gamble in Cincinnati, the US Navy, a bank in California, and one other civilian employee of the US Government. It was a wonderful experience. I think that one or two AID employees went there later. Not too long after that, I think that AID decided to initiate senior management training programs.

Q: How long was the course there?

PIELEMEIER: It was a two week program. In the course you learn a lot about yourself and you learn a lot about management methodology and theory which most of those in the course didn't know. This shows how open people were at that time to new ideas. Basically, if you came up with an idea, the attitude was that they would let you do it.

Q: Very accommodating.

PIELEMEIER: Yes. As I said before, my next post was Liberia. We were interested in going to several places, either back to French speaking Africa, because we knew French, and the Sahel programs were now well under way, or elsewhere in Africa. Liberia hadn't been particularly high on our list. However, the AID program there was large, important, and a troubled program. I was informed that I would go to Liberia as Deputy Director of the AID Mission. The new Director, who was going to arrive almost at the same time that I was scheduled to arrive, was Lois Richards. Lois had been in Kenya previously. She was a bit older than I was and had held some key positions in the African Bureau of AID.

We were told that we needed to go and "clean up" the program and the staff.

Q: What year was this?

PIELEMEIER: It was in 1983. There had been a coup d'etat in Liberia, and Sergeant Doe had taken over as President of the country. We were providing assistance to Liberia at this time. It was a shaky situation. We were trying to encourage a move back to civilian rule through elections, but it was clear that that wasn't going to be easy. There was no internal fighting at this time.

The AID program was fairly large. Lois Richards had a very direct and forthright style of management. She was very clear in saying what she thought, especially to her staff. She did not accept products that were not done well and she let people know it. So part of my task as Deputy Director was to become an intermediary to a certain degree and a "buffer" between Lois and the staff. The first thing that we did, which I think was a wonderful model, was to sit down and agree to divide up the "portfolio." She said: "I'm not going to supervise everybody and I'm not going to ask you to supervise everybody as the Deputy Director." Sometimes, Mission Directors do that. She said: "Your background seems to be more programmatic and design. You supervise the technical offices, and I'll supervise the Comptroller and the Executive Officer."

Q: Where did the Program Office fit in this structure?

PIELEMEIER: The Program Office was part of my responsibility. There was generally a clear division of authority, and we were able to express that to the staff. They knew how it would work and also knew that she was the ultimate boss. For key decisions I would basically have to take them to Lois. We had an excellent, working relationship. Several staff members left Liberia of their own accord, early on. They saw the handwriting on the wall. We worked very, very hard. Lois worked extremely hard to locate and recruit new personnel, which is how you do this. Finding suitable people is basically hard work which requires more than just letting it be known through the system that you need someone. We worked at that jointly from the very beginning and got some excellent staff, many of them younger and newer people who came to the Mission either because they knew Lois or me.

I think that the program blossomed. We got more money and were able to change the focus of the program somewhat. We didn't "terminate" many of the projects, but some of them we looked at carefully, evaluated them, and decided to "re-direct" them. In general and in most cases, we found good allies within the government to work with and to provide program assistance to. AID and the US Government was the aid donor of first and last resort for the Liberians. They came to us first for everything. We were the major donor in the country, dealing with all issues, including program assistance, civil service problems, and project assistance. You name it. They came to us.

Q: What was our overall strategy? What were we trying to accomplish?

PIELEMEIER: We were working essentially to keep other aid donors "in the game." With program assistance we would repay debts owed by Liberia, usually to the IFIs [International

Financial Institutions]. Then, as a result of that, we would encourage the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the African Development Bank to remain involved in the country. We placed conditions on all of our program assistance, linked to reforms, especially in terms of tax and customs administration, both areas where we had technical advisers or PASAs (Participating Agency Service Agreements) from the U.S. Bureau of Customs and the Internal Revenue Service. To the degree that we could do so, we integrated the program assistance conditions with our project assistance activities. Especially within the Liberian Ministry of Finance and within the Ministry of Planning we had several advisers dealing with financial reform.

We had some local currency that we managed as well. We used this money to restructure the organization and system for dealing with it. It was a very challenging program. Liberia is a country with a large petty "corruption" problem. Corruption may have also been at the very top, but there were no cases that I could think of where AID resources appeared to be misused.

Liberia is a tough country! Electricity went "off" for six months of the year during the first year that we were there [1982]. This was because the Liberians had not paid their bills for purchasing fuel to generate electricity. They traditionally imported fuel for six months of the year and depended on hydroelectric power for the other six months. When the rains stopped, the dam which produced the power for the Monrovia area no longer produced electricity, and they had to use diesel fuel for power generation. They hadn't saved enough foreign exchange to be able to purchase diesel fuel for power generation. They also did not maintain the generators. Only one electricity generator was working, which meant that we had electricity on for six hours and then off for six hours during most of the six month, dry season period. None of us had our own electricity generators at this point. The country virtually came to a standstill during this period.

Taxis used to buy gasoline for each ride. The custom was to buy a little gasoline for the expected ride. Paying for the fuel was part of the charge. Since there was often no electricity, you had to pump the gasoline by hand. The lines around the gas stations were many blocks long. Grocery stores didn't have electricity generators, and perishable foods spoiled.

At that time my wife had just had our second child, born in the US I had come back to the US for the birth of the child and returned to Liberia ahead of my wife and the new baby. When she came back to Monrovia, the power went off. Here we were, living in a city where the temperature averages 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and the humidity averages 90 percent. Rainfall amounts to 30 feet per year. That is, 360 inches of rain a year in Monrovia. Our poor little baby girl had no air conditioning and even no functioning, electric fans. The only relief you could get from the heat came from fanning yourself. However, we managed to survive. There was a lot of hard work done by Alan Swan, the Executive Officer of the AID Mission, as well as Mark Anderson, his assistant. Eventually, we placed food freezers in the AID compound. All of the families would bring their food and place it in those few freezers, which would be run by the AID generator. You would decide what you were going to have for dinner on a given night and then go to the AID compound, get your meat out, take it home, and cook it. It was a year later that the AID Mission was able to complete the procurement of generators for household use. That took care of the problem.

Q: Did you and Alan Swan try to address the overall problem of power in Monrovia, including the procurement of diesel fuel and so forth?

PIELEMEIER: The problem was that Liberia did not have enough foreign exchange to buy diesel fuel for the generators during the dry season. That was part of the program assistance package. I remember that, at times, AID resources were used to buy diesel fuel for the Liberian electricity generators.

We had a wonderful Ambassador, Bill Swing, who has gone on to be Ambassador in all of the "hot spots" in Africa. At one time or another he was Ambassador to Haiti, Nigeria, and Liberia. Now, I believe, he is going to be Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of Congo, the former Zaire. Ambassador Swing is my vision of the perfect Ambassador. If I think of what an Ambassador should be, I think of the way he handled his job. He knew everyone in a large, US Government Mission. He knew the children and knew their names. He found time for everybody. He was relaxed but extremely knowledgeable.

He was also very "gutsy." There would be times when he would be called, in the middle of the night, to see President Doe, who would send over a car to get him. Ambassador Swing would go by himself. He would get into the car, which would take him to the Presidential Mansion. When he arrived at the Presidential Mansion, there were armed guards around him, I think at times even brandishing weapons in his face. The guards would walk Ambassador Swing down to wherever President Doe was, in his bedroom or wherever he might be, for several hours of discussion. At the time there was a lot of "mumbo jumbo," "voodoo" type stuff going on in the Executive Mansion, related to President Doe's very rural upbringing. Ambassador Swing had to "play this game," survive in it, and teach things to President Doe. In some ways Ambassador Swing was trying to "teach" Doe how to be a leader.

Swing never talked about these things openly, but we heard about them through other sources, people who, perhaps, had seen some of his most confidential cables. It is amazing to reflect on what Swing went through and how admirably he was able to do it.

Q: How did things work with the Liberian Government at that time?

PIELEMEIER: It was frustrating, because, while we could control the use of our resources, we couldn't control the use of the resources and revenues coming into the Liberian Government. These resources often were not used for the highest priority activities, as we would see them. Sometimes, these resources disappeared into politicians' pockets or were used to buy Boeing 747 airplanes. So that was very frustrating. Monrovia is obviously a difficult post to live and work in. However, among the expatriate community the camaraderie was wonderful. People would head out to one of the few beaches and lagoons for the weekend and relax, play "Scrabble," and so forth. We have some wonderful memories of that.

I worked with groups like the OICI [Opportunities Industrialization Center International], whose headquarters are in Philadelphia. OICI had a very good program in Liberia. Reggie Hodges was the Director of the OICI office in Monrovia. He was a wonderful fellow. Henry Barrett, one of

the people who worked with Reggie, is now an AID auditor. He is an American who lived in Liberia for many years.

Q: Were you able to get anything done? Did you have anything to do with this program?

PIELEMEIER: I think that there was some impact. There were some improvements in the health area, when we decided to move away from the Government and started working with PVOs [Private Voluntary Organizations].

Q: You were not involved with the JFK [John F. Kennedy] Hospital at that time?

PIELEMEIER: The JFK Hospital had been completed and was pretty much a "lost cause." It was a hospital that was built with political influence, I think during the Kennedy years. It was not maintained. There were no funds for maintaining it. There was no expertise to run it. It was a place where people "went to die." People went to other hospitals if they could possibly do so.

We did not try to resurrect JFK Hospital, that "white elephant." We went to work elsewhere in the health system. We had a very good program in the education sector, working on the reform of primary and secondary education. The first education sector analysis that I've been part of was truly absorbed by the host Government and utilized was one carved out by Joan Claffey and Henry Reynolds. Henry was the Education Officer. I think that he's now the Deputy Director of the AID Mission in South Africa. They did a marvelous job on this analysis.

I can't say that all of these changes, and the work in the agricultural sector as well, were successes, because in part, only a few years after we left Liberia, the country slid into civil war, which has gone on for over six years now. This civil war has just stopped, but, frankly, I think that most of the improvements we made can no longer be seen.

Q: Was the Monrovia Consolidated High School going at that time, or had that deteriorated also? This was one of the earlier, education projects in Liberia.

PIELEMEIER: I'm not familiar with that high school. We were working with the system as a whole. We were concerned with teacher training and the curriculum, so I'm not familiar with that school.

Q: Anything else about Liberia at this point?

PIELEMEIER: Only that shortly after I left AID, we brought in a very high level team, essentially to provide help at the highest levels of the Ministry of Planning. It was headed by Frank Kimball, a former AID official and a Mission Director. This was a major initiative aimed at really changing things, making things different, turning the situation around, and opening Liberia up to foreign investment. The purpose essentially was to make an effort to wrest "control" of the finances of the country away from the political leadership.

This very high-powered team stayed for a year or two and left the country. I think that attempt was essentially a failure. It's an example of a country whose highest levels of leadership really do

not want the same objectives that we were trying to work towards. It was almost impossible to achieve what we sought.

Q: But this was an effort to try to discipline the management of their finances?

PIELEMEIER: Yes, essentially through Liberian officials who were going to be in operational positions.

Q: And it didn't work.

PIELEMEIER: It didn't work. On the positive side we made good use in Liberia of the resources we had. We did a better job of managing aid resources than any other aid donors did. I think that we responded well to the requests we were getting. There was a good sense of harmony between the Embassy, the AID Mission, and other groups. In general, however, many things went well.

Q: Was there anything about the AID Mission approach to the educational sector, methodology, or contents that you think were particularly at fault?

PIELEMEIER: It went very slowly. Clearly, the approach was to use "joint teams" of expatriates who would come out to Liberia for fairly long periods of time to work, side by side, with people in the Ministry of Education. They were truly doing a collaborative analysis of the educational sector, in a slow but careful process of deciding what steps should be taken. The number two ranking Liberian in the Ministry of Education was a very strong, tall, forthright, young Liberian. He and Henry Reynolds worked together beautifully. Both of them were very, very able people. They directed this analytical process in such a way that the result was seen as essentially a "Liberian product," with American help.

I think that this Liberian official, whose name I have since forgotten, has left Liberia. I think that he now works at the World Bank as an educational specialist.

Q: Did this program effort involve primary education or the whole system?

PIELEMEIER: If I remember correctly, this involved primarily the secondary educational system.

Q: Throughout the country?

PIELEMEIER: Yes.

Q: Okay. Anything else in Liberia?

PIELEMEIER: Only that, when we found that the public health system was not responding to traditional assistance, I think that it was a very wise decision to move to working with the non governmental groups [NGOs], many of which were initially religious organizations.

Q: Such as?

PIELEMIEIER: A group called CHAL [Christian Health Association for Liberia] was one of them. I think that it was our major intermediary, which then funneled resources to other religious groups which ran hospitals and clinics up country.

Liberia remains a place where the roads are very poor. Going to visit projects in Liberia required a real effort, even at this time. There is a lot of rain and a lot of logging trucks on these roads which tear up the roads even if they were maintained reasonably well.

Q: Were you working with the Peace Corps at that time?

PIELEMIEIER: We did a lot of work with the Peace Corps. We linked into the Peace Corps in the health sector and in agriculture. They were wonderful people to work with, especially in the more isolated areas of the country.

However, the Peace Corps had a tough time as well. We had a room in our house which we called the "E. T." room, meaning "Early Termination." However, "E. T." had also been a figure in one of the Steven Spielberg movies. We had an arrangement with the Peace Corps Director, Rudy Watkins, that if there were volunteers who really had cultural problems and were thinking about "early termination" of their tours of duty, we would give them a dose of real "Americana" by coming to live in our house. We had two small kids. We had normal, American food and we had a room for these people to stay in. We would take them to stay in the "E. T." room for a week, talk to them, and help them decide whether to return to their positions or to terminate their tours. Both my wife and I had been Peace Corps volunteers, so we could talk about volunteer experiences. We probably used the "E. T." room seven or eight times during our tour in Liberia. About half of these Peace Corps volunteers went home, and half of them went back to their posts.

Q: You played a very valuable role. Where do you think that the AID program had any lasting effect and took root, as you look back on older projects and despite all of the more recent turmoil in Liberia?

PIELEMIEIER: I haven't been back to Liberia since our tour of duty there. I think that, frankly, with the fighting which has now gone on for six years, the only possible, lasting benefit is in the Liberians who will now return to Liberia and help to rebuild it. Several of the people whom we helped to train, as well as others who were already trained and were working with us, are in the US or in Ivory Coast, Ghana, Nigeria, and other places. If they go back to Liberia, they will take with them some of the skills they learned through working with or being trained by our AID Mission.

However, unfortunately, I am told that, in terms of infrastructure, it is now virtually all gone, in terms of both the education and health systems. I would imagine that everything is now destroyed and forgotten.

Q: So when did you leave Liberia?

PIELEMEIER: We left Liberia in 1984, after a three-year tour. I had been working in the African Bureau of AID for almost a dozen years, after my initial tour in Brazil. I was interested in seeing other developmental issues and problems. I had several offers from the head of the African Bureau to do interesting things in Washington, since we had now been overseas for seven and one-half years. We thought it was time to go back to Washington. We wanted our children to spend some time growing up in the U.S. The African Bureau had some good positions available, but I really thought that I wanted a change of pace in terms of the kinds of problems I was dealing with, as much as anything else.

JOHN E. HALL
Economic Counselor
Monrovia (1984-1986)

John E. Hall was born in Niagara Falls and was educated at Kenyon College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1962 and has served in a variety of posts in Switzerland, New Zealand, Liberia, and Canada. Mr. Hall was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1998.

Q: I'd like to talk more about that in a minute but before we get there let's just finish up. You say you were in the African bureau focusing on what, economic affairs?

HALL: I was the deputy director of their regional economic office for two years. I think it was understood earlier than it was enunciated that I would end up following that assignment by being the economic counselor in Monrovia. And so for my second year in that office I was very heavily involved in understudying and researching and dealing with our economic relationship with Liberia. I was, I think, everybody's informal choice but nobody did anything formal about it until the assignment cycle began.

Q: The economic relationship with Liberia, certainly among the nations of Africa, is certainly unique and special for the United States.

HALL: Special for Liberia, that's for sure... special for us, too, I suppose.

Q: As compared with other states in Africa.

HALL: Oh yes, there is baggage there.

Q: When did you go there, to Monrovia.

HALL: Eighty-four to '86 was my assignment there.

Q: And what was the setting then? The government of Liberia was under whom?

HALL: Samuel K. Doe and his group had assassinated Tolbert and his government ministers in 1980. By the time I went there, to the extent anyone could claim to have control in Liberia, it was probably Doe.

Q: But the civil war and Charles Taylor...

HALL: That all came later. And eventually Doe himself became his own victim. For the most part it was a peaceful place while I was there, in security terms.

Q: Your family was there?

HALL: No, I went alone. We had a son who was in 11th and 12th grade in those two years and we just didn't think that was a wise move. So I went on a separated tour. The place was relatively tranquil, but as in many parts of Africa it was many countries woven into one. There was, of course, the capital city. The vast rest of the country, for the most part the central government in the capital city had little contact with. Little influence over. To the extent that political activity happened, it was pretty well concentrated in the capital city. To the extent that there was economic activity, it was there, and at the sites of the major plantations and mines, all run by expatriates.

Q: Europeans as opposed to Americans?

HALL: Europeans and Americans, and indeed one of the plantations, I must be honest, was owned by a U.K. interest but run by a Malaysian. All run by ex-pats. And of course the petty commerce in the country was in the hands of Lebanese and Syrian ex-pats. There were occasional troubles in some of the outlying areas, but they certainly never impacted on me and never really impacted on embassy personnel. Even the AID people and certainly the embassy people rarely left the capital... We didn't have project personnel in the rural areas, although we had a substantial Peace Corps presence there. We had a large AID program although most of that was ESF, so it didn't involve project personnel in the field. I don't think our people were ever impacted by troubles that arose in the countryside. Come the late '80s and '90s when Charles Taylor and so on became forces, then I think that situation changed. But when I was there it was a relatively peaceful period.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

HALL: Bill Swing during my first year, and Ed Perkins during my second.

Q: And the DCM?

HALL: Len Shurtleff in both years.

Q: Perkins had earlier been DCM, had he not?

HALL: That's right. Neither Ambassador Swing nor Ambassador Perkins had an easy task in Liberia. By the time I arrived at post, Swing was in his fourth year as ambassador. He had gone

in shortly after Doe took over and established, by all accounts, a very good personal relationship with this neophyte, had coached him. Swing was often referred to as the proconsul.

But Doe, as he gained experience and confidence, came to realize that Swing was advising him in Washington's interest and according to Washington's expectations, and not in Doe's. And so he began to distance himself from Ambassador Swing. As the relationship became more strained over time, it became more uncomfortable for Swing. Eventually he concluded, and the Department concurred, that he had contributed what he could to the situation, which had been a very great deal.

The situation on the ground having evolved, which was to be expected, it was time for a change at the embassy, and Mr. Perkins was that change. Whereas Mr. Swing's approach had been to try to make things work by coaching and nurturing and guiding, Perkins' mandate was to be tough - to play hardball. The relationship changed very much in 1985 when that change of incumbent occurred. It changed in part because of personalities, but principally because of politics and changed expectations back home.

Q: Politics in the U.S. in what sense?

HALL: We became progressively more annoyed at having the Liberians consciously and deliberately frustrate our ambitions and aspirations for them. They began to defy us. A lot of people were taking shots at our Liberia policy, reinforced by the widening gap between what we and the IMF and others wanted the Liberian government to do and what it did. There was still a lot of sympathy for the Americo-Liberian memories and the prominent personalities of that era still living (many of them in exile in Washington). The Doe regime was viewed variously as malicious, inept, and certainly bloodstained. Congressional committees, NGOs, the IMF/IBRD were disillusioned, felt they had been ill-used by Doe and his cohorts. As they had.

During that year in Washington when I was learning the Liberia account, I had the opportunity to chat with a number of these interested parties. I found growing hostility to the Doe regime, even among those who once had placed high hopes in it. Great sympathy for Liberia, but great hostility toward Doe.

Q: Probably a lot of that went back to the time Sergeant Doe seized power, killing leaders of the previous regime.

HALL: Without question. The image of the bullet-ridden bodies tied to poles on the beach was very vivid. We had conveniently deluded ourselves into believing that Liberia had been a peaceful place for centuries until Doe struck. Liberia had been a model we held up to the rest of Africa, an offspring of which we were proud. Suddenly, we found that it wasn't the model, wasn't the stepchild, we wanted.

Q: You mentioned before the special relationship, as far as the Liberians were concerned, who looked to the United States in a way that other African countries had never experienced, because of the unique history and background. At the time you were there, in the economic realm, was that special relationship pretty much the same as it had been, or was it beginning to change?

Could it have changed even more? By now, it's disappeared, it's gone pretty much. How was it then? Firestone was still there?

HALL: The special relationship always meant much more in Liberia than it did in the United States. There it was both a psychological crutch for the Americos (who, after all, prided themselves on not being "native" to their country) and the promise (occasionally fulfilled) of money and other forms of sustenance. To a few Americans, the special relationship had theological significance; to most who knew of it, it was an annoyance which we could occasionally draw upon to make us feel good; to the vast majority of Americans, the phrase and the concept were totally without meaning.

At the beginning of his regime, I think that Doe saw the special relationship certainly in terms of cash and guns, but also in terms avuncular. Bill Swing succeeded in his early years in making it all that. But the honeymoon could not, and did not, last.

As for the private sector, Firestone was indeed still there in my time, as was the old Uniroyal plantation which had been taken over and was being run by a small group of private American investors; senior on-the-ground management there, also, was American. In addition, the Lamco iron mine in northern Liberia, a joint Swedish-American venture, was run at Nimba by an American head. There were also a few private American investors-cum-businesspeople, who were generally also cum-shyster. There were three American-run banks, and the fabled Liberian ship registry was run by a subsidiary of one of those banks out of Reston, Virginia.

So there was a noteworthy private-sector American presence and connection. In addition, there was a clear preference for American goods in the stores and for American connections by local traders; the only frozen foods available in the supermarkets, for instance, were Giant brand. So the "special relationship" had its private-sector economic aspect, made possible by its political aspect - and by the relative stability of the Americo period. All that has since changed, I suspect.

Q: In the notes you gave me last month, you mentioned that while in Monrovia as economic counselor you provided facts on the basis of which we might have cut the special relationship cord, had we had the courage to do so. I'd be interested if you would elaborate on what you meant by that, what you did, maybe what wasn't done that could have been done at the time.

HALL: I inherited from Dane Smith, my predecessor, a close and correct relationship with the key government economic ministers and officials. In addition, at that time, there were several AID and IMF advisors in various economic ministries, and the IMF had a resident representative who was very active and very alert. Putting it all together, we had many good sources. In that sort of society, you never have totally reliable access to information on all things, but we did pretty well.

The main focus at the time was on economic management. Nature made Liberia a rich country; her leadership made it a poor one. Resources were being exploited, but the proceeds were being diverted. It's the tragedy of many countries, but because of the special relationship, much of the world viewed this country as our responsibility. And the Liberian leadership liked having us in

that hot seat. By the time I arrived, Doe and his team had become pretty adept at hiding things, at covering their tracks, at obfuscation. We weren't ever 100 percent informed, but we knew enough to be able to guess most of the rest.

I saw my role as being to ferret out all I could, piece it together, double-check whenever possible, and report factually. We inserted very little commentary in the reporting the Economic Section did; the facts were all the commentary we needed. The facts we reported, particularly when spliced together with those being reported by the IMF representative and, to a lesser degree, the resident IBRD representative, clearly showed that our advice was not being followed, or efforts to improve economic management were being ignored, and our aid and other programs aiming at those ends were being frustrated. Deliberately, positively, consciously, aggressively, knowingly frustrated. Washington's expectations, and the reality in Monrovia, were very far apart by late 1984. And in my judgement, the perception of a very close relationship between us and Liberia was harming our image in Africa at that moment.

By the end of 1985, I sensed that Washington knew that it had enough information to see clearly the consistent pattern and that, had it wanted to cut Liberia loose, free itself from the millstone of Liberia, it could have justified the act. Such a debate did occur here, and in the end the posture which was settled on was to try to tough it out. Ed Perkins brought a "get tough" message, and, of course, Doe's eventual demise and the chaos which preceded (and followed) it, made a difficult situation even more so.

There is one fact about the special relationship should not be lost sight of. From the 1830s until the 1940s, it was really an empty phrase - nothing more than a state of mind among the Americas. There was no measurable, quantifiable substance to it at government level. Liberia became a very convenient and willing ally in World War II, and since then the relationship has become more than just words. But until the Doe regime, that substance was economic only, and largely in the private sector. Only since 1980 has it had a more comprehensive content.

Q: You know I was in Ghana from 1989 to 1992, and my sense was at that time from the Ghanaians, they thought that we, the United States, whether government, or people, or what, had a history and, ergo, a responsibility vis à vis Liberia that was unique. It wasn't exactly the same way they saw Paris' responsibility and interest in Francophone Africa, but it was close. And I think they thought - again, civil war broke out and things began to happen there - at that time, of course, you had long since gone on to other things, but we had turned our back and were certain that were discharging the proper level of interest now. I may have misunderstood or misread it, and it was a different period, but I think they thought that we could or should have done more, because we had this history with Liberia.

HALL: Many Liberians felt the same way at that time, and when I was there. But at the time I was there, you were hearing those remarks more from the economic class - which has prospered under the Americas, and wanted us to oust Doe - than from Doe and his companions. The Doe government by my time was using the idea of the special relationship to try to prod resources, and forgiveness, and the turning of a blind eye, out of us.

I think the key is that everyone was dissatisfied with us, as we were with the Doe regime. Even we were dissatisfied with ourselves. The choice before us was to identify the least objectionable, the least painful, course, in a setting and at a time when we were being played for suckers. In my view, we chose an inferior option, but I acknowledge that it was a perplexing dilemma with no easy way out.

Q: It certainly is fair to say that in the period when you were there, and throughout Liberian history, the role of the American embassy differed from that of any other embassy in Monrovia.

HALL: That's correct. In my day, we were larger than all the other embassies put together. The others were insignificant in size, in role, in purpose. To their home governments, they were - virtually all of them - marginal. I and my colleagues had very little contact with them. Actually, the International School was the one place where some contact did occur.

Q: Let's talk a bit more about the expatriate business community, particularly the rubber and mining interests. Were they under a lot of pressure? Were they beginning to scale down in your time there?

HALL: By the time I arrived, Uniroyal had sold out to a private consortium of some of its own executives, and Goodyear had sold out to a British firm. Otherwise, the American presence which went in during and after the Second War was intact.

Firestone dominated all. It employed forty thousand people, principally on its plantation, which was huge, but also in the Coca-Cola bottling plant, the paint factory, the various import firms, the shipping line, the trucking company, and so on which it owned. They also ran one of the major ports.

There were two major iron mines - Bong, which was German-owned, and LAMCO, the joint Swedish-American venture. And there were several timber plantations and sawmills, all foreign-owned - largely Lebanese and Syrian expats [expatriates] in those cases.

In my time, each of them was worried about the future, but each of them had a good thing going at the moment, and Doe and Company knew enough to let them continue to make money. The investors knew how to share that money, and that kept them safe. I assume that with civil war, most of those (with the possible exception of some of the Lebanese and Syrians, who had nowhere else to go) pulled out.

Q: How involved were you with the neighboring countries?

HALL: In political/security terms, there was always rivalry/friction across the Liberia/Sierra Leone border. Indeed, the "attempted coup" which occurred while I was there came from Sierra Leone. In its detail, it was straight out of Laurel and Hardy, but it gave Doe an excuse to jail some of his detractors. Small, disorganized, dissident groups from any one of these countries might occasionally seek temporary refuge in another, but that didn't amount to much in toto.

North of the LAMCO mine runs another vein of iron ore which crosses the border with Guinea. Loosely called "Mifergui," this resource is occasionally the subject of speculation as to whether the two governments might cooperate to permit its exploitation. LAMCO was interested, as were some French interests, and others. But when the one government waxed hot, the other waxed cool, over the decades. That continued in my time, but it was the spur to a visit I made to Conakry to talk with Guinean officials just to find out more about the topic.

With those two exceptions, there was little cross-border activity which involved our embassies in any of the four countries at issue.

Q: What about the security situation in Monrovia?

HALL: Now and then, individual soldiers or small groups of them turned into hooligans for a short while. I found myself looking down the barrel of a rifle once or twice, but I knew that the soldiers were rarely given bullets for fear that they might use them on their officers. There was often tension in Monrovia in my time, fear that things would happen. But they rarely did.

Doe and his henchmen were of the Krahn tribe, a small up-country group. Most of the garrison in the Monrovia area were Krahns, and the people of Monrovia mostly were not. Tribalism was alive and well in Liberia then, as I am sure it is now, and one can legitimately view Doe's takeover, and his subsequent overthrow, in tribal terms. Incidentally, like it or not, cannibalism is also alive and well in Liberia. Once overthrown, Doe became lunch.

Q: Was there a large private American community in Liberia in your time there?

HALL: The official Americans numbered several hundred, even excluding the Peace Corps volunteers. There were several score American missionaries, most of whom were so committed that they would not think of leaving whatever might happen. There must have been thirty or forty Americans associated with Firestone, plus others attached to the other firms. But all in all, not many in the private sector. There were, of course, many Americo-Liberians who held American passports - dual nationals. I am not counting them.

Q: When we were together in Bern, you were in the Commercial Section. You had considerable commercial experience by the time you arrived in Liberia. Was there an active commercial program at the embassy there?

HALL: In a word, no. Commerce paid for two FSNs, and State paid for a local-hire American (in my time, the wife of an AID officer), who functioned nominally as a commercial officer. But in fact that person was the third economic officer at the post. After the Americo period, it would have been a very rare circumstance in which we could honestly recommend to any American firm not already operating there that they seriously consider doing business in Liberia. The total climate was simply not conducive.

Before we leave Liberia, I would like to mention one small but amusing point. Doe had been an Army sergeant, but promoted himself to five-star general; no one argued with the promotion at the time it happened. Each minister in the Doe cabinet was made an Army major, both to keep

them in their place to him and to provide them with a second official income. The major who was Minister of Finance during most of my time in Monrovia never served in the real Liberian Army, but he would come to the office occasionally in full dress uniform - complete with plumed cocked hat and sword. Seeing him getting into and out of his car, or into and out of his office chair, was a treat.

KEITH L. WAUCHOPE
Deputy Director, Francophone West Africa
Washington, DC (1984-1986)

Deputy Chief of Mission
Monrovia (1986-1989)

Ambassador Wauchope was born and raised in New York, graduated from Johns Hopkins University and, after a tour in the US Army in Vietnam, in 1966 joined the Foreign Service. His specialty being African affairs, Mr. Wauchope served in a number of African posts, including Ft. Lany, Asmara, Bamako and Monrovia. In 1989 he was appointed Ambassador to Gabon, where he served from 1989-1992. In his several Washington assignments Ambassador Wauchope dealt with personnel, cultural, Latin American affairs and Sudan affairs. Ambassador Wauchope was interviewed by Stuart Kennedy in 2002.

WAUCHOPE: The Anglophones Liberia and Nigeria, took up a great deal of our time and energy. Liberia was our hottest concern. As the senior Deputy, I used to take over for Ed while he was away. He used to travel to the region and domestically a fair amount. He had the good sense to get out there to show the flag in the entire region and to have a better feel for it. Our extensive assets in Liberia, the VOA facility, the diplomatic telecommunications relay facility, and the Omega navigation station were a key concern in the region. These were the greatest aggregation of American assets of any country in sub-Saharan Africa. I was the acting director, AF/W there was an coup against Samuel Doe's government in October of 1985. Jim Bishop was managing the crisis for the AF bureau, and Ed was now Ambassador in Liberia at this point. Howard Walker was away and I was running the show when the coup took place.

Q: This was where?

WAUCHOPE: Liberia. Quiwonkpa came damn close to overthrowing Doe. The significance was not only the disruptions and repression that occurred thereafter, but also the watershed for Liberia transforming from a non-tribal government as it had been under the Americo-Liberians, to one in which tribalism became the definitive test of loyalty. The Americo-Liberians had successfully suppressed tribalism during their rule. For the first five years of Doe's stewardship the nation continued to avoid tribal conflicts. Quiwonkpa, by contrast, was backed by two large tribal groups. Therefore, when he went after Doe's Krahn supporters, it took on the aspect of a tribal conflict. From that point onward, politics in Liberia became explicitly tribal in their orientation. Our concern was driven by the size of the American presence. We had so many

Americans there, the U.S. Mission itself was over 225, and there were about 5,000 American citizens counting returned Liberians who had gone to the United States and obtained U.S. citizenship. So, we had a lot at risk and we monitored very carefully how we in AF/W backstopped the Embassy's efforts to do what was necessary. Unfortunately, our military mission chief did not handle themselves very well and we had some problems deriving from his conduct..

Q: What were the problems?

WAUCHOPE: Well, there was a great deal of resentment against Doe among Embassy personnel because they had reason to believe that he had stolen the election a month earlier, and the U.S. had been compelled to certify the election for political reasons. Further, they felt that Doe was recalcitrant and uncooperative on a range of issues. So, when Quiwonkpa who was a military man, launched his coup attempt, our military people, in particular, took it upon themselves to go out into the streets, ostensibly to look after the Americans living in various parts of the city. In reality, they ended up encountering the insurgents who for about 12 hours or so, seemed to be on the verge of taking power. They were observed talking to and joking with the insurgent forces. Inevitably, Doe's people saw this as well. When Doe's reinforcements arrived and put down the insurrection, Quiwonkpa was captured, killed and dismembered. Doe strongly resented the American military for having "collaborated", with his enemies. Doe wasn't so sure that our MilMish people hadn't work with Quiwonkpa and his supporters, and encouraged them to take action against Doe because our relations with Doe were not good at that time. We prevailed upon Doe not to expel these people. They were still assigned there when I arrived. It was probably a mistake. They probably should have been allowed to leave quietly. It would have taken one less irritant out of the relationship.

What struck me when I was in AF/W, was the degree of intensity with which Nigeria and Liberia seemed to dominate the thinking of the bureau whenever they thought of West Africa. We tried to explain that the Francophone West African countries were much more stable, had shown much more promise in many ways. While the French were still influential in their former West African colonies, we could have played the game much more effectively than we did. We tried to get more attention devoted to these countries. Chet Crocker was the Assistant Secretary at the time, and his focus was almost completely on South Africa. Constructive engagement was the AF watchword and it was a challenge to get his attention on problems elsewhere. The Deputy Assistant Secretaries, particularly Jim Bishop, were more focused on the West Africa, and the non-South African side of the continent. He was a consistent supporter of our efforts to persuade the Francophones to be more cooperative and responsive, and to provide more assistance where the opportunities existed.

Q: When did you leave there?

WAUCHOPE: Okay. I left in July of '86. I went to Liberia as the Deputy Chief of Mission.

Q: Okay, we'll pick it up then.

WAUCHOPE: Okay, sounds good.

Q: Today is Friday the 13th of September, 2002. Keith, you were in Liberia from '86 to when?

WAUCHOPE: To 1989. Three years.

Q: '86 to '89. Three years. Okay. Before we get into the thing, what was, how did you get chosen to be DCM?

WAUCHOPE: Well, the ambassador at the time was Ed Perkins and he'd been my Office Director in AF/W for the first year that I was there. Then he went out to Liberia in the summer of '88. I had indicated to him that I would be interested in competing for the job as his DCM. He indicated he would be interested in having me, but it was not a done deal because it had to go through the open assignment process.

Q: When you went out there, did you do your homework. I mean you had been in West Africa anyway, but what was the situation, what were our interests in Liberia and what was the situation there when you went out in '86?

WAUCHOPE: Well, it's very important to understand the events that occurred immediately before my arrival as they set the tone for the U.S.-Liberian special relationship, which Liberians constantly invoke. We were reaching a transitional phase in our relations with Doe. In 1980, with the overthrow of Tolbert, the last Americo Liberian chief of state was killed by a group of army sergeants. This group called the Redemption Council, had held sway for five years as a loose coalition. Doe had risen to the top of this council, I was told, because he was the only one who knew how to type. Thus he typed the edicts, announcements and notices, so he formulated their content. Increasingly people looked to him to provide leadership. He was a staff sergeant. He and his fellow NCOs had been living in deplorable conditions that provoked them finally to move against the Americo-Liberian government. We know Doe was in the bedroom of President Tolbert at the time he was killed. Whether he actually killed the president is not clear. For five years this group functioned without significant division along ethnic lines. The sergeants made themselves colonels and generals, but Doe emerged as the undisputed leader.

The privilege that the Americo-Liberians had enjoyed over the many years had to come to an end. The Americo-Liberians, who still held positions of influence in business and society, were, to a certain extent suspect by Doe. They kept their distance from Doe's government. Doe's people believed that the Americos were smarter and better educated than they were, and that they would take advantage of them. Nonetheless, after several years of our prodding, we persuaded Doe's government to take advantage of their expertise and bring them back into government. The U.S. was deeply engaged in trying to bring some legitimacy, credibility and stability to the Liberian government during this time. The culmination of this effort was the presidential election in the summer of 1985, which, while definitely flawed, was sufficiently credible that the U.S. certified the results. We tried very intensely to make certain that the election free and fair. We had tried to persuade Doe not to be a candidate himself, but rather to let others step forward and become candidates in their own right. When Doe chose to run, we saw immediately the handwriting on

the wall. He was not going to allow anyone defeat him in this election. Our efforts at elective democracy were shattered in November of 1985, when Quiwonkpa, who had been a member of the Redemption Council and had the title of general, rose up against Doe. He led his ethnic groups, the Mano or Gio against Doe. They were a significant part of the population in the Northeastern part of the country. They moved against Doe because they believed that he was favoring his tribal group the Krahn. The Krahn were considered a backward, warlike, brutish group who didn't really reflect the best of Liberia. In the wake of his unsuccessful coup, Quiwonkpa was captured and killed, and a number of his Mano and Gio followers were slaughtered, both in Monrovia and also in their indigenous areas as well. The Quiwonkpa coup attempt was an outgrowth of the flawed election. It reflected a recognition that the elections were fraudulent, and that the Americans were inclined to accept them simply because we wanted stability to protect our assets, although we did acknowledge that there had been fraud in the election process.

So, this was the setting into which I moved in August of 1986. There was a lot of tension in the country. There were pronounced divisions along ethnic lines and there was a lot of dissension within the U.S. mission. There were a number of officers both in the embassy and the U.S. Information Agency who felt that the Embassy leadership should not have sanctioned that election, that the election was, in fact, fraudulent and that we should have called it that way, and rejected Doe as the legitimate president of the country. That was not the majority view, and certainly not the view of the Department at that time, but it was an ongoing concern for mission management.

Q: Was the prevailing view of the Department, I mean what brought them to feel that we should accept this?

WAUCHOPE: Well, that gets into what the U.S. interests were in Liberia. We had the largest collection of strategic interests in Liberia that we had anywhere in Africa. These included the diplomatic telecommunications facility, run by the CIA, a 20-man Voice of America relay station that broadcast all across Sub-Saharan Africa, the Omega maritime navigation station, one of eight in the world, and the communications support base which provided communications technicians to support diplomatic communications throughout most of Africa. The U.S. had built Port of Monrovia and the airport, Robert's Field, during the Second World War. We had an ongoing interest in keeping these operating should we ever need the port for American naval vessels operating in the region, and the airport might be useful in the case of conflict in the Middle East. It was considered important to maintain access to these rent-free facilities. Although we did have a significant assistance program, it was not directly linked to paying for these facilities.

The irony in our role in Liberia at that time was, as I mentioned earlier of having served with Dick Moose in his early days the AF bureau and his distaste for the sale of F-5 to Sudan, we found ourselves having to provide an increasing amount of military assistance to Doe to keep him happy and in power. One thing that Doe had promised the army, the rank and file, was to improve their living conditions; to improve the barracks and mess facilities, their pay and medical care. We were obliged to maintain an uncomfortably close relationship with Doe, which we felt we had no choice but to continue. Some of those in the embassy who were unhappy about

the 1985 election results had served as observers in polling places and claimed to have seen ballot boxes dumped out or found ballots that had been partially burned. They claimed there had been substantial fraud, which I'm not prepared to say was wrong, but I am not sure that the outcome would have been different. We were mouse-trapped into a policy that required our acceptance of the election outcome. .

Q: Looking at it, was the army a real army or was it sort of?

WAUCHOPE: Well, it was an army by all outward appearances, which is to say that they were in uniform, and they had units and a military hierarchy and a reasonable amount of weaponry. But no, it was not an army by our standards. Of course, you'd have a difficult time, with few notable exceptions, to show where in Africa there was an army that had a real military structure and capability, and that could effectively defend its borders. Most African armies are oriented to counter internal threats, and are an instrument of the people in power to keep control of the government and the nation. Our objective in Liberia was to try to make its military more professional. We sent Liberians officers for advanced training in the United States. We had a modest military assistance programs, primarily in the area of small arms, transportation and medical supplies. We were not going to provide them with heavy weaponry, like armored vehicles or sophisticated aircraft. They had no requirement for such equipment and we didn't want to have to maintain it. We had been responsive to what Doe thought he needed during this period, but the U.S. was beginning to change its attitude following the flawed elections and the failed coup.

I want to give you an idea about the orders of magnitude of our mission in Liberia. It was the largest mission in the AF bureau. We had about 225 direct hire employees, not including about 140 Peace Corps volunteers. In addition, we hired almost 1,500 local personnel. More than half of them were the uniformed guard force to provide security for our many compounds, apartments and housing. We had an American school that went through the 12th grade. We had an extensive operation not only in the capital, but also miles outside of the capital. Part of the diplomatic telecommunications relay facility was east of the city. The Voice of America retransmission site was out about 18 miles north northeast of Monrovia, as well as the Omega navigational station.

In addition to the U.S. government activities, there was substantial U.S. investment in Liberia. By this time, the Americans had sold out of the iron ore mining business at LAMCO, the Bomi Hills deposits had played out, and the Mano River mines, which had started as an American undertaking, were later taken over by a World Bank consortium, had never produced the amount of iron ore that had been anticipated. What they called the Liberian American Mining Company, LAMCO, was now owned by Electrolux of Sweden. Their mines were up in the Northern region near the Guinea border. While there were Americans working there, it was no longer an American facility. The Germans had an iron pelletizing plant also, a very high grade iron ore in Bong. So the mining sector was now primarily in the hands of the Europeans. The highest profile American investment was the Firestone rubber plantation at Harbel, the largest rubber plantation in the world. Uniroyal had a plantation, which was later sold to a consortium of private American owners. There was also a ship and corporate registry, USLICO based in Monrovia, but actually run out of Reston, Virginia. It was an American company that registered over 200 or so merchant ships, primarily tankers, and hundreds of offshore corporations. This provided the Liberian

government a welcome revenue stream. Finally, there was international banking with regional operations of Citibank and Chase Manhattan. They were a good source on Liberia's financial dealings and the economic climate. Forestry was a profitable industry, but the Americans were not significantly involved in operations. The Lebanese, some Europeans and the Israelis all had active operations. So, the economic side Liberia was doing reasonably well.

While most of these activities were enclave type operations where you extract the materials through a self-contained operation. These export operations were self-contained such as the Germans operating their own iron ore port, and Firestone its own export facility. Our economic interests were extensive and our mission was commensurately large. The Embassy was involved in every aspect of Liberian political and economic life. We had probably more people in the U.S. mission than all the rest of the several dozen diplomatic missions combined. Most of the Europeans were represented there. The Bloc countries were represented, and, of course, the Chinese and the Soviets.

I arrived in Monrovia in August 1986. Just prior to my departure from the States, I had heard that Ed Perkins was being seriously considered to be our ambassador in South Africa. Since I came out there to serve with Ed Perkins, I called him before I left Washington. I said, "Ed, is there any truth to the rumor that you might be going out to Pretoria?" He said, "Well, nobody has been in touch with me about it." I'm sure he was correct as far as that went. The reality was that Chet Crocker, the AF Assistant Secretary, was orchestrating his "constructive engagement" effort with the South Africans, trying to maintain a rational relationship with their government to nudge them toward majority rule. The White House was persuaded that in order to forestall a Congressional initiative to place an embargo on our trade with South Africa, the best course would be to send a black ambassador to Pretoria. It wasn't necessarily Chet's idea, but apparently the Reagan administration thought this was a way to deflect criticism of the America's South African policy. The White House approached a variety of potential candidates. One of whom had been the special assistant to the president for minority affairs under Nixon. I had met this fellow when he was the President's representative to the independence of the Bahamas. When they looked into his background, they found something that made them wary. They then tentatively approached Terrence Todman, now a Career Ambassador and the ranking black officer in the Foreign Service. He preemptively let it be known that he wouldn't be interested. Looking down the list of senior black officers, Ed Perkins loomed large. So his name surfaced. I had his tacit assurance that he hadn't been contacted at that time. We arrived at post on a weekend and the following Friday Ed hosted a reception to introduce me to the key players in Liberia, as well as the mission staff. As we were leaving the event, he took me aside and said, "Keith, can we talk for a moment?" I went into the drawing room and he said, "I just received communication today from the Department that they want me back in Washington." I asked, "Is this related to South Africa?" He said, "Apparently. They want to talk to me about that position." I had been at post at this point for six days. I asked, "When are you leaving?" He said, "Tomorrow morning. In addition, I want you to keep it secret that I'm gone." I said, "Good luck."

To understand the significance of this you must understand the role of the U.S. in Liberia and the Liberian scene, particularly in Monrovia. The American ambassador had a profile second only to President Doe. He was a key player in every facet of Liberian life, not to say "The Pro-Consul"

as they used to say about Ed's predecessor, Bill Swing. Ed's whereabouts and his activities were a constant focus in the local media. The Liberians had picked up the rumor that Ed might be sent to South Africa. I said, "Well, we'll do our best to try to keep the fact that you're no longer here under wraps." So, sure enough he left discretely the next morning. He went to the airport with the chauffeur only, no flags, and my wife remained home. We tried to arrange his departure as surreptitiously as possible and keep his absence out of the news as long as possible. In fact, he left Saturday and by the next Tuesday the word of his whereabouts came out in Washington, and the Liberians picked it up immediately. There was a strong sense among Liberians that, if Ed had been called back, he would be tapped for the job. Ed was noncommittal, he hadn't asked for it and didn't know if he wanted it

To give further context on the role of the American ambassador in Liberia, I had visited Liberia in 1983 on a trip with the Director General Clark, and I saw Bill Swing in action. Ed was then his deputy. Bill's role was as close to that of a pro-counsel as you could imagine. I attended a luncheon that he had organized with various ministers. They were asking him what he thought they should do about a power generation problem. He said, all you have to do is this, this and this. His advice was sound, but essentially he was telling them how to run their government. The Liberian officials were almost taking notes on how to go about solving the problem. They would later invoke the fact that the American ambassador had told them this is the way to do it. That was accepted practice. At that time Doe had agreed to bring some of the more talented Americo-Liberians who were willing into his government. They were people who had some sense of the right way of doing things, but they wanted to get the Americans' perspective on issues. So, decisions were often made in this manner. Ed Perkins was now playing that role and, all of a sudden, he's being tapped to serve elsewhere. It would have a significant impact on our bilateral relations. It certainly was a matter of concern to me. I'd been in country barely seven days and I'm given charge of the largest mission in Africa. Again, I was outranked by all the agency heads and by the Admin Counselor. But we had an excellent staff across the board, and everything seemed to fall into place. We carried off Ed's absence, and he returned in about ten days, and I asked him how it went. He said, "Well, I had a sequence of interviews of the White House staff starting with their personnel people on up the chain." He met with Deaver and then James Baker, who was at that time a senior Special Assistant to the President. Eventually he met with the president. By that time he had obviously been given the Good Housekeeping seal, and the deal was done. He said the decision was close hold and was not to be revealed in any manner. So, we had to conduct ourselves as if there would be no change of leadership. This agreed tactic was to allow the White House to announce the nomination at the critical moment as the Congress moved forward the legislation imposing sanctions on minority regime in South Africa in hopes derailing their efforts. I should point out that this ploy didn't work. Congress got wind of the ploy and plowed ahead with sanctions. Thus Ed went to Pretoria representing a government that had just imposed sanctions against their government. In any event, he spent almost a month in Monrovia in suspense awaiting the announcement. When he left Washington he had been told that his appointment would be announced in a week or ten days. The suspense went on and on, and he was twisting in the wind with his mission in Liberia undermined by the expectation of his departure. Eventually the nomination was announced with a whimper, and he was told he should prepare himself to return to Washington and present himself to the Senate and to the press. He would have one more opportunity to return to Monrovia, say his farewells and close out his affairs in Liberia, then off to South Africa.

He returned to Washington and was presented to the press. While in the Department, Jesse Jackson asked to see him with a group of black American leaders. According to Ed's account, he knew immediately that Jesse Jackson's intent was to get some face time in the media in the guise of showing opposition to Reagan South African policy, but Ed was game to meet with them. They had a private meeting in one of the Secretary's antechambers. The meeting lasted for some time and he told me Reverend Jackson said to him, "Really you can't sanction this administration's constructive engagement policy in South Africa by lending your presence as a representative of your race." Ed heard him out. I've seen Ed in action when he dealt with people with whom he disagreed. He very deliberately would just listen and nod, offering no encouragement. At the end of his presentation, Jesse said, "Well, what do you think? What are you going to do?" Ed replied, "I think I'm going to do what the President asked me to do." That was it for Jesse. He reported that Jesse said, "Well, if you are determined to go, then I guess we must support your decision." As a courtesy, Ed accompanied Jesse Jackson down to the diplomatic lobby. He immediately saw a mob of press at the security barrier waiting to get some kind of reaction. He said, to Jesse Jackson, "Well, it's been very nice to meet you Reverend." He turned to leave and Jesse Jackson almost physically dragged him toward the barrier to get him in front of the cameras. Ed is a very large man and a former Marine, nobody is going to take him where he didn't want to go. He walked away.

Ed knew he was being used by the Reagan administration, I believe, but as he said to me, I was a sergeant in the Marine Corps, and when my superior tells me to do something, I do it. If the president asks you to do something, you do what he asks. That was his motivating factor, and that was that.

He returned to post for about a month to pack up and get his affairs in order, and to attend all the farewell receptions. He went to lunches and dinners day after day, while I tried to get a grasp of mission activities, and to pick his brains on dealing with the key players in the Liberian scene. I was going to be Chargé and, this move being unanticipated, no one would be on the horizon to replace Ed. So, I knew it was going to be Chargé for an extended period of time. Ed departed in mid-October, and I was Chargé until I left for the U.S. in mid-April to be present for the birth of my second son, Colin. My time as Chargé was a very interesting period because the issue of Liberia's performance in economic and fiscal reform came to a head. In the early '80s after Doe had taken power and had begun to bring responsible people in to administer the government, he negotiated an economic reform package with the U.S. and the international financial institutions or IFIs. It was intended to rationalize government revenues and ensure that fiscal policies were in line with revenues so that, among other things, Liberia could service its debt to the IFIs. These institutions were extending to Liberia more credit than they were comfortable with because the U.S. had persuaded them to do so. To keep our promises to these institutions we had to see to it that the Liberians conformed to the reform program and made the promised repayments. Unfortunately, this program, which had been in place for well over a year, wasn't working. During the time I was Chargé I consulted with the Country Team and with the Department, and would repeatedly approach the government to jaw-bone the Minister of Finance and to the head of the Central Bank. These were bright, capable people, Americo-Liberians. Robert Tubman, the Minister of Finance, was a Harvard law school graduate. He was a nephew of the former president Tubman who was still revered by the indigenous Liberians. So, Robert Tubman

benefited from this aura. I used to go to his office and we'd talk about the shortcomings in the implementation of the program, things that weren't happening, and benchmarks that were missed. I would actually take in a copy of the bilateral agreement, and I would highlight in yellow the parts where Liberia had failed to meet its obligations. I'd leave a copy with him so he could show his colleagues the areas of U.S. concern. I felt that, in the absence of an ambassador, I had to try harder, if you will, to press them to focus on things they had committed themselves to do. It had only a very limited effect because of the entrenched questionable practices. So, with the agreement of the country team, I prepared a speech, which I cleared throughout the mission, particularly the USAID mission, which was deeply engaged in this process and believed strongly that something had to be done. We would fire a shot across their bow, and we had to do it in a manner that would get their attention and proper press play as well. The most influential of all of the business groups in Liberia was the Rotary Club which held its monthly meeting at the premiere hotel, such as it was, the Ducor Palace. I would be the keynote speaker. This speech would make clear that the U.S. Embassy believed that the government is not living up to its obligation under these agreements. I gave the speech and initially there was silence, and almost audible gasps from the Liberian audience. We knew that the government of Liberia and its policymakers, were not of one mind on this economic reform. They were not all behind Doe's lax compliance with the program, and the business community felt that the government wasn't putting its house in order and the nation's credibility was at risk. They wanted to see us take a harder line with the government, so they were encouraged by what I had to say. It stirred up quite a hornet's nest, nonetheless. It did make it into the press, the radio and television, but we had certainly gotten the message out. A few days later I was called in by Senator Yancey, who was an old retainer from the Americo-Liberian governments of Tubman and Tolbert, and now working faithfully for Doe. He was a venerable old character, although he was probably as corrupt as the day is long. In any event, he said he'd been tasked by the President to let me know that, as Chargé, and as a young man not understanding the complexities of the situation in Liberia, it was most inappropriate for me to take the government to task on these issues of economic reform and its adherence to economic agreements. I took his message onboard and said, "The intent was not to embarrass the President, but rather, it is a clear expression of our position, which we have made clear to the ministers many times before this speech. I had received their assurances, but nothing has happened. I had the full concurrence of the Department in this message." Although I must say that regarding the Department, I had provided them our intended approach, but I'm not sure how closely they focused on exactly what I planned to do or how much reaction it was likely to generate. In any event, it was very satisfying to capture the limelight in an effort to do what we ought to be doing. We also succeeded in getting the U.S. government to focus by taking the Liberians to task. Knowing that it would be a long time before an ambassador would arrive, even as Chargé, I thought we had to keep up the momentum.

That speech was in early December 1986 and, as it turned out, the Secretary of State was scheduled to visit Africa in January. This was George Schultz's first visit to Africa and it was going to be quite a big deal in the region. The countries that he was going to visit were the countries we considered to be the important countries in Africa. Needless to say he went to South Africa, to Kenya, to Zaire and just before Monrovia, he was in Abidjan. Our marching orders were very clear from the outset. The scheduled visit would be six hours and 20 minutes. We were to arrange the following; the usual formalities to include a working session with the

president, a meeting with key opposition leaders, and a session with the mission staff and dependents. During this period the opposition leaders were becoming increasingly vocal. After the flawed elections, they felt they'd had a strong case against Doe. We were told to set this meeting up, and we knew Doe's government would resent it. This was my first Secretary of State visit and, as Chargé, I mobilized the entire mission to support the effort. We stopped everything else we were doing. The Secretary's advance team came storming in and took over the executive suite. There was a young woman officer, perhaps an FS-03, who was on the Secretary's staff. She didn't hesitate to tell me what I was to do. We prepared briefing papers for all the meetings, a last minute briefer to ensure that the Secretary while on his trip would have up-to-the-minute briefings on local situation in the most concise form. I drafted that and passed it to her. She said, "Wow, this is pretty good drafting." I thought, well, that's a very nice from this junior officer of all of 5 or 6 years in the Service. Ordinarily it was my job to compliment others. The security and the press aspects of visit seemed overdone. We knew that there were a number of global issues that were of concern to the Secretary, and we expected that the accompanied press corps would focus very little on Liberia. Sure enough that proved to be the case.

In any event, per instructions, we had the Secretary's scheduled down to the minute. I informed the Liberians that there would be a meeting between the Secretary and the opposition leaders. It would be held in the American embassy, and we had invited all the leaders of the legitimate parties to discuss their perception of the political situation. We knew the president was very unhappy about this meeting and his officials tried to jawbone us out of doing this. Then they decided they would take another approach. They would fill up the schedule with so many ceremonial events that we wouldn't have time for such a meeting. I made it clear that this was not going to happen. I dealt closely on this with the chief of protocol at the Executive Mansion, a distinguished Americo-Liberian who had worked for Tubman. The first event was the working meeting with the president and the motorcade that brought the Secretary into town took some 40 minutes as the airport is quite a distance from the capital. We'd go directly into the meeting with the president. There would follow be a state luncheon and there would be an exchange of toasts. I programmed this event down to the timing of the courses and the toasts. I dictated the time at which we are going to be out of the executive mansion to give us time to be at the meeting with the opposition leaders at the embassy. They tried to extend the program at the mansion and wheedle here and there, but I held firm. On the morning the Secretary arrived, to give you an idea of the last minute insanity, a stretch Mercedes limousine showed up minutes before touch down at the VIP area. The Liberians said that the Secretary had to use this vehicle because it was sent by Doe. The Secretary's DS people refused because it was not an armored vehicle, which the chief of mission vehicle was. Doe's protocol people were insisting that the Secretary ride in the president's vehicle because they were afraid of Doe's wrath if we refused to use it. We almost had to wrestle these people to the ground to get them to understand that security concerns took precedent. We compromised and turned the limo over to Mrs. Shultz who my wife accompanied for her program.

The Secretary arrived on a U.S. Air Force executive jet only slightly late. He is greeted by his counterpart, and the airport welcoming ceremonies began. I'm standing there with the Secretary when AF Assistant Secretary Chet Crocker takes me by the elbow and he says, "The Secretary doesn't really feel that he has a very good grasp of the issues here and since he's going to be meeting with the President as soon as we get into town, he'd like to have a few minutes with you

to go over what the issues are.” I said, okay. I sent somebody scurrying off to the head of the airport to set aside a part of the VIP lounge where the Secretary and I can talk. The ceremonies were completed and we were taken into the VIP lounge where our people were organizing the assignments for the motorcade into town. Apparently the Secretary’s problem was that the flight from Abidjan to Monrovia, probably 50 minutes, hadn’t been enough time to absorb his briefing papers. When we were by ourselves, I started to rattle off all the key issues in relative importance. I spoke to him for perhaps two or three minutes. He didn’t say a word. At the end of my presentation, he said, “Okay.” He is well known as a man of few words. He clearly had absorbed what I had to say. I asked if he had any questions, he said, no. So, I said, all right, let’s go get you into the right car. Off we went, speeding off to the city. Crowds lined the route, some protesting U.S. policy, some supporting it, probably brought out by the government. We swept up to the Executive Mansion and we’re taken upstairs to the President’s conference room. There was the usual fumbling around about where everyone was going to sit. I was the note taker for the U.S. side. The President greeted the Secretary, and the Secretary responded. Then Doe launched into his presentation which was basically a tutorial on his view of Liberia’s problems. The first words out of his mouth were, “Mr. Secretary, first I have to tell you that your Embassy here in Monrovia lies to Washington about what’s going on in Liberia, and whatever they’re telling you, it’s not true.” He took off from there, explaining that all the problems were not his fault. He held forth for almost an hour. His pitch was, the Americans don’t understand the complexities of the situation here. He invoked the special relationship insisting that we had to give him some latitude to get things done. He complained about everything that came to his mind; his unhappiness about the American military attachés during the Quiwonkpa coup, our lack of sympathy for their economic problems and their failure to understand African culture. He wore himself out in the process and finally his spiel petered out. He turned to the Secretary for a response. The Secretary said in about as many words, “Well, I’ve heard what you have to say and I appreciate your concerns, but I still think it’s not working here and you’re going to have to try harder.” Doe was stunned. He again launched his appeal for understanding for another 15 or 20 minutes. At the end, Doe again turned to the Secretary who said, “Well, fine, but I think we’re both going to have to do more. I’m prepared to have the Administrator of AID come back here and work out an achievable program with you.” Well, Doe saw this as a positive thing, as it gave his problems a higher profile. The Americans were sending the head of the entire AID organization back to take another look. Doe thought he would be able to persuade AID Administrator McPherson, who had accompanied Shultz, to cut the Liberians more slack. It was left at that, and Doe seemed to be somewhat mollified, at least he had had a chance to say his piece.

As an Africanist, I can tell you that this is basically how meetings with African chiefs of state play out. They usually hold forth at length about the need to understand the unique local situation, their culture and their history, as well as the background of the current situation. Further, they plead that you be patient with them as all their problems are not their fault. Doe had basically played out his role. We then moved on to the massive luncheon they laid on. There were hundreds of Doe’s retainers. The lunch began, and as the Secretary had requested, the toasts were exchanged at beginning. As the meal went on, Doe had a very animated conversation with the Secretary. I was thankful that Chet Crocker was available to the Secretary. As the lunch began to wind up, the Liberians dragged out the interval between the last course and the dessert. I buttoned holed of the chief of protocol and told him it is now 2:10 and we are going to be out of

here by 2:20. If the desserts are not out here now, I am just going to take the Secretary out of here and it's going to be very embarrassing to everyone." He ran back and they finished up with last course, and the Secretary left on time. We returned to the embassy and met with the opposition leaders who essentially did the same thing that Doe had done, telling him their version of the political situation. He heard them out but had very little to say. He said, "Well, we do support the concept of a multiparty democracy. We would hope that you would have a legitimate role and that you will act responsibly when you do." He said the things he should have said, and they had their chance to talk to the American Secretary of State, and that was fine for all parties.

The Secretary had asked to have a chance to talk to all the Americans serving in the mission. We all massed in the courtyard in front of the embassy building. He and his wife Obie, an absolutely delightful person who regrettably died a couple of years ago, came out on the steps. My wife had taken Obie around town, and she couldn't have been more gracious, interested and pleasant. The Secretary said, "I have nothing formal to say. I just want to tell you how much I appreciate your efforts. I understand something of the hardships that you go through." He then shook hands and had photos taken all around. It was a brilliant gesture. Our people couldn't have asked for more. He made a point of talking to the Marines who made a presentation of a T-shirt because Shultz was a former Marine. . Then we swept out of the compound for the airport where there was to be a presentation of grand Boubous from various tribal groups.

Q: What are those?

WAUCHOPE: They are the ceremonial dress of the paramount chiefs. The robes have elaborate embroidery that signifies the status of the individual. By now, time was running short, and we had pushed the schedule to the absolute limit. I'm radioed to our advance group at the airport because it was a 45-minute trip. I was in the car with the Assistant Secretary, Chet Crocker and I instructed our people how it was going to work. The group that we had agreed to present the boubous would get to gown Shultz and the others can just hand him the gowns and have a photo taken. We are not going to have him take off one boubou and put another one and take that one off and put a third. We don't have the time to do that, nor should the Secretary have to go through that. I suspect that I made some points with Chet by making such command decisions on the spot and having things done properly. We saw the Secretary off in his Boubou, and he turned and thanked us all. We had a great "wheels up" party afterward, as we and we felt a great sense of achievement and relief. The promise to have McPherson return with a team was a tangible result.

McPherson returned in three weeks with a high-level team including Howard Walker representing State. The Liberians sat down with our economic team and worked out an arrangement, which was unprecedented in Africa. Talk about an American ambassador acting the pro-consul, we now set up a system by which we would have financial advisors in every economic or fiscal office of the Liberian government; on both the revenue and the expenditure side. On the fiscal side, they'd be in the Central Bank, not only with access to all of the documents flowing through, but also with some decision making power as well. The Liberians were in a tight spot, and it was understood that, either they cooperated or they didn't get further American assistance. McPherson was with us for about three days and worked very hard

negotiating the agreement. We recognized that whatever was agreed to, it was still going to be very difficult to actually implement. The Liberians were more motivated by the fear of losing U.S. support than by an interest in improving their economic and fiscal operations. Initially things went reasonably well. AID hired a former USAID mission director to head of this mission; ultimately 26 fiscal specialists, auditors and financial managers were hired for this team. We called them OPEX for operational experts. They over the next three to six months they took up their positions throughout the government. The Liberian government insisted that the issue was not about expenditures, but rather capturing more revenue. Of course they wanted more revenue because they wanted to have more money to divert for to their own pockets. Inevitably friction developed, despite a good start. In April 1987 I returned to Washington for the birth of my second son, Colin. On my return a month later, I reassumed the role of Chargé until Jim Bishop, who had been designated to be the ambassador, arrived in July. He had been a Deputy Assistant Secretary in AF for seven years. He knew the Liberia account intimately. He knew most of the African countries, but he knew Liberia in particular. After Jim arrived, we restructured our operations. He was extraordinary good at ensuring that I knew everything he knew, particularly about all the agencies' activities. I sat in on his weekly session with the station chief who was also in charge of the CIA base or communications facility. They had an extensive operation there. Our CIA operation had been in place a long time, and we relied on it very heavily to track local events. The first station chief was a very likable guy, very intelligent and intellectual, and had both perspective and poise. His successor was not as experienced or as balanced.

When Jim arrived the idea was to see to it that the OPEXers were smoothly integrated into their positions in the hope of finally get some control over the revenue inflows and the outflows. We did learn a tremendous amount about Liberian operations in a very short period of time. They reported to their chief who would report to Jim. We learned where the money came from and where it went, and which agencies and individuals didn't pay their bills. For example, the government never paid the utility company which was a parastatal corporation. On the outflow side, we gained a sense of how deals were structured so that kickbacks were obtained. In doing so, we learned a fair amount about the peculations of some of our favorite government officials to include people like Robert Tubman and John Bestman, the head of the central bank. All of them had special arrangements to line their pockets, which was a great disappointment to us, but part of the Liberian reality.

While we were plugging away on the economic side, the political side became increasingly agitated. The opposition insisted that the 1985 election had been stolen. They presented evidence of electoral fraud to us, and the international human rights organizations. They were agitating in the streets and they closed down the national university. The newspapers became more critical of the President. He allowed them to criticize up to a point, and then his people would shut them down, or there would be a suspicious fire which would take them a while to resume operations. It wasn't terribly vicious, but the repression and threat was always there. Increasingly the opposition rallied around Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a forceful, well-spoken individual, who was also a successful advocate for change. She was critical not only of Doe, but also of the United States for supporting Doe. She criticized us for bringing in these experts to try to prop up a crumbling, corrupt economic and governmental structure. We had continuing dialogue with the opposition to signal to the government that we would not tolerate repression against them. Inevitably, the Doe government gave way to its natural inclination toward repression.

Jim liked to take off in the summer months, and I enjoyed those occasions when I was the Chargé. A major flap arose while he was away on his first long vacation. We had heard that there had been some kind of an intrusion in the northeastern part of the country by a group of exiled Liberians, and that two Americans had been arrested with them. We learned through agency contacts that they were detention in Monrovia. Our informants indicated these two Americans had been pretty badly abused. As Chargé, knowing that one of our greatest ongoing responsibilities was the welfare and protection of Americans, of whom there were some 5,000 in Liberia, albeit that two-thirds were Liberians who had obtained American citizenship and returned home. These Americans had contacts with the Liberian communities in places like northern New Jersey, St. Paul and the Minneapolis area, and in Boston, the locations where they had settled. To find out about the two Americans, I went to foreign minister Rudy Johnson, and asked, "Do you have any Americans in detention?" He said, "No." I said, "Are you sure?" He said, "Yes, I'm sure." I said, "Okay." What I accomplished by that exercise was to let him know that we knew that they did have them. We did so in hopes of protecting them from further abuse. By signaling to the Foreign Minister we had reason to believe that they had them in detention, if they suddenly weren't to be found, we would know something had been done to them. Two or three days later the Liberians said, "We have found out that, in fact, there are two Americans in detention." They gave me their names and I insisted that we get access to them. At first they hedged, saying that they had been involved in an effort to overthrow the government, but I pressed them hard. It turned out that these two Americans were from New Jersey and they had talked into this venture by Liberian friends. One of them had been fairly prominent in the American civil rights movement in the '60s. I suppose that the other was a friend of his.

Q: These were not Liberian Americans?

WAUCHOPE: No, they were black Americans, African Americans. They had been talked into joining by Liberian exiles in an effort to overthrow Doe's government. They were told that, if they could cross the border the local people will welcome them and would rise up against the government. They were enticed by promises to share the rights to the gold and diamond mining in Liberia. So, these two characters, knowing little about Liberia, get sucked into this plot. They drove across the border in the dark of night somewhere on the Ivorian frontier. They get through the first checkpoint, but were stopped at another checkpoint. The troops thought something was fishy, and detained them all. On learning of the attempt, Monrovia sent a group from Doe's executive mansion staff. They quickly found out what was going on. These intruders were beaten and then loaded into a truck to be brought down to Monrovia. The security officers stopped somewhere along the road at night, dragged all of them out, and immediately shot all the Liberian exiles. They hesitated with the two Americans and decided not to execute them. They threw them back into the truck and brought them to Monrovia. They stripped them and chained them to beds in a cement cell. They were there for several days until such time as the Liberians felt they were obliged to report to the Embassy that they had these two in custody. They had been badly beaten. Eventually I had a chance to talk to these two characters. You could see they had swollen eyes and cuts and scrapes all over. I tried to find out what I could. All they could talk about was how badly treated they had been. I asked what they had done. They explained in general terms. The exiles had told them that if they returned with them they would be able to

overthrow the government. So, I asked, “Didn’t you think that there might be some downside risk in this process?” They said, “Yes, but we had no idea what the situation was.”

I made a presentation to the government suggesting that they release these hapless individuals, as they were not further threat to Liberia, and that they were unaware of what they were doing. The government had one on us this time, and, by the summer of ’88, the strain over the efforts of our financial advisors was building. By having guilty American citizen detainees gave them an advantage that they were going to play it to the hilt. The Foreign Minister said he would consider my proposal, but he clearly didn’t intend to do anything. They threatened to put them on trial, and that these were crimes punishable by death. We did have consular access and we tried to ease their situation the best that we could.

The next thing we heard from Washington is that Ramsey Clark, Carter’s Attorney General, was coming to Monrovia to intervene on their behalf. Ramsey Clark had been involved in the civil rights movement, and he knew the prisoner who had been involved in the movement. He claimed that he was a very significant figure who ought not to be allowed to languish in a Liberian jail. Ramsey Clark arrived and I met with him. I briefed him in detail on the general situation in Liberia, and explained that it was a very tense time because the government was concerned about possible efforts to overthrow it. Clark was clearly suspicious that I was protecting the Liberian government, and skeptical of what I was saying. Nonetheless, I did arrange for a session for him with the foreign minister. I believe he got to see Doe as well. Ramsey Clark, a very soft-spoken, yet determined, individual and laid out the case for Doe. The President said only that he would take his concerns into consideration, but nothing was done at that time. Ramsey Clark left for somewhere else in Africa. About a week later, the government told us that they felt that these people had been properly warned and now better understood the situation, and thus they were released. I must say they did fully appreciate of how lucky they were to survive this adventure.

Another event that occurred while I was Chargé was the visit of the Director of the CIA, Judge Webster. The principal objective of his unpublicized Africa visit was to read the riot act to Mobutu, who had been acting unpredictably. He would be coming to Liberia because of the size of the agency presence. He would overnight and leave the next morning. The station set up the program with little consultation with me. The station chief told me one of the events was a meeting with the President to which I was not invited. I was very annoyed as I thought that was entirely inappropriate, but I could get no support from the Department. The station chief was a shameless careerist, and of the old school that the Embassy was a nuisance to be tolerated at the margins. He insisted his control of the visit was because the agency was concerned about security. I did host a dinner for Webster and his senior staff. The station arranged the airport arrival, and I would have a chance to talk to the director before his session with the President. I had no idea what he proposed to be say to Doe that I couldn’t be a party to, but whatever it was, I was cut out. As I learned after the fact, when Webster met President Doe, the conversation quickly deteriorated from one of substantive issues to a bizarre exchange that was typically African. Doe said to Webster, knowing what a very important official he was, “Mr. Director, do you know that I am bullet proof?” The director said, “Bulletproof?” Doe said, “Yes. I have a special grigri that I wear around my neck and, if I’m wearing it, I can’t be shot.” The director said, “Oh, that’s very interesting.” Doe said, “No, no, no. It’s really true. I’ll demonstrate.” He called one of his bodyguards and he said, “Here, give the director this gun and then I have him

shoot me.” The director said, “No, no, I’m not going to do that.” Doe insisted, “No, really.” Webster said, “No, I’m not doing that.” So, Doe relented and said, “Well, I’ll tell you what. I’ll invite you over after dinner and we’ll sit around and have a few beers, and we’ll do a demonstration for you.” When he returned to the Embassy it was very obvious that this exchange unnerved Webster extraordinarily. Webster is a very fine, upstanding individual; he was a former judge and Director of the FBI, and now the head of the CIA. His very high level entourage was, by turns, concerned and bemused. His delegation included the General Counsel, the head of the Africa branch, the chief of covert operations, and the head administrative official. Everybody had wanted to take a trip with the director on his special plane and now they were confronted with this extraordinary problem. I have to admit, I was genuinely amused at the fix that the Station Chief had gotten himself into, and as he didn’t know Africa, he had no clue how to deal with Doe’s gesture. At dinner at my residence that night, I had a chance to talk to Webster about the session with Doe. There apparently was not much of consequence in the meeting except for Doe’s boast of being bulletproof. The prospect of return to Doe’s residence weighed heavily on his mind and there was some hope among his entourage that Doe would not follow through. The director kept saying, “I’m not going to shoot that man. I don’t care what he says; I’m not going to shoot him.” I said, “Well, Mr. Director, I hope we can avoid that.” I turned to the Station Chief and said, “Well, you got him into this thing, you’re going to have to figure out a way to keep the director from having to shoot the president.” He was now very unsure what to do. I said, “Well, you better find a way out because this guy may well invite you back to the executive mansion and you’re going to have to follow through on this thing.” I was relishing his discomfort because I wasn’t party to any of his closely held arrangements for Webster.

In their consternation, and the Director had his general counsel looking at the legal aspects of this farce. There was a strong sense that Doe was just bluffing. He just wants to show that the head of the CIA, this omnipotent organization, as Doe’s knowledge of the CIA comes from Hollywood, that the CIA could not kill him because of his grigri. In fact, there is some history to this belief. There was another member of the Liberian government who claimed to our Admin Counselor that he was bullet-proof. In other parts of Africa this sort of belief also arises. I assumed that the station would be able to send the word back to the President that this is not an appropriate thing to do and that the whole exercise would be called off. So we went ahead with our dinner.

At about 9:15 as the dinner was winding down, there is a knock on our door and the guards said there’s a colonel here from the executive mansion guard. Sure enough, he came in and he said, “Well, I’m here to escort the director to the executive mansion to see the president.” Good God, how the CIA folks scurried around. Who was going to go, how were they going to handle this? Once again Webster said, “I want to make this clear, I’m not going to shoot him. I don’t care what he does. I don’t care what he says, I’m not going to shoot this guy.” I thought this was incredible. Webster was invited back to the Mansion with any of his delegation he wanted to accompany him.

So, off they went back to see Doe, and I just waited on the edge of my seat trying to figure how we were going to explain all this to Washington if things went awry. They returned in about an hour and a half. I asked what had happened. Webster said when we got there and Doe welcomed us up on the sixth floor which is the private quarters and they sat on the balcony overlooking the

ocean. They produced some beers, and everybody had a beer and talked. The issue of his being bulletproof never came up. Anyway, it makes for a great story. To my knowledge, it is not in the public domain at this time, but it might make into Judge Webster's memoirs; or maybe not.

The relationship with Doe's government began to deteriorate as our OPEXers found more and more corruption in the Liberian fiscal system. When they first unearthed the corruption they tried to address at the operational level. The advisor would say to the minister or the assistant minister, his counterpart, you can't continue to do this. You must fiscalize these revenues; you must account for that. The tension resulted from the Liberians unwillingness to conform to the program. The Liberians would push the dispute up their chain, and eventually it would come to Jim Bishop's attention, who would take the issue to the President. Each time he'd see the president and he'd have to remind him that his government has failed to meet the terms of the agreement. The president would respond by saying, his government needed more money and more aid. Jim could offer nothing because it would be rewarding non-compliance. Jim is a very tough guy and he is very straightforward about it. He'd say, no, he wouldn't do it. Well, their personal relationship became increasingly acrimonious and unpleasant, but Jim held the line, as he was obliged to do.

In an effort to rally support and to try to embarrass the U.S., Doe launched a campaign which claimed that the Americans were demanding that Liberia repay all for all the improvements it had made in the country over the many years. The issue of Liberia's debt obligations to the United States, to the international financial institutions became a rallying call synthesized in the phrase, "We will pay." The Americans had built just about all of the Liberian infrastructure; the power plants; the dams that provided the water and the power grid. We'd built the roads and bridges, and, of course, the airport and the port of Monrovia. Doe was trying to appeal to the masses by saying, see, as poor as we are and as rich as the Americans are, they're going to make us pay them back for all these things. Of course, that wasn't the case, but that's how Doe was spinning it.

The Liberians would stage large rallies where the president would preside, and kids would come forward with sacks full of pennies that they'd allegedly raised to pay back the Americans. It was really an appalling show, and we tried our best to counter it with facts, but Doe had control of all the organs of the government and kept pushing this case. As part of that process the Liberians then began to raise the prospect of making us pay rent for our facilities. Now, this is an issue we had been able to fend off for many, many years. We deflected it by pointing out how much we had done for Liberia in so many other ways, not just by building all the infrastructure, but also by our substantial assistance programs and intervention with the IFIs. We thought that we could more than demonstrate that they were getting a great deal out of the mission and its activities than they could receive from rents. They continued to raise the rent issue, and we countered that this would reduce the "Special relationship" to a cash exchange, if we became a tenant of Liberia. This argument had some impact on them, but had a sense that it was time to take the offensive. All this occurred as the clouds of the failure of our OPEX program became to loom

So, we decided to calculate what it costs to run the U.S. mission in Liberia to show what we contributed to its economy. We came up with a figure of \$32 million a year to operate. This included our local payroll and what we expended for fuel and electricity. The fuel bill alone was

over \$6 million. We had six big generators at the VOA plant that generated power for the transmission towers. We paid for electricity and for telephone service, whereas the government and all its branches never paid for its utilities. We had to pay for them and we paid in hard currency. So, we informed the Liberians of this \$32 million to give them some sense of the tangible benefit of this relationship. To a certain extent it had a beneficial effect. In addition to this valuation, we advised the Liberians of the technological transition taking place, as had been the case in Asmara. The Omega navigational system was being replaced by satellites and ships were now able to get their navigational bearings by satellite. Likewise, the communications relay facility was going to satellite as well, and they didn't need ground stations to the same extent. It was convenient to us to retain these facilities; it was less expensive than having to launch a satellite. We calculated that, as long as could keep these operating, so much the better. There was one irreplaceable, or at least difficult to replace activity and that was the agency diplomatic communications service facility which had technicians on the ground, to service posts throughout the region. They were right in the region, and they could respond quickly, and they knew the area. Of course, it could be moved back to Washington, but there would be a loss of response time.. It would be slower and more expensive, but you could do that if you had to. We told the Liberians, look if you press the rents issue, we'll just shut down our operations altogether. There were hundreds of Liberians employed by these facilities, as well. They hemmed and hawed, and they kept this Sword of Damocles over our head throughout this entire period.

As we tightened up on his government's fiscal operations through these financial experts Doe became susceptible to other kinds of schemes. He became involved in several money-making schemes which was a concern to us because of the potential embarrassment to him and the U.S. One was the establishment of the Meridian Bank which already operated in several other African countries. It was supposedly U.S. based, a U.S. chartered bank, giving them access to help from our embassies. We wondered with the collapse of the Liberian economy, and the inefficiencies and corruption, why would a bank open here and build a very fancy office building in Monrovia? We learned that it was financing a satellite ground reception operation. We found out subsequently that this was about a \$4 to \$6 million project for which the government of Liberia borrowed \$16 million to pay for. The rest of it was to be shared among Liberian government officials and those in the bank. It seemed clear that Meridian was involved in the business of assisting the government in these shady financial transactions. We were suspicious from the beginning.

As a footnote, about three years ago, I was asked to testify as an expert witness about how business was done in Liberia in that period to show that the Meridian Bank was a fraudulent operation as best we could determine. They flaunted the fact that they were chartered in the United States and they asked and, to a certain extent, received our support for their activities. We would attend their functions and they would consult with us about their activities. We just tried to fathom why they were doing any of these things at this time in Liberia. In any event, when I testified as an expert witness the question was how did they do business? I testified that all of these organizations that came to do business in Liberia would have to make some sort of an arrangement with Doe and to the people around him. So, it seemed likely that this was the case with the Meridian Bank. By this time the Meridian Bank was suing the successor government of Liberia for \$86 million in repayment of this \$16 million loan with interest and penalties. Of

course, Meridian was looking for some kind of settlement to recover some money out of this deal. I'm not sure how it came out, but my sense is that with my testimony and that of others, it became apparent to the Meridian representatives lawyer that it was unlikely that Meridian would receive anything. Meridian by this time was bankrupt and it was really their creditors who were trying to squeeze some money out of the Liberian government. It was just one of these corrupt initiatives in this period.

Q: Did you go back to Washington and say who are these Meridian people?

WAUCHOPE: Absolutely. They were based, they were chartered out of Delaware or something like that, but their base of operations was the Bahamas and they were operating. I remember one of their locations was in Zambia and there were a couple of other African capitals, but they were always in the fringe states, not the nations with real economic prospects. They were operators who were prepared to take greater risks on loans than most traditional banks would. They charge higher rates in this process as well. Their game was to hike the amount of loan involved and then split the overage with the host government officials, and then whatever the modest real costs were covered by in nominal repayments.

I remember there was a contractor who was to build an underground water line to a facility near Paynesville. They claimed it would cost \$4 million to put this line in. Somebody looked at the project and said it should cost \$800,000. The markup on these kinds of deals was often 400%; way out of line with reality. The expectation was that no one would look closely at the cost to run a water line for a half mile and a, \$4 million? Of more concern to us was an individual named Gus Kouwenhoven who set up shop at the Hotel Africa, a hotel outside of the city along the beach that had a legal casino. He apparently was Swiss. We developed information that Mr. Kouwenhoven was laundering drug money and what better way than in some African casino in a country with a large Lebanese community. The Lebanese loved to gamble, and money was flowing in and money was flowing out and no one knew where it came from or where it went. Kouwenhoven seemed to be very tight with president Doe. It seemed likely that he was paying Doe to allow him to operate in Liberia.

Probably the shadiest deal of all was one we got wind through the station. It was a group came to talk with Doe and exchange of presents. Doe was a great collector of expensive watches among other things. They wanted to set up an illegal drug production and trafficking operation. They were going to make narcotics and then ship them from Liberia to Europe and elsewhere. Once we heard about that one, we had to decide to thwart the plan without compromising our source. We handled it in such a way that we sent the word back through various channels that we'd gotten wind of this scheme. The message was that if the president were even to contemplate this operation that we would blow the whistle and he would completely lose credibility and all the U.S. assistance. We learned that the word got to him and the scheme didn't go anywhere, but this was the degree to which Doe had been reduced to contemplate any kind of activity like that.

Let me just talk briefly about the Lebanese community. It was very strong, very powerful. They had a virtually complete hold on the retail import-export sector in the country. They were a very dynamic group of people. We had good relations with them. We were very close to their ambassador who had a fair amount of influence over his compatriots. Now, the Lebanese in West

Africa, and in Liberia in particular, were a microcosm of the Lebanese in Lebanon. There were Christians, Shiites, Sunnis and Druze, and all the different political subsets were represented as well. They lived in peace with one another there. They lived good, even luxurious lives, but they did not live ostentatiously. They were cleverer than the Lebanese in Sierra Leone who maintained a high profile; they built grand homes, and as a result they became targets of resentment by many Sierra Leonians. When the time came they were eventually expelled and they lost everything. Lebanese in Liberia had the sense to live modestly, but maintain tremendous assets outside the country. I once had dinner with one of the more prominent Lebanese. He showed us a photograph of this 250-foot yacht that he maintained in the Mediterranean. He and his family had commercial operations in all of North Africa, and in Europe, and he kept the bulk of his assets there. The Lebanese were making excellent money in Liberia and they had the government on their side. They were making a contribution to the government and to Doe. When Doe was a sergeant, he had been given credit by a Lebanese grocery store owner, and he was fairly well disposed toward them. But they had to pay, too, to make contributions. We had some concern that the Lebanese might transfer their conflict, the civil war in Lebanon, to Liberia. This was an increasing concern to all U.S. overseas missions. In part, this was because they'd taken American hostages in Lebanon. We knew that the Lebanese were sending their fighters from the civil war in Lebanon to Liberia for R&R, to recuperate and to get their heads back together. Every faction, even the most extreme factions, had representatives in Liberia. Both the U.S. and Liberian governments made it very clear to the Lebanese there if you carried on a civil war in Liberia, they would be expelled and the good thing they had there would be gone.

For example, at the American high school, one of our school buses was being followed by some Middle Eastern looking individuals in a car. That same afternoon, we reported the incident to the police, to the Lebanese ambassador and to the head of the Lebanese community. Who are these people? Well, it turned out to be some lovelorn teenager whose girlfriend who was an American teenager who was on that bus. He was trying to get her attention with his flashy car. Well, before the day was out he was hauled up before the leaders of the Lebanese community and read the riot act. That was the end of that nonsense. That's the degree of control the Lebanese community maintained over its own people. There would be no threat against Americans. It was not in their interest to do so and they certainly didn't need the wrath of the Liberian government coming down on their heads.

As my tour closed out, the relationship is now very strained over the economic reform process, which is basically not working. Jim's relationship with the president was deteriorating, and ultimately the whole operational expert process was beginning to come apart. I left Monrovia in August of 1989 and by that December the Charles Taylor group came across the border and started what was to become the process that led to Doe's overthrow and death. What did we know about Charles Taylor? The fact of the matter is we had some knowledge of the fact that there was a group of exiled Liberian former political figures in Burkina Faso, and that they were being supported with arms, training and money by the Libyans. We had fairly extensive information dating back to the mid-'80s. Taylor was a late comer to this process. Taylor had been the head of what was the equivalent of our GSA in Liberia and he was. . .

Q: General Services Administration.

WAUCHOPE: That's right. Basically it was the procurer for the state of real estate, materials and services. He was, like many of Liberian officials very greedy, and he dug his hand in a little too deep and got caught at it. He was arrested and charged with having stolen at least a million dollars through several corrupt deals. He fled Liberia and turned up in the United States. He was in the United States for a year or so and was arrested in Massachusetts on some petty charge, but they didn't grant him bail. The authorities checked with the Liberian Embassy in Washington who said, he was wanted in Liberia as a fugitive. We didn't have an extradition for his particular crime, but the process was being worked out when he somehow got out of jail. His welcome in the United States was worn out and he pitched up in Burkina Faso, joining a bunch of other former politicians who were plotting against Doe. There, they received backing from the Libyans. The estimates were that the group was never more than 50 or 100 people. It was unknown if Libya was acting on its own or as an instrument of Soviet policy with the objective of undermining the U.S. presence and assets in Liberia which were still of importance to us. In either event, Libya was a very determined opponent of ours and this would be an excellent way of creating problems for us.

We followed their activities, but the conventional wisdom at the time was that they couldn't mobilize enough people to create a real problem for Doe. What ultimately happened is that when Taylor and his cohorts came across the frontier from the Ivorian side in December, 1989, Doe's forces over-reacted. The Ivorians intensely disliked the Doe government. Among other things, it was because the Liberians had invaded the Ivorian embassy to take a fugitive from the Doe government out of the Ivorian embassy, thus violating their diplomatic immunity. Doe's people had also killed Houphouet-Boigny's son-in-law, and Houphouet never forgave Doe. So apparently, the Ivorians were more than happy to cooperate with these exiled Liberians coming across his country from Libya to move against Doe. In any event, the conventional analysis would have held true except that when Doe's military overreacted. When Taylor's 50 or so people came across the border the word went out that they had arrived, the military spread out into the region. They started by destroying villages and dragging people out and shooting them. The victims were from the Mano and Gio group, the old Quiwonkpa supporters back from the 1985 coup attempt. As a result of these actions, within three months of Taylor first crossing the border, there were over 5,000 people who were now backing Taylor.

When Doe's troops began ravaging the region, Taylor's group went from 50 to 5,000 and it was just a matter of time before the government lost control of the north and northeast. Our military advisor, Col. Staley, told the Liberians over and over again, if you keep this up, these groups will rise up and they'll overthrow your government. You cannot continue to carry out these depredations against your own people. Of course, they did exactly what he warned them against, and eventually it resulted in Doe's overthrow and death. So, Doe in particular, and his military leaders were the cause of their own undoing, the way in which they handled the incursion led to their own downfall. The nation broke into factions, an extenuation of the ethnic conflict that became even more intense during this time. The people of Nimba in the Northwest didn't want to be part of this process. The Krahn were now under siege. Eventually when Doe fell, the Krahn became the outcasts and were driven back into the interior. Only recently have the Krahn been able to re-establish the faction that represents their interests. The country crumbled into its ethnic divisions.

In terms of what happened with American investments, on the commercial side, they held on as long as they could. Firestone had been bought out in 1988 by Bridgestone a Japanese company. As things got more difficult and problems arose, their officials turned to the American Embassy. We said the Japanese embassy is now responsible for you. Of course there were American citizens working there and did what we had to for the American citizens. That had been the single largest investment we had in Liberia. The successor to the Uniroyal, a group of private American investors, continued to operate as long as they could, but again had to pay the insurgents to get their rubber to the port.

Q: Uniroyal is that British?

WAUCHOPE: No, it's American, but it's now been taken up by Goodrich. When they were bought out, but the Liberian plantation was bought out by this group of investors and they were making good money, as was Firestone. Firestone was making excellent money. They were producing not only hard rubber, but they were also producing latex as well. During the time of the AIDS crisis and there was a real boom in latex.

The iron ore companies were having increasing problems. They were being squeezed for more taxes and revenue. They were located in the Northern most part of the country and the insurgent activity in that area became particularly active and as a result they had continuing problems. A fairly common occurrence was finding mangled bodies along the LAMCO iron ore rail line. It was revealed late in my tour that, as part of the historic Liberian culture, there were secret practices that would curl your hair. The Liberian Minister of Defense, no less, named Graham Allison, was involved. Allison had studied in the United States, and was a reasonably polished individual with whom we were in constant professional and personal contact. He was charged by the Liberian authorities of having committed ritual murder. When we heard of these charges, we thought he'd obviously run afoul of Doe and they're trying to trumping this up. We learned to our astonishment that it wasn't a set up, it was all true. He had, in fact, participated along with his wife, in the murder of a police sergeant. He and his cohorts had abducted the policeman, took him to a property that he owned. They slit his throat and they hung him upside down and drained his blood and drank his blood. Then they did what had been done in other cases; they'd take the body and lay it out on the railroad line. As these ore trains would come by of course they'd mangle the body beyond recognition, and the severed head would be just taken as another part of the injuries from the train.

I spoke with LAMCO, the Liberian American Mining Company representative and they said, this was a fairly common thing that every year there would be several dozen bodies that were allegedly killed by the trains who were actually the victims of ritual murder. Sure enough they were able to prove their case against Allison and he was executed for ritual murder. The concept behind ritual murder is that the more important the victim that you kill the more power and influence that you attain. So, a police sergeant was reasonably important. Unfortunately, most of the victims were small boys, as boys have more power to convey than girls do. We were flabbergasted at those kinds of events because as I say they implicated some of the most senior Liberians. The death of several boys in Harper in the southeastern part of the country was attributed to the mayor and the police chief. They had been performing ritual murders, but

eventually were caught and executed. These that apparently went on under the table for a long time, and some people in power probably got away with that. You might ask, would the Americo-Liberians participate in that? I think most would find it as repugnant as you and I, but some with closer roots to the indigenous culture might conscious something like that.

Another area of a great deal of focus was the American community. As I said, it was quite large, some 5000, and the community harbored a continuing concern about the breakdown of civil order. Political agitation was frequent in the form of demonstrations or political action against the government or one another. We had set up a warden system that was really quite effective and, even when I was Chargé before Jim Bishop arrived; we conducted town meetings in several different sections of the city so the people would know our assessment of the situation and we could refine procedures and communications. We also had missionaries in the interior. They had representatives in Monrovia and they had a pretty good radio network. We just had to make sure we were in touch with them. We succeeded in making people feel reasonably secure, and aware of what the embassy could and would do for them, how to get in contact with the embassy and what would happen in the case of a crisis. When the crisis did occur in late 1989, it unfolded at such a pace that most people were able to get out of the way before the complete collapse of the Doe government. We had an excellent team on the consular side. When you have that large an American community and many close ties between Liberians and Americans, you had Americans with problems popping up all the time. They would run out of money and become destitute, or they'd had mental problems and we would have to repatriate them .

Of course, underlying all was visas. Visas were a constant headache. No matter whom you dealt with, at some stage or other, the Liberians would importune you to help them with a visa. They used to say, Liberia is the 51st state of the United States., why do we have to have visas at all? We're the same as you. Why can't we just go to the U. S. whenever we want to go? I replied that Liberia is a sovereign nation, as you always insist when it comes to issues that are to your benefit, so you can't have it both ways. There was all manner of visa fraud, needless to say. Jim Bishop adopted the position that whenever anybody even mentioned visas, he said "I don't do visas," and that was that. I would defer to the consular officer whenever visas came up. If she said no, that was no, and I would never even contemplate overturning her decision. Visas generated a vast amount of acrimony, and a visa refusal was a very bitter pill, especially for members of the leading families. One of the more effective sanctions the United States invoked against the Taylor government because of its support of the insurgents of Sierra Leone, was to stop granting visas to the United States. This proved to be a very telling form of reprisal against them.

In any event, I wrapped up my tour in Monrovia in July of 1989. That spring, I was approached by the AF Bureau about several different chief of mission possibilities. One of the early ones was the Central African Republic. I was unenthusiastic about it because the limited educational options for my sons. I had two boys, the older one was in elementary school and he needed some extra help, and there was no English speaking school in Bangui. So I indicated that I didn't think that post would really work for me. This was not taken well in the Director General's office, but I held my ground. Then there was Mauritius. I was told that one of Bush's supporters from Texas (a woman of the "you can never be too thin, too blond or too rich" school) was in line for that appointment, but it hinged on whether her husband, a lawyer, could find work there. It turned out that he could, and that job slipped away. Finally, Jim Bishop went to bat for me, and another

option was offered in Gabon. There was an international school there because of the American oil companies. I said, "That sounds good to me." I knew that things in Gabon tended to work, which would be a nice change from where we had spent in our other tours in Africa.

Q: Okay, a couple of things, going back. Did you find that you had a problem with the Peace Corps when you arrived there because of fraudulent elections? You know, the Peace Corps is idealistic people and I mean as things went, I mean the corruption and all this. Could you talk a bit about this?

WAUCHOPE: Yes, that's a good point: I should have elaborated. The elements of the U.S. mission that were strongly anti-Doe included the U.S. Information Agency, some in the embassy political section and certain Peace Corps staff, and to a lesser degree, the Peace Corps volunteers. The Peace Corps held the view that to support Doe was to encourage the misuse of money that was intended for the development of the country. They expressed a fair amount of resentment about this. They know the people better than we did in the embassy and they, the people, were unhappy with Doe. The people knew about Doe's shortcomings and the corruption of his regime, and they resented the Americans supporting Doe. Peace Corps volunteers would bring to our attention Doe's abuses as well. We had a strong and balanced Peace Corps program and an excellent director, Bob Jackson, and he would try to keep their eye on the prize while trying to keep the volunteers on task and out of politics. The object of the exercise was to see what you could do to within the constraints of our program, working with our counterparts to achieve our agreed goals. The Peace Corps was always well received in Liberia. The Liberians appreciated what the volunteers could do, and they understood that these volunteers were not only an asset to them, but that they offered a form of communication to the American public as well. They wanted them to have a valuable experience. There is an organization, Friends of Liberia, that was founded by former Peace Corps volunteers and they try to help Liberia; its people, not its government. There is a strong sense of residual commitment in this group. Their PC programs were not that badly affected by their distaste for the government, but they were being harangued by their local counterparts about the failings and the corruption of their government.

Q: Well, speaking about this, the Peace Corps in a place like Liberia, is out in I don't know if you called it the bush in those days or not, but you know, out in the up country. Did you all get out there much? Was there in a way much to do out there except to show a presence?

WAUCHOPE: Absolutely. We tried to get out there because both Jim and I had a strong sense that we had to show the flag in the interior, as well as to find out what people are thinking in the outlying areas. Our volunteers were mostly involved in teaching, rural development and agriculture. We had a training facility for volunteers from other African nations where you had created an integrated agricultural scheme. The Peace Corps bought trainees and lead volunteers to observe this process. It was a pretty basic operation, which included pig and chicken production. Their waste was then used to feed a series of fish ponds, and then these fish, Tilapia, would develop. If properly managed, this scheme would add fish to the diet of Africans living in the interior. It was a sort of self-perpetuating project because participants would also raise crops to feed the pigs and chickens. It was really quite an impressive operational concept, and Peace Corps used to run groups through there on a set schedule. Jim or I would go up there for the graduation ceremonies or to welcome the trainees. We also went out to the more remote areas as

well. As the bilateral relationship began to unravel; we were a bit more careful about sending volunteers into areas where there might be trouble. In point of fact, the Krahn region, which was Doe's tribe, there was a longstanding history of brutality and violence. We kept our volunteers out of those rural areas because they were more susceptible to violence than in other parts of the country. Some tribal groups were further evolved than others and the Krahn were probably the most backward in Liberia; ironically. Doe was from that group.

Q: What about AIDS as, that's Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, which is now plaguing the place. Had that started?

WAUCHOPE: It had just barely started to be acknowledged, but we were able to do was work on education and training. We would make funds available to produce videos and shows on television so that they could get some sense of the threat. We focused on the basics of how AIDS is transmitted and the use of prophylactics. We imported prophylactics and ensured that they were distributed. I have to be honest about it, as was my experience also in Gabon, we did not get the sense that the Africans appreciated AIDS as a real threat. They just could not seem to get their minds around the fact that this could really threaten the existence of their country, as it has since proven now to have done. The irony is that most victims were from the elites because they had the mobility that was an essential element in spreading the disease. In terms of their sexual conduct, the level of promiscuity was not significantly different than any other part of Africa. We never really got the sense that the government did more than pay lip service to the threat at that time. I remember that the videos had a little tree with inflated prophylactics attached to it, the relevance of which I could not fathom. Generally, Africans were unwilling to talk about sexual practices with us as it was a private matter.. prophylactics, you know, this is part of human nature, but in order to stop the spread you had to use them. I have to tell you they did not take it very seriously.

Q: What about diamonds? Were diamonds a big deal there?

WAUCHOPE: Not really. Most of the diamonds that surfaced in Liberia came from Sierra Leone. The diamond trade there was then controlled by the Lebanese, and most of the diamonds were in fields where the Lebanese controlled production trade. There was artisan mining, which is to say they carve into a hillside or dig into a pit to try to find the diamonds. They are not of the highest quality or value, and were used in most cases for industrial purposes, but they still have value. There are some diamonds in Liberia, but not really of any significance.

They do have gold. While I was there, Broken Hill Proprietary, the largest company in Australia had one of its American subsidiaries negotiate for a gold mining investment. They thought that they had a very good prospect in Liberia.. They were unnerved at the corruption they learned about. I was at the reception when the deal had been signed and David Farhat, the Minister of Commerce at the time, arriving late, said, "Did I get here too late? Has everybody already been paid off, or is my share still there?" He was half-joking and half not.

Q: Speaking of corruption, was the money being peeled off going out of the country or was it being recirculated?

WAUCHOPE: Probably both, as best we could tell. They were sending a certain amount of it out through a very porous banking system. One problem they had was that the Liberian dollar, through mismanagement and political uncertainty, and because of corrupt practices was becoming increasingly worthless. Theoretically, it was in parity with the U.S. dollar, but in reality it was trading at about five to one during this time. Then the government went a step further and introduced higher denomination coins. It felt that paper money was too easy to devalue, so they went to coins figuring they would be more solid, but it didn't fool anybody. Corrupt payoffs had to be in foreign currency, U.S. dollars in most instances. Then of course they could have it deposited into offshore accounts. But leaders needed a certain amount of assets in Liberia like their SUVs and fancy gear, and home improvements. Where the Lebanese had the good sense not to flaunt their wealth, the Liberian elites did not. It caught up with them eventually because everybody recognized who was getting the kickbacks.

Q: You mentioned there were a whole number of embassies there from all over. Obviously I can understand why we were there, the Lebanese and all, but what were all these other people doing?

WAUCHOPE: Right. That's a good question. The British chancery was right next door to us on Mamba Point. They had a large physical plant, but a small staff. The French were across the street from us, again small staffed, but impressive operations. The Italians were up the street. Most of these European nations were there because the Americans had encouraged them to be represented in times past, and Monrovia's infrastructure was relatively good. The Swedes were there because Electrolux owned the LAMCO iron ore mine. That made sense. The Japanese were there because they wanted to be engaged in economic assistance. The Soviets were there for political reasons, a hangover from the bipolar world, and they were joined by the Romanians. Their sense was that this had been an important place for the Americans. The West Germans were there because they had a large mining operation, Bong Mines. The Italians and French had very little real involvement. They had some export business and they did buy some of the rubber, but nothing really significant. I think they were there primarily because of its past history under the Americo-Liberian regime. Monrovia was a nice place to operate out of and to look out for their interests in other parts of West Africa. It had good communications and, when the Tubman government was operating, the Americans made sure things ran well, reliable power and water. So, they'd set up their operations in those days and monitored their regional responsibilities from there. They stayed on basically because the Americans wanted them stay. They stayed for as long as they could tolerate the situation. The British closed down soon after the trouble started in late '89, and we took over their chancery compound.. The Italians and the French saw no reason to hang on and closed down. Then the Eastern Bloc countries left with the collapse of communism.

Q: What about life for you at the embassy, you know, I mean, the people there, was there much social life? How did things progress?

WAUCHOPE: It was really quite excellent, in fact. It was remarkably good, like the last good this before the Fall. The Embassy was well organized to provide support services to the American community. Most of us were in the Mamba Point area where the embassy is located. We had three large apartment buildings immediately adjacent to the embassy compound. My own circumstances were really extraordinary. My predecessor Len Shurtleff had arranged to

purchase the combined Dutch embassy and residence. The Dutch had closed down in the mid-1980s and so we took it over their complex. It was just around the corner from the embassy. We had more space than we could use. We could host a reception for 600 people, which we did on two occasions when we I was the Chargé and hosted the 4th of July reception. We could easily put them all under cover. There had a large dining room and living room area and then we could open doors onto a big terrace with an awning over half of it. The Dutch, being as thorough as they were, had an air conditioning system for each level, plus a back up unit. The lower level had been the chancery and the upper level was the residence. These air conditioning units were about half the size of this room. You'd push the button and these things would roar into action. As we had increasing problems with electricity, the GSO put up a building for a massive generator that could run everything in the house. You had seven refrigerators because we had to do a lot of entertaining. I had a household staff of 5 people, probably one of the best cooks in town and after I left he opened his own restaurant. He did well enough to make his living as a restaurateur. There was a big pool at the Voice of America compound, and there was a pool on the embassy compound. There were all kinds of mission activities; there were the hash house harriers, the marine house was a great center of activity and life for the Americans was really quite excellent. With a large American school, we had just about everything. One source of concern was the CIA telecommunications base, it was one of five in the world. The other four are all co-located with military facilities. The communicators were a group of people who rotated among these five bases, and Liberia was the most backward. There was no PX or commissary, no American recreational facility, no officer or NCO clubs. This group was always disappointed at the lack of support services and facilities. We were told about that this was a select group of technicians and communicators; only one applicant in 20 was accepted, and they were virtually all former military. Despite this selectivity there were no lack of problems; employees sleeping with each other's wives, etc. One family was thrown out of country when the wife discharged a shotgun out on the balcony of their apartment in frustration over a husband running around with somebody. I must say the agency didn't hesitate to apply its rules in this case, the whole family was gone within 24 hours. Not only did Monrovia not have the expected perks, there were Africans all around these newcomers, which unnerved some of the more insular ones. This resulted in substantial adjustment problems. We had to work with these people and try to bring them into the process and we appealed to their sense of adventure. Some responded well, some didn't.

Q: How about relations with the Liberians?

WAUCHOPE: They were generally excellent. The Liberians have a great affinity for the United States whether it's for real or not, which is debatable. They were persuaded that we can do anything we want to do. Of course, they all would go to the United States in a flash if they were given an opportunity. This attachment to the U.S. was not unfortunately taken into account when Liberia collapsed in turmoil, but the Bush Administration was unprepared to put American military forces into restore order. When the killing started in December and into the early part of 1990, there were five U.S. ships off the Liberian coast and this task force had as many as 2,200 American marines aboard. If we'd just put 500 American marines ashore, the Liberians would have done whatever the Marines told them to do. They had that high a regard for the American military. A certain number of Liberians had served in our military at one time or another. Our troops could probably have kept the Liberian factions apart and had some real impact on the situation. I'm not suggesting it would have been a miraculous solution, but Jim Bishop told me

that the Bush administration didn't want to be in a position to be seen to be supporting either Taylor, who was a fugitive from justice in the United States, or Doe, a man who presided over terrible repressive actions against his political enemies. It seemed like a no win situation, so Bush didn't order them in. The perception of U.S. power, influence and ability of Americans would have been a very important restraining factor on later violence that occurred in Liberia. It's unfortunate.

On a personal basis, we really enjoyed the Liberians company. They had a special handshake which we all mastered so we could be part of their group. They were good company and a lot of fun, and they really enjoyed life. They really knew the United States well. They knew we were open and friendly and they really appreciated that in us, and we enjoyed it in them.

Overall, I think that, while my tour as DCM in Monrovia was professionally rewarding and personally enjoyable for me, it also marked the end of an era in Liberia. In the months following my departure a process began that brought down the last vestiges of the Americo-Liberian heyday, and replaced it with a failed state that is only now beginning to show the first glimmers of hope of some degree or stability. Reflecting on our role in this period, I think we sincerely tried to make Doe and his government into a responsible and effective organization, but we learned that there are always limits to reforming such flawed individuals. If there was any error made by the U.S. government it was probably to permit Doe to run as a candidate in this election. Once we acquiesced in that decision, the game was essentially over. Doe made certain he would win, fair or foul, and then his greed and stupidity that of his supporters ensured the corruption and mismanagement that we strove to correct. Corrupt regimes breed their own undoing, and just as Amin's army proved to be no more than a gang of thugs and thieves that proved incapable of facing the questionable military prowess of the Tanzanian army, so also did Doe's army revert to thugery to suppress Charles Taylor's 50-man incursion transforming it into a 5000 man insurgency in three months. Again our advice for a moderate and disciplined response was brushed aside and Doe was tortured to death less than a year later. The tragic descent of Liberia into chaos and death could only have been prevented by an intensive and timely intervention by the U.S. with all the longer term consequences that such interventions entail. Our leaders of that time were not prepared to make that investment of American resources and prestige, but ironically, it perhaps one of the few places in the world where such an intervention would have been both welcomed and very likely hugely successful.

HERMAN J. ROSSI III
Economic Officer
Monrovia (1986-1989)

Mr. Rossi was born in Florida and raised in Idaho. He was educated at Gonzaga University and Washington State University. In 1965, he entered the Foreign Service, specializing primarily in economic and African affairs. During his career, Mr. Rossi served in Kinshasa, Blantyre, Rome, Pretoria, Monrovia, Kingston and Libreville, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. He was Economic Counselor at several of his posts. In his Washington assignments, Mr. Rossi dealt with both

African and Economic matters. Mr. Rossi was interviewed by Peter Eicher in 2007.

ROSSI: ...Carrying on, I got the job as head of the economic section in Liberia. I went there in mid '86, and it was a differential post. My oldest son was starting college about then and a couple of years later I had four kids in college at one time, so Liberia turned out to be a good post for me from a financial perspective. As usual, it had good points and bad points. The climate is terrible. One needs a bit of background to understand the situation in Liberia in 1986 when I came. From the 1840's until 1980, Liberia was ruled by a group of black freemen that had come back from the United States called the Americo-Liberians. They were never more than 5% of the population, but they had ruled the country for well over a century and had become a ruling elite over the patchwork of local tribes.

Liberia is like most of the west African countries. There are seven or eight different tribes speaking seven or eight different languages. In 1980, there was a coup by a group of native Liberian army noncoms who overthrew the Americo-Liberian government. Samuel Doe was one of the leaders, but he was only one of the leaders at the time. He eventually emerged as the dominant figure in the post coup period. He was, I think, like a lot of the African dictators, someone who had a lot of political street smarts and was skilled at maintaining himself in power but had almost no skill in managing the economy.

The overall Liberian economy, when I was there, was very uneven. The government's finances were in terrible shape. Corruption was rampant and little money was reaching the key sectors like health and education.. But because the U.S. dollar was the legal currency of Liberia along with the Liberian dollar, the private sector actually ran reasonably well. Importers could buy their foreign exchange directly from the exporter, so they didn't have to go through the Liberian government. Goods and services were relatively plentiful in Liberia.

The strongest part of the economy was what we called "the foreign concessions". These were iron ore mines and rubber plantations which were owned and operated by foreign companies. Firestone was the best known and biggest of the group. The price of rubber was strong so most of the concessions were doing well. Also, there was a steady trickle of gold and diamonds being mined by small-scale prospectors up in the north of the country, and that was contributing to the economy. There was also a considerable amount of logging taking place. Unfortunately, the logging was unregulated and was slowly wiping out one of the last rainforests in west Africa. Aerial pictures of Liberia at the time I was there and compared to 20 years earlier show a huge decline of the great hardwood forests that covered Liberia.

That was part of the problem with the Doe government. The logging companies were most small-scale foreign entrepreneurs, not large corporations, and they would pay off the officials and be left to do whatever they wanted. It was a rather corrupt government even by African standards. I was three years in Liberia; I extended a year because largely for financial reasons. Our work over that time was dominated by our effort to persuade and guide Samuel Doe into better economic policies. We had a lot of communication facilities in Liberia such as the Voice of America and other things. We had significant interests there, far more so than the size of the country would indicate. Therefore we were pouring a fair amount of aid into Liberia and were

getting frustrated that the economy—at least the government section of the economy—was so mismanaged.

One should not understate the impact on the country of the government's financial chaos. Many key sectors depended on the Liberian government. These included the hospitals and clinics, nearly all the schools, the electricity infrastructure, and of course roads. All were being starved of funds. The electricity grid was falling apart and there were frequent outages. I remember one particularly bad example. The navigation aids and radio beacons at Roberts Field airport (the country's main airport) were only working sporadically and were steadily deteriorating. The government could not find the money to repair them. Americans, Liberians and everyone who came in and out of the airport were at greater risk as a result. (I recall the Embassy begged the USAID mission to allocate a couple hundred thousand out of their multi-million dollar budget to refurbish the nav aids. They refused stating it was outside USAID's "development philosophy".)

Our efforts with Doe had a mixed record. We kept him from doing the worst things, but the government's overall management improved only briefly and that was a period where we sent into some AID advisors into the Ministry of Finance to actually manage the cash flow. This was a deal worked out during a visit by George Schultz, then Secretary of State.

I was closely involved in this effort. I think it was working. It was helping improve the government's finances although it was far from solving the overall problem. The program was in place for only a year. It was supposed to stay in place for two years. The ambassador pulled the plug on the project after a year. He felt that the advisors were not being allowed to manage all the government's resources so it was not worthwhile to manage just part of them.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ROSSI: Jim Bishop who is, of course, a very experienced Africa hand. I did not agree with his position on this issue, but I did not speak up strongly either. This was very much a judgment call, and it was the ambassador's judgment that the improvement wasn't worth the very large investment. These advisors were expensive people.

Doe was a difficult person to deal with. I didn't deal with him personally. The DCM and ambassador did. We had these substantial interests in Liberia, so we needed to deal with him. In some ways, it was a classic problem in dealing with dictators in countries where the U.S. had substantial interests. There was no better alternative to Doe on the horizon at that point and if we did not work with him, we imperiled significant interests that had been there for many years.

Q: Firestone and the mining companies could work all right despite this?

ROSSI: They worked pretty well. They paid their taxes to the government of which only part ever got into the formal government coffers. However, they were relatively prosperous.

The iron ore mine in the north was running fine except the deposit was running out. It was right against the Guinean-Liberian border. The iron ore deposit on the Liberian side of the border, which had been mined for 30 or 40 years, was near exhaustion. The deposit continued over into

Guinea, but they never could get agreement to carry on the mining over there. It was a shame because there was already a railway and other mining infrastructure in place. The problem was the Guineans had wildly unrealistic expectations of how much money they could get from the project. The same was partially true of the Liberian Government. As a result, they could never reach an agreement. Toward the end of my tour in Liberia, the mine, which was Swedish-owned, essentially shut down. I do not believe it has ever reopened.

Q: How about the Liberian flag shipping registry?

ROSSI: That was a good source of income for the government. That was one of the reasons that the ambassador pulled the plug on the AID advisors because Doe would not agree to let the AID advisors handle the income from the Liberia shipping registry and the off-shore corporate registry that was part of it. Doe saw this as his own slush fund. The amount should not be exaggerated. It was a good and steady income, but it wasn't huge amounts of money.

During that time, there was a corporate fight in the U.S. for control of the shipping registry. I think the registry was damaged as a result of the internal struggle that went on. Doe eventually sided with one faction, and that was enough to tip the balance. The old professionals had been on one side, and a newer group was on the winning side.

Q: It must have been a good sized embassy.

ROSSI: It was, particularly for a small African country. We had a big mission with several other agencies besides State. We had USIS. We had Peace Corps. There was also a large AID mission with a fairly large program. Plus we had some diplomatic communications facilities there. All this went back to the old historical links to Liberia and the fact that up until 1980, it had always been looked on as a very stable place under the Americo-Liberian rule, a good place to put VOA facilities and other facilities like that. It became much less so after 1980. The whole U.S. approach to Liberia was involved in trying managing this problem. We had these facilities and interests in what had become a much less stable country with a government run by a corrupt and somewhat unpredictable leader.

The other thing that happened in the period that I was there was that Doe's base of support narrowed steadily. There had been a coup attempt against Doe just before I got there and he became a little paranoid after that. One of the results of this was the army was increasingly drawn just from his tribal group, the Krahn. This was a relatively small tribal group in eastern Liberia, but they had come to dominate the army and, to a degree, the government. This increased during my three years and was resented by the rest of the population. That, I think, was the major source of the civil war that broke out about six months after I left.

I left in about August of '89, and the civil war broke out in the north up near the Swedish iron ore mine in about January of '90'. It was very sad for the Liberian people because it was the start of a six civil war that devastated the country and the economy. In spite of all the government's problems, most people had had enough to eat and some had decent jobs while I was there. The civil war destroyed most of that. The concessions shut down. About the only thing that kept going through all this period was the illegal logging and some of the small-scale mining in the

north. The more organized portions of the economy largely collapsed. Again, this was after I left. Doe was killed in the course of the civil war but his Krahn army fought on and kept the war going for several more years.

After I left Liberia and read about what was going on there, I found it very discouraging. Liberian was never a rich country but the private sector economy was operating well and showing real promise when I departed. It's another case of a country where a functioning economy was destroyed by political strife and tribal warfare.

One of the most discouraging factors was that in the final months of my tour there was a large Australian mining company that was on the verge of making a major investment in gold and diamond mining in northern Liberia. This was going to be a substantial investment and would have been a huge benefit to the Liberian economy. Of course, the civil war ended all prospects of that. On that sad note ended my last African tour.

Q: You left there in '88?

ROSSI: No, mid '89. At that point I still had kids in college, and I was still looking for a differential post. I was also still looking for government housing, but I did want to be closer to the kids. I didn't want them to grow up before I could see much of them in their college years.

The kids came out to Liberia at Christmastime each year to spend a couple of weeks with me. I think they got to like their visits. There were a number of other American and European kids back for the holidays and something of a party atmosphere for the expatriate kids. I wanted to see a bit more of them before they really grew up, so when an opportunity to go to Kingston, Jamaica as economic counselor arose, I took it.

JAMES K. BISHOP JR.
Ambassador
Liberia (1987-1990)

Ambassador James K. Bishop, Jr. was born in New York in 1938. He received his bachelor's degree from Holy Cross College in 1960. His career has included positions in Auckland, Beirut, Yaounde, and ambassadorships to Nigeria, Liberia, and Somalia. Ambassador Bishop was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 1995.

BISHOP: I was the back-up officer for Liberia when I was working on Ghana and Togo. So starting in 1972, I began to learn a little about Liberia. I visited it for the first time in 1975 when I was the Deputy Office Director. Liberia was a rather appalling scene. The American Liberians, who had been freed from slavery in the US and emigrated to Liberia, had created in that country a social structure similar to what they had known in the American South. Those former slaves played the role of plantation owners, controlling the local political structure while the indigenous people played the subordinate roles. The American-Liberians had every intention of maintaining

their privileged position as long as it was possible to do so. For many years they prevented the indigenous people from acquiring educations and made no effort to develop the interior in order to maintain their power. In the 1970s, President Tubman recognized that this policy was not consistent with Liberia's ambition to play a prominent role in Africa--a role that the Liberians thought was theirs because Liberia had been the first independent country in modern black Africa. But as the economies of other African countries began to grow and they attained independence and exerted themselves politically, Liberia began to be seen by Africans more and more as an anachronism. The Liberian economy also was stagnating; Tubman decided to invite foreign mineral investments and to invest in rural infrastructure. Firestone of course, had been in Liberia since before WW II. All of the rubber companies were quite content with the plantation mentality that developed in Liberia. But when the Liberians did attract mineral investments, the exploitation of their tropical rain forests began. Roads were built into the country's interior, allowing the rural population somewhat greater economic opportunities.

Tolbert, who succeeded Tubman when the latter died in 1974, was caught between the Liberian old guard which resented any efforts to expand the political base and those who agreed with him that the economic base had to be enlarged, which meant a broadening of the political base. Tolbert brought some of the indigenous people into government. But they were not admitted to the other two pillars of Liberian politics: the True Whig Party and the Masonic Order. The newly anointed felt that exclusion.

President Carter felt a particular tie to Tolbert because the latter was the President of the World Baptist Alliance; he was in fact embraced at the White House as a serious personage. From my perspective, I did not think that we were looking critically enough at what Tolbert was doing. We did not focus on human right violations in Liberia, contrary to posture that the Carter administration was taking in many other countries. There were some projects undertaken by the Liberian regime in rural areas with USAID and Peace Corps help. Schools and dispensaries were built in the rural areas, but the process was much too slow to keep up with the aspirations of the people. Tolbert was killed in 1980--the same year that Carter lost his bid for re-election.

We were all very impatient with Qadhafi; Haig was among the most impatient, but no one suggested an invasion of Libya. Later in 1986, of course, we did bomb Tripoli, but that was in reaction to a direct provocation against us. Libyan involvement in the bombing of a disco in Berlin which killed one American. When the Libyan connection with that bombing was established, an F-111 strike on Tripoli and on Qadhafi's compound was ordered, which did kill some members of his household. That strike had a salutary effect on Libyan behavior towards the US; it did not sponsor any terrorist attacks on us thereafter.

In 1980, the Americo-Liberian domination of Liberia came to an end as a group of non-commissioned officers assassinated the President and also killed some of the leading members of the government and the establishment--19 were executed on the beach at Monrovia. The Carter administration became alarmed by Libyan overtures to these young, inexperienced rebels. We had a substantial strategic and economic interest in Liberia; so in part as the result of the coup, we embarked on a program to try to "civilize" the new government, led by Samuel Doe--a former Master Sergeant. That effort ultimately cost us about \$500 million. Its failure helped set the stage for the 1990-97 civil war which destroyed much of the country including our physical assets. The

Libyan threat to our interests in Monrovia receded in the early 80s. In fact, by the mid-1980s we persuaded Doe to expel the Libyans; we were able to prove that they were involved in a conspiracy against him.

Q: Your next assignment in 1987 was as Ambassador to Liberia. How did that come about?

BISHOP: Secretary Shultz wanted a black ambassador in South Africa--as part of a package of maneuvers intended to try to head off the imposition of US mandatory sanctions. Ed Perkins, then our Ambassador in Liberia, was selected. I proposed to Crocker that I be nominated as Ed's successor. I had been Chet's deputy for six years and I thought it was time to move on. I knew Liberia and its problems and I thought it offered a challenge. Crocker, Shultz and the White House agreed and I went off to Monrovia.

There was a period when we appointed only African-Americans as ambassadors to Liberia. In the 1960s, a pattern developed of alternating a black and a white, almost mathematically. It may not have worked like that exactly every time, but it was close. I don't think that pattern came about as part of any plan; I think it just happened that way. We all know that the Department's personnel system has no plans.

I was lucky in my confirmation process. I was expecting Senator Kerry--(D). MA--to be difficult because I had been involved in the development of Liberian policies for six years. Kerry had a Liberian on his staff who was not sympathetic to our policies concerning that country. There were lots of Americo-Liberians who hated Doe. He had brought to an abrupt end to their domination of the country. There were Liberian politicians, many with friends in the US, who felt our support for the Doe regime was precluding their ability to seek and acquire the Presidency for themselves.

There had been an election in 1985, in which Doe ran against several of those politicians. There was a very large voter turn-out, indicating a refreshing interest in the democratic process. Unfortunately, there was considerable fraud throughout the election on the part of all parties. There were claims from the outset, by almost all of the leading contenders, that their rivals were all cheating. The vote count, which was supposed to have been conducted in a more open fashion than customary, was in fact conducted *in camera* by the chairman of the Electoral Commission, Emmet Harmon. His determination was that Doe had won 51% of the votes. A number of opposition politicians were elected to the Assembly whose members were selected at the same time as the President. All those politicians decried Doe's victory as a fraud. The US administration, and Crocker particularly, testified in response to a question about the US view of the electoral process in Liberia, that since we hadn't participated in the vote count, we didn't know how honest the results announced by the Commission had been. But he added that we accepted the outcome and continued to have relations with the Doe government.

Three weeks after the election, Thomas Quwumpha, who had participated with Doe in the 1980 coup--he was the brightest in a not very bright group, as well as the most popular officer in the military establishment--, mounted a coup against Doe. He had had a falling out with Doe in

about 1983 and returned in November 1985 at the head of a small group to overthrow Doe by force. He almost succeeded, but he went to the radio station instead of the arsenal. He was ultimately captured and killed in a vicious fashion. There were reprisals against people in Nimba County from whence Quwumpha came; perhaps 1500 people lost their lives either in Monrovia or in other parts of Liberia. These reprisals were quite bloody, extending Liberian resentment against Doe well beyond the Americo-Liberians whom Doe had turned out of power in 1980 to members of ethnic groups which were victims of this slaughter, as well as opponents who lost the 1985 election.

In any case, Kerry came down with pneumonia and never showed at my hearings. I was on the same list with Arnie Raphel, who was headed for Pakistan. There were members of the Committee who had a lot of questions for Arnie; so I was spared. Arnie drew whatever fire the Committee had that day. I slipped through without pain. No real questions were raised about our policy toward Liberia.

I arrived in Monrovia on April 12, 1987--the seventh anniversary of the Doe coup. As I left Washington, the Department was about to undertake an initiative in its Liberian policy. The original strategy, as developed by the Carter administration, was to try to "civilize" Doe by providing him financial assistance which would enable his government to organize and manage itself, while instructing Doe in political governance--essentially through ambassadorial tutorial--which Bill Swing conducted quite ably for the first years of his relationship with Doe. That relationship later soured as result of something Bill said to the press which Doe resented. Bill was trying to encourage the nascent democratic process by coming down hard on Doe when he acted in undemocratic ways while simultaneously encouraging Liberian political leaders to test the limits of the Doe environment. After 1985, that environment became more restricted because a) many opposition leaders fled the country and b) many opposition leaders who had been elected refused to serve as a protest against the fraud involved in the Doe election.

The new element in 1987 was an attempt to curb corruption and mismanagement in the fiscal operations of the Liberian government. Shultz and Peter McPherson, the head of AID, went to Liberia in February 1987. They persuaded Doe to accept a team of American experts who would sit at the control points of the government's financial system; among other responsibilities, they would be required to co-sign all government documents relating to fiscal expenditures. Doe agreed that seventeen such experts would be assigned. When I arrived in April, one of my first priorities was to get this program off the ground. Some of us had hopes that our intervention might help clean up the government by getting it back on the road to responsible management. I think Doe recognized that the continuation of substantial levels of US assistance depended on his acceptance of the Shultz/McPherson proposals. He also recognized that a lot of what was going on was beyond his control; he did not have a good command and control system in his government. He understood that many of his government's officials were stealing, but he had no mechanism to prevent or detect such abuses.

Beyond that program, my agenda included efforts to manage our relationships with Liberia so that we could continue to have access to our strategic facilities which meant that there had to be a modicum of civility in our relations to Doe and his people. At the same time, I wanted to maintain sufficient distance from the Liberian government so that if it were replaced, we would

continue to have access to the facilities. I wanted to be sure we did not make ourselves anathema to a successor government by being perceived as too closely attached to the Doe regime. We also had to be concerned with the protection of the 5,000 Americans living in Liberia--more than 20% of whom were US government employees and dependents.

I mentioned the strategic facilities. These included a VOA transmitter, which was that agency's major broadcasting facility to reach west, central and southern Africa. There was a CIA telecommunication installation through which much of our diplomatic and intelligence communications flowed throughout the Continent and to and from the US. We had an OMEGA navigation site which was of six maintained by the US Coast Guard throughout the world, a network which at the time was very important to both air and sea navigation. We had military access rights to Monrovia's port and to Robert's field, the latter allowing us to send cargo to other parts of Africa with no questions asked.

In addition, we had significant commercial interests in Liberia: rubber plantations--Firestone had the largest rubber plantation in the world, in addition to some other American owned plantations; several banks owned by Americans; the Liberian Maritime Registry, which involved American interests as well as ships. On the international political front, we were interested in the continued support of the Liberian government, which, although it had lost substantial credibility after Doe's coup, was still able to play a positive role for us in African and international councils. Doe had expelled Libyans at our request and had re-recognized Israel--the first African country to do so after the beginning of the peace process of the mid-1980s.

We clearly had a strategic stake in Liberia. Due to our distaste for the Doe regime, we had estimated the costs of replacing the facilities we had in Liberia. But the numbers were so astronomical that it just could not be contemplated, even assuming that there was another country in Africa which was both geographically suited and politically willing to let us use its territory for our facilities.

Liberian society was still traumatized by the events of 1980. A high proportion of the Americo-Liberians had fled. They had been excluded from governance in the early years. Their replacements, in many cases, were unequal to the task because they were semi-literate high school or grammar school drop-outs. They spent a lot of time bickering among themselves, accompanied in some cases by violence. It was a depressing time for Liberia. Our assistance had enabled Doe to increase the government payroll, which did bring into the government some country people as an ethnic payoff for the revolution. Doe's actions were a revolution; it was just not a coup d'état because it was just not one government replacing another. There was a fundamental change in the government's composition, with repressed country people replacing their former Americo-Liberian overlords. The price of that revolution was that there were not only less competent people in the government, but there were more of them; the salary bill was devouring 95% of government revenues, leaving very little for program needs. Schools had no chalk, the roofs leaked; there was no medicine in the clinics. The teachers and the medical technicians were increasingly poorly trained as the educational institutions ran down, reflecting the departure of the Americo-Liberians. The resource constraints in the teaching institutions were very noticeable. The economy continued to be dominated by expatriates.

The enclave establishments at the mine sites and the rubber plantations were run by primarily expatriates: Europeans and Americans. The commercial life was dominated by Lebanese, who numbered 5,000 or more. There was also an expatriate African business community that was of some significance as well as an Asian subcontinent community. That left little for the Liberians except for the Americo-Liberians, who had been able to make their money in the past or who were associated with the concessions--e.g. paid board members or skilled employees, and filled the ranks of the liberal professions due to their superior educations.

The Americo-Liberians, as a matter of policy, had not developed the countryside because they recognized that economic development might well result in demands for political power sharing. In the 1950s, President Tubman decided that it was necessary to invest some resources to the countryside if his power structure was to survive. A few all-weather roads were built into the interior; some government schools and medical facilities were established in an environment that had seen these social services rendered almost exclusively by missionaries. The infrastructure in the countryside remained very limited; there were no more than 200 miles of all-weather roads. There were railroads that ran from the coast to the Lamco mine in Nimba County and to Bong Mine in Bong County.

Many people living in the countryside were on a barter economy. The rubber plantations were scattered around the country. The plantation and mine employees were in a cash economy. Their earnings helped establish supporting services. The Firestone plantation, for example, employed something like 12-15,000; there were 40,000 people living on the plantation, mostly dependents. In the area surrounding the plantation there were spin-off settlements populated by merchants who provided food and other basic services. The same phenomenon occurred to a lesser extent at other rubber plantations and at the major mines sites.

The Americo-Liberians had been educated in the US for many years. There were Harvard educated lawyers in Monrovia when I arrived. The churches had established some high schools in the rural areas--the Lutherans in Lofa County, and the Episcopalians in Cape Mount County; e.g. Cuttington College had been in existence for close to 100 years. There were indigenous college educated Liberians who occupied subordinate positions in both the private and public sectors. Tolbert had made an effort to bring the indigenous population into higher governmental levels. They had nominal access and in some cases, actually occupied ministerial positions. But they were kept out of the two other pillars of the political structure: the leadership of the True Whig Party--which had governed Liberia as the sole serious political party for well over 100 years--and the Masonic Order. Both institutions remained Americo-Liberian preserves even after other Liberians began to find some acceptance in the higher levels of government.

The differences between the Americo-Liberians and the indigenous population were very pronounced. Americo-Liberian society was, in many respects, like the American white plantation society of the 1820s. When Americo-Liberians came to Liberia, they attempted to replicate to a substantial extent in Liberia the social structure they had known in the US' south. Except, of course, in Liberia they were in the plantation houses and the indigenous rural people did all the heavy work. The Americo-Liberians did have to fight to maintain themselves against the native population almost from the day they landed in Liberia. They never constituted more than 5% of

the population of the country. Before the arrival of the Americans, there were armed conflicts among the local tribes, some continuing to occur through the 19th and into the 20th century.

The Liberian military was a significant institution. We had helped to train it, going back to the early part of the 20th Century. The US military was in Liberia through the WW II--primarily black construction troops used for building airfields as well as the harbor. The social structure of the Liberian military reflected the social structure of the country. The officers, especially the senior ones, were all Americo-Liberian; the soldiers were indigenous people. The officers cared as little for the welfare of the enlisted men as the average Americo-Liberian cared for the welfare of any indigenous Liberian. Therein lay the seeds of their own destruction because the indigenous people, living in miserable circumstances in Monrovia, saw the Americo-Liberians enjoying the fruits of Liberia's national resources. That generated resentment which grew steadily over the years. Tolbert's efforts to give greater enfranchisement to indigenous Liberians were bitterly resented by many of the conservatives in the Americo-Liberian community. That became well known to the indigenous people. In 1979, there were "rice" riots, when the government-dictated price of rice was increased in an environment of considerable corruption. Money was being spent for yet another show-case project--in this instance buildings to house delegates to a OAU summit meeting. The frustration of the population rose until it boiled over among NCOs in the military, who were living in absolute misery while Americo-Liberian officers lived well by local standards. The NCOs--Sergeant Doe among them-- finally rose up and eliminated the political and military leadership.

Our Embassy was large; in fact, it was the largest in Africa. We had 250 American employees in the official establishment; in addition, we had 200 Peace Corps volunteers. We had very substantial facilities--an American School that went from Kindergarten through 12th, a number of recreational facilities (boat club, swimming pool, tennis courts) a commissary, which opened just when we arrived). It was a pretty nice life for people who were interested in creature comforts. Admittedly, the climate was difficult, but there were many, particularly among the CIA communicators, who had been in Monrovia for years and years, because they had the opportunity to do the things in which they were interested. They had a choice: they could live in a self-contained environment, never seeing local life, or they could participate as little or as much as they wanted in that life. I should note that among the American employees were about 100 who were assigned to the telecommunication facility--50% operators and 50% technicians. The latter traveled throughout Africa, leaving their families in Monrovia. There were about 20 American families at the VOA site, keeping that working, together with a smaller contingent of Filipinos and the Liberian workforce. The AID mission consisted of 25 people, who had a rather complex portfolio. The MAAG consisted of about 6 officers and enlisted men who administered a substantial military assistance program. Then we had a good size Embassy including a sizeable CIA presence. We had three legitimate political officers for a country of 2.5 million people. That was reflection of the importance that Liberia had in US strategic planning.

I had met President Doe once when he had come to Washington during the Reagan administration. Secretary Shultz and I called on him. In fact, Doe was the first foreign head of State that Shultz called on after he became Secretary. I remember that he commented later that he wasn't sure that he had made the right career decision. At that point, Doe had not learned

standard English; still spoke Liberian English, which was a very distinctive dialect and very difficult to understand.

While serving in Washington, I had followed Liberian events through the Embassy's reporting. I watched Doe grow in the job, although it was never a good fit. At least he developed a greater capacity for governance as result of a deliberate effort on his part. He recognized his limitations and tried to overcome them by systematic studies and applications, but he was never going to be up to the task; he didn't have the intellectual acumen to do that. He was by no means stupid, but his intellectual resources were not up to Presidential responsibilities.

Getting things done in Monrovia was pretty frustrating. The level of governmental competence was low. There were "chips" on various shoulders. Soon after my arrival, the Foreign Minister gave me a long lecture on how we owed it to Liberia to increase our assistance because of past neglect and racial discrimination in the US. I got quite fed up with that and I think he got the message. Fortunately, he was out of office within a few months. Many other members of the government were notoriously corrupt and not really interested in serious business; they were just looking for opportunities to line their own pockets. Other members of the government were serious about their jobs; one could get some satisfaction in working with them. There were vice-ministers and division heads who worked very hard to develop effective programs and good relationships. But overall, working with the Liberian government was rather discouraging.

We were very active in trying to encourage the development of a democratic society by advocating a greater role for the legislature, the judiciary and the press. We tried to identify the few honest members of the judiciary and gave them encouragement by providing travel grants for them, bringing in lecturers, establishing a law library, etc. We identified members of the legislature whom we thought would be responsive; we tried to help to educate them on how they might play a more important role in Liberia's political life. We worked with the press, offering various forms of support as it flexed its muscles. Liberia had a terrible reputation in the US thanks to the reports that were being filed for the American press and the film footage of people being killed on the beach. It wasn't "Idi Amin West" by any means; there were functioning opposition parties, which criticized the government. They were free to speak their minds as long as they didn't criticize the head of state; they could take oral shots at the ministers and their departments. The judiciary had been dishonest for as long as there had been a judiciary; we were not very successful in changing that. We had one political officer working on the judiciary, one on the press with USIS, and the third on the political parties. We went to bat for them. Six months after I arrived, we learned that Doe was going to jail the principal opposition leader and ban his party the next morning. I immediately tried to get to see Doe, but he didn't want to see me. So I went to my typewriter and banged out a letter to him, telling him that he should not take the planned step because such action would fundamentally change Liberia's relationship with the US. It was delivered to Doe; he became quite upset and wouldn't talk to me for three or four months--for that and another reason--, but it had the desired result--the opposition leader was not jailed nor was his party banned. There was a lot of confrontation with Doe, which began about that time and probably stemmed from that issue. This was an example of what we were trying to do; namely force the pace of democratic development.

I used to describe my role in Monrovia as a pro-consul without a legion. The American Ambassador to Liberia was a personage of some significance in Liberian society; he had a bully pulpit and I used it often. The Liberians take a lot more exhortation from an American Ambassador than would most other foreigners. In the past, the Americo-Liberian community had overwhelmed the Embassy with its hospitality and access. But after 1980, that decreased substantially with the Americo-Liberian flight. There weren't many left when I arrived and those that were resented the American government's role and presence because they felt that we should have eliminated Doe and maintained them in power. Many were not interested in welcoming official Americans, and some were quite hostile.

In the US, a number of Americo-Liberians live in Reston and in Silver Spring. There is another cluster in New Jersey--some of the wealthier ones live near New York and some managed to find employment with the UN. There are some who live in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. These expatriates had some influence in the halls of Congress; I mentioned that Sen. Kerry (D-Mass) had an Americo-Liberian on his staff. Another one was on the staff of the House's Foreign Affairs Committee; she was the former girl-friend of Liberia's leading opposition leader. One of my most felt frustrations was our administration's inability to work with Chairman Wolpe (D-MI)--the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on Africa. Wolpe had been in the Peace Corps in Ethiopia; he had come to Congress from academia and took an academic approach to African issues. He was not interested in compromise; he was only interested in making political statements which didn't have many immediate impact or positive results. They did make him feel good and presumably made some of his constituents feel good. We could not work with him on most issues because his positions were very doctrinaire, and he was not willing to compromise. So for many years, we had no authorization bills. But more significantly, his posturing and that of his staff, led many of the Liberian oppositionists to believe that they didn't have any need to participate in the existing Liberian political process; they felt that sooner or later, Congress would pull the rug from under the Doe regime, allowing them to take power. As far as I could see, that was not going to happen. Doe was not going to allow himself to be chased out of town by Howard Wolpe or any of his staff.

There were recurring coup attempts against Doe--some by people close to him. So there was always the possibility that someone close to him could assassinate him. But there was no threat of foreign invasion, although a rebel incursion from across the border was always a possibility. In fact, while I was in Liberia, there were several incidents of that kind--e.g. a small incursion in 1988 involving a couple of Americans. The Liberians that participated were captured were taken behind a building and shot. The Liberian Chief of Staff told me that if I could assure him that the Americans would keep quiet about their activities, they would be returned to us. Ramsey Clark came to Monrovia to champion their cause. We were able to persuade Clark that if he kept his mouth shut, we could get the Americans freed. I take my hat off to my staff who spent a lot of time with Clark and were successful in convincing him to keep quiet. Clark had been the Attorney General in the Carter administration and a well known champion of unpopular causes and people; some how or other, he found out about these two African-Americans who had been taken by the Doe government under charges that might lead to their execution. So he came to try to free them through Liberia's judicial system. That certainly was not what the Liberian general had in mind. One of the African-Americans felt that if the coup were successful, he would be in a privileged position in the exploitation of Liberia's natural resources. In the other case, I don't

remember the reason for his participation; it may have just been a sense of adventure. In the final analysis, both were turned over to us and we got them out of the country in a hurry.

I have already mentioned the widespread corruption that existed in both public and private sectors. At first, after the 1980 coup, the Liberians expected us to follow local customs; they soon found out that the American Embassy did not pay bribes. The American business community had to struggle with the issue and some went along and paid bribes. They would pay Doe's entourage for access to the President; they would not have characterized their actions as bribes, but that was what it was. There was uneasiness between us and some in the American business community. When we tried to set in motion the control system that I mentioned earlier, one reason for its undoing was that an American bank cooperated with members of the Doe government who opposed controls of that kind--or any, for that matter--in the financial administration of the country.

I should expand a little on this effort to install controls on the government's financial process. I mentioned Shultz' and McPherson's trip to Monrovia. They got Doe to agree to accept a cadre of American financial experts who would monitor the strategic points of the process--the Ministry of Finance, Customs, the Budget Office. They were to co-sign all government expenditures and also to improve the government's personnel system and eliminate fictitious employees. One of reasons for the failure of this effort was of our making. It took AID eleven months to recruit and train a team of 17 experts. The local AID director assigned one of its least competent officers to the project although it was to be the show piece of AID's presence in Liberia. The director didn't want to take good personnel from the other programs for which she was responsible because she had a greater psychological attachment to them. I suspect that the office director also felt threatened because the project leader was a recently retired AID Comptroller--a very senior Agency official, considerably senior to her in the AID chain of command. She showed considerable anxiety about the project. By the time the experts finally arrived, the Doe government had lost interest in the experiment, in part because they had found some other resources. Doe himself may or may not have been committed to the experiment; we were never sure. The team finally was put in place in January 1988. By November of that year, I closed the effort, having decided that we were wasting the US taxpayer's money. By then we had invested about \$10 million in a system which was not having the intended effect because the Doe government had devised ways to move money outside established channels and therefore the control points, partially, as I said, with the connivance of the American bank. By November, my concern was to get the experts out of the country before they were physically harmed. Some had been threatened. For public consumption, we and the Liberians said that the program had been terminated by mutual agreement; which made it impossible to launch an attack on the American bank.

I had no problem with Chet Crocker in closing the project. When that time came, I got on the secure phone to him and asked that the project be terminated. As I mentioned, we had some concern for the physical safety of the advisors. But there were some people in the State West Africa office who were making very ominous predictions about the potential consequences. I assured them that if we got the people out of the country quietly, i.e., without criticizing the Doe regime, we would could do so without risk. Washington followed my recommendations and all the project participants left without incident. It was very helpful that I had worked with Crocker

for so long that I could talk to him on the phone and expect his full backing. He had made it clear to me when I left for Monrovia that I would be able to "call the shots" on Liberian policy-- obviously with his concurrence, but without interference from the desk, office directors and the rest of the Bureau bureaucracy.

While on the subject of AID, I might just add few comments about the program in general. It was well intended, but some of it was ineffective--for example, I found that we were engaged in agricultural projects that had been on going for 20 years without any results to justify the investment. When I asked someone to look at the records, we found that the agricultural projects were encountering the same difficulties that had existed 20 years earlier, essentially due to Liberian mismanagement, some of it deliberate. We had an education program that was innovative. We were using our Peace Corps volunteers to upgrade the skills of Liberian teachers--at least those who were interested in improving their own performances. But, as I said earlier, the schools were without chalk or paper; they had holes in their roofs. That made it very difficult for the teachers to maintain their enthusiasm for their jobs or to accomplish very much in terms of using their upgraded skills. We worked in a rural health program, training physician assistants and building some facilities. To the extent that we controlled the delivery of supplies, these clinics had something to work with. I think in general the program was successful, but I don't think we had any hopes that it would have lasting impact after our assistance ended.

The most satisfying project was the one that brought us into contact with Liberian private volunteer organizations. That enabled us to work with people outside the public sector. We had the pleasure of working with people with integrity--many of them physicians who had been out of the country for a sufficient period of time so that their cultural values reflected foreign inputs as well as Liberian ones. They were sincerely committed to their patients and were doing fine work providing medical care under very difficult circumstances. We had some American doctors who came to Liberia with Operation Smile. They became involved with some of the Liberian physicians, and the joint program gave us considerable satisfaction.

I took seriously my fiduciary responsibility for the expenditure of American taxpayers' money. I would not have agreed to continue programs which I thought were a waste of money. I was coming to that conclusion on the agricultural program I mentioned earlier. Of course, I had the same problems that all my ambassadorial colleagues encounter. The AID program had been designed three to five years earlier and to the extent that an ambassador is involved in any new efforts, the results will not be known for three to five years later. It takes a certain amount of time to understand how well existing projects are working. To begin to insist on modifications--and there is usually a great deal of resistance when that is suggested--is a major step, but we did some of that. Most of my AID related energies were devoted to the "operational experts" project which I discussed earlier, starting from the time I got there when we were trying to get the project off the ground and then in the subsequent eleven months while the project was active. That took a lot of my time.

I was also heavily involved in the Peace Corps program which in Liberia worked in tandem with AID not just in the education field, but also in rural development. We wanted to make sure that the volunteers would not just be sitting around idly, like so many Liberian civil servants, because of lack of resources. We made sure that the volunteers were engaged in activities that had an

external source of funding, so that they would have the material resources required to do their jobs. I am a great fan of the Peace Corps. I think that the Peace Corps volunteers are by and large the best of American society. We did have volunteers who were crazy and some who were criminals, but 80% were really upstanding young and middle-aged Americans. We had a high percentage of middle age and even late age volunteers because Liberia was English speaking and reasonable medical support was available. The volunteers did a great deal to embellish our national reputation; the volunteers also had a very enriching experience; they brought back to the US a vastly increased comprehension of life abroad, which had an appreciable--not determinative--effect on how our society regards people who live more difficult lives.

During my tour, we had to overcome some regional difficulties. There was an estrangement between Liberia and the Ivory Coast which was in part a function of President Houphouet-Boigny's resentment of the killing in Liberia of his friend and neighbor, Tolbert. That was in part a personal problem because Houphouet-Boigny had a ward who was married to one of Tolbert's sons, who was murdered by the Doe regime. After getting Doe's agreement, I went to the Ivory Coast and met with Houphouet-Boigny in an effort to achieve some reconciliation between him and Doe. I asked him to play the "older brother" role; to help Doe better understand how to govern his own country. Houphouet-Boigny said that he would do so, but never did. In fact, he later let Charles Taylor stage from the Ivory Coast the civil war which devastated Liberia and had some spill-over effects on the Ivory Coast, which became costly.

There was a relationship between the Liberians and the Nigerians which was interesting. President Babangida came to Monrovia and there was a fair bit of visiting back and forth between the two countries. Given Babangida's undemocratic history--he was no role model. But there was a welcome Nigerian commitment to return their country to civilian control. The Israelis played a significant role in Liberia and in Africa generally. We made efforts to counter Libya's attempts at subversion as I mentioned earlier--which were intended in part to undermine our role on the continent. We used Liberia as a transit point for delivery of military equipment to Savimbi in Angola as part of our Cold War struggle against the Soviet Union. So we were involved in matters others than strictly Liberian.

The Soviets had a mission in Monrovia and its Ambassador became a reasonably good friend. They were watching their "Ps & Qs"; they had been thrown out once when we persuaded the Doe government in the early 1980s that they were working with some of his opponents. By 1987, they had reestablished themselves, but they were being very careful. It was obviously in their interest to get along with the Americans because we legitimized them to some extent by opening our doors to them. Frankly, the diplomatic corps in Monrovia was so damn dull that I welcomed the Soviet Ambassador just for company; he was more interesting than most of the others. Our relationship even withstood the defection of one of the Soviet diplomats, who actually served as the Ambassador's interpreter. We took him out of the country surreptitiously when he and his wife decided that they were not interested in pursuing a career in the Soviet diplomatic service any longer. The Soviet Ambassador was on home leave at the time. When he returned, he called on me. I was braced for an unpleasant encounter, but he just said: "As you can see, I have no interpreter." I assured him that he was well. There was not much of a contest with the Soviets for influence in Liberia given the intimate nature of our relationship. The CIA and the KGB played their usual games--the defection in fact stemmed from one of our initiatives.

Of course the major event of course during my tour in Monrovia was the war which started at Christmas, 1989. My wife and I and two of our daughters passed Charles Taylor's band in the rain forest in north-east Liberia on roads about 10 kilometers apart. We were headed for Abidjan for the holidays and Taylor was moving his men into Liberia to overthrow the Doe government. We stopped at the border. It was an event for the customs officers and guards who did not see an American Ambassador very often. I chatted with a Colonel Doe and his colleagues for about twenty minutes and then went to the Ivory Coast. We spent the night in an hotel in Man and arrived in Abidjan the following mid-day. We found the Embassy in a state of alarm about our well being since the Monrovia Embassy had become aware that Taylor's force had crossed the border at about the same time we had done so. My colleagues in Monrovia were concerned that we might have been involved in the ensuing violence. We fortunately had escaped that; in fact, we knew nothing until we reached Abidjan. Taylor's band swung around to the border post and sliced Colonel Doe's throat as well as those of the other officers with whom we met the previous day.

Charles Taylor was a Americo-Liberian born in Arthington on the St. Paul River. He had been active in student politics during the Tolbert period. He returned to Liberia at about the time of the Doe coup; he rose to a prominent position as head of the General Services Administration in the Doe government. After a falling out, Taylor left for the United States; he was charged in Liberia with embezzlement of a million dollars--this happen before my time and I never had an opportunity to study whether the charges were valid. He was ultimately arrested in the US and held pending deportation to Liberia to face the criminal charges. Obviously the American authorities thought that the charges had sufficient backing to warrant an arrest and to start extradition proceedings. He broke out of prison in Plymouth, Mass where he was being held with the help of some confederates. He fled the US and went to Ghana. From there he went to Libya and Burkina Faso. He received some backing from the Libyans. He gathered a small group of disaffected Liberians who were given some military training by Libya and Burkina Faso, which acted as surrogate for Libya. In our Embassy, his name appeared from time to time in intelligence reports on dissidents activities. Taylor was only one of the Liberian dissidents wandering around West Africa, allegedly with ties to Qadhafi or other miscreants.

I have never met Taylor. The first thing he did after his forces had crossed the Liberian border was to get to a telephone; he called the BBC and announced that he had staged his invasion. Since there weren't any pay phones in Liberia, presumably the call was made from the Ivory Coast. It later it became very apparent that he had received considerable assistance from the Ivory Coast; he later received even more despite assurances given to Ambassador Ken Brown that the Ivorian government was not involved.

In Abidjan, we took stock of what we knew. We thought that this incursion would be just another one in a series of short-lived raids which would be stopped by the Liberian military and would quickly become part of history. However, I thought it prudent to return to Monrovia. Within a day, it became evident that there was a Monrovia aspect to Taylor's invasion. I flew back and arrived late at night to be greeted by Colonel Staley, the head of the MAAG, and our security officer. We made our way from Roberts Field to Monrovia through a number of checkpoints manned by nervous members of the Liberian Armed Forces. Over the course of the next few

days, it became evident that the problem had not been contained in the north and that some of the invaders had split off and had gone to Monrovia, where they expected to be joined by dissident members of the Liberian military. This would have enabled them to stage a military coup in Monrovia as what was happening outside the capital pulled some military units out of Monrovia. Incredible as it sounds, the Taylor forces that went to Monrovia were all wearing blue tennis shoes--not common in Monrovia. That allowed the Liberian security forces to spot them easily. They captured a number of them who were forced to divulge Taylor's plans. Those which reached Monrovia also were not joined by any members of the Liberian armed forces; so that part of the operation was squelched quite quickly. Within a few days of my return, Doe asked to see me. He gave me his version of what had transpired; there was some bloodshed as I mentioned earlier. The Taylor strategy, as it became evident later, was to provoke reprisals by killing as many of Doe's Krahn kinsmen as possible. That reprisal, in the fashion of the Doe period, was an overreaction in which many innocent members of the local ethnic groups, who formed the bulk of Taylor's contingent, were slain. The young men from these ethnic groups then rallied to Taylor and formed the manpower base from which a more substantial insurrection was developed and moved toward the coast.

As I said, Doe called me in and told me what a terrible thing had taken place. He told me that he wanted help from the US--military supplies. He reminded me that we had a mutual defense accord--the only one that we had in Africa. I told him that I would see what could be done. My own recommendation to Washington was that before rushing to provide Mr. Doe with any substantial help, we should wait to see how substantial the incursion was and how the Liberian Armed Forces would react to the incursion. I did have our military mission provide some communication equipment which they had on the shelves, primarily as an gesture of sympathy and acknowledgment that we did have a mutual defense pact.

Over the course of the following week, it became evident that the Liberian military were over-reacting in their response--they were targeting civilians; backing away from confrontation with Taylor's men and falling away from the border shelling indiscriminately as they did. Some of this got into the international media. I recommended to Washington that we not only not supply Mr. Doe with military equipment, but I recommend that I would be permitted to tell Doe and his ministers that a response of the nature we were seeing would prove counter-productive militarily and politically, and result in estrangement from Washington. My dialogue with Doe was initially unproductive. However, after several weeks, during which the Liberian military was in a slow retreat before Taylor's forces and atrocities against civilians were continuing, I had another meeting with Doe. I made some specific recommendations, including relieving the military officers then in command and making some political gestures to the residents of Nimba County including provision of some humanitarian assistance. In our meeting, Doe made some excuses and didn't agree to any of the suggestions I had made. But consequently, the general in charge was removed and was replaced by someone in whom we had some confidence. Doe also held public meetings with people from the north-east part of Liberia.

I sent the head of our military assistance mission and his deputy to Nimba County together with the new Liberian general. They were to keep watch on what he was going to do, to see whether he could take effective control of the Liberian forces, and to see in what manner the military were acting. I gave our officers written instructions about what they were to do and what they

couldn't do. They were not to engage in any combat activities with the Liberian Armed Forces. They were to remain at the rear headquarters, monitoring the behavior of the Liberian troops. Unfortunately, the deputy, Lt. Colonel Newman, spent some of his time training AFL troops in the rear headquarters. He was observed in that activity by a BBC reporter, who then announced to the world that the US was providing military assistance to Doe in his effort to crush the insurrection. I later learned that that report frightened a substantial number of Liberians in that part of the country; they felt that they now had not only Doe to contend with, but the US as well. So they fled across the border, perhaps in greater numbers than they might have had the BBC report not been aired.

The military situation, as we later learned, was that Taylor was engaged in recruiting and training, using Libyans and Burkinabe military cadre as well as his own his own core element that had received training earlier from the same countries. Our military assistance advisors reported back after a time that the new general was being ignored by the Krahn officers who were in the key command positions of the AFL forces in the field. They took their orders from Charles Julu, who was a Krahn and head of the Executive Mansion guard in Monrovia. Our officers also reported that the new general and the commanding general of the AFL--General Dubar--both had made an effort on the spot to improve the performance of their troop, including sending back to Monrovia some of the least competent officers and those that had committed atrocities. But they also reported, as I said, that the Liberian general did not have command of the situation, that Julu was much more influential with the AFL; the AFL performance was not professional and atrocities continued. So I asked both US officers to return to Monrovia.

On February 14, we had a cultural exchange performance in Monrovia in the garden of my residence. The Minister of Defense was there. I took the opportunity to tell him that the performance of the AFL had reached such a low level that we might be forced to disassociate ourselves publicly from the AFL. There had to be a radical improvement, I insisted. Another problem that had become apparent during the two previous weeks was that Doe had recruited Krahn hooligans off the streets of Monrovia and put them into the AFL, which already lacked professionalism. This recruitment certainly would not enhance the professionalism of the AFL. I had already made it clear to Doe and his cabinet that there wasn't going to be any more military assistance from us. At my request, Washington had issued two public statements condemning both the government and the rebels for their human rights violations, calling on both sides to cease and desist.

I cabled Washington on February 14 that we should disassociate ourselves from the AFL publicly and recommended that I be authorized to advise the Doe government that we were doing so. Washington was hesitant; it said that there was some concern that my relationship with Doe was so bad that my delivering such a message might be just be the "straw that broke the camel's back" and result in injury to me personally. There seemed to me to be a desire by some people in Washington to be seen as participants in the action in Monrovia. Washington suggested that the tough message be delivered by Assistant Secretary Hank Cohen, who would come from Washington with a message from the President. When this suggestion was made to the NSC and the White House, they didn't want anything to do with Doe, perhaps perceiving him to be a loser and not wishing to engage the President in a very messy affair in Liberia. Then the Department

considered sending a letter from Secretary Baker, who had no more appetite for becoming engaged in Liberia than had the White House.

All these machinations in Washington burned up valuable time during which Taylor began to advance out of Nimba County on axes on the main road to Monrovia through Gebanga and through secondary roads to Buchanan. We had pulled the Peace Corps volunteers out of Nimba and advised other Americans to do the same. As the violence moved toward Monrovia, we pulled more volunteers out of the areas being contested and issued the same warning to other Americans. We also tried to get some relief commodities into the disputed areas. The government had rebuffed my offer of assistance, which I made under the authority that all ambassadors have to provide up to \$25,000 under emergency circumstances. I finally got fed up and declared an emergency without Liberian concurrence. I went to the UN to see what agency might help the displaced Liberian civilians only to find that the UN didn't have a mechanism to deal with such people. It could handle refugees who had fled from one country to another, but not internally displaced people. It could handle development and public health, but had no mechanism to handle internally displaced people. There was a representative of the ICRC--the International Committee for the Red Cross--in Liberia. He was concerned about the displaced people; he agreed to go beyond his normal mission, rent some trucks, buy some commodities and take them to the countryside for distribution if I could come up with some money. The government then did appoint an emissary to look after the needs of the displaced population. We put AID together with this new Liberian effort. We began to play the humanitarian role which was to become prominent and then paramount in our relations with the Liberians in the course of the subsequent eight years.

As the fighting came slowly closer to Monrovia, the opportunity for public criticism of Liberian forces ebbed since it would not have been wise to make enemies of the AFL as we became dependent on it for the protection of the 5,000 Americans still left in Liberia. The AFL was doing poorly in the field because it had to fight in the rain forest which meant close action for which Liberian Army did not have much stomach. It was not prepared to take casualties. I suspected that once the fighting reached open areas closer to Monrovia, the AFL could use its more modern weapons and that would make a difference; that is what happened. They were just not up to fighting in the rain forest, while Taylor's men were. Taylor's forces were motivated partly by pecuniary ambitions--they expected that the victor would get the spoils--, partly by tribal rivalries--the Mano and Gio in Nimba county had been ravished by Doe in 1985 as consequence of the failed Qinwompha incursion and were seeking revenge. When the Doe forces began to shell Mano and Gio villages following the killing of Krahn officers by Taylor's forces, young men whose families were being victimized by the AFL joined Taylor's force. There was also an element of conscription--people being "pressed ganged" into Taylor's forces; that became more prominent later and came to involve a substantial number of boys.

Washington, in its wisdom, finally despatched some one with the message to Doe--a deputy assistant secretary from the Bureau for African Affairs. I had told Washington that an official of that level would probably not be received by Doe, who may have been dumb, but certainly would have recognized the reason for the visit. Indeed that is what happened. The Washington official came; Doe would not receive him and therefore the message had to be delivered to some other Liberian official. A little earlier, I had received a letter from Bush to Doe that I was to

deliver, which said that if the AFL did not act properly, the US would disassociate itself from Doe and company. Bush gave a couple of examples of military activities that concerned us. When I delivered President Bush's letter, Doe became furious. He started to yell at me accusing me of misinforming Bush and Washington and claimed that the letter reflected misinformation that I had provided Washington. I fully admitted that the facts had indeed come from me but insisted that there wasn't anything in the letter that was not completely true. Furthermore, I noted that I had brought the same issues to his attention during earlier discussions. That was the last time I ever saw Doe. I was told later by one of our sources in the President's office that Doe had made some remark about me to the effect that although I was small, I was tough. When I told my wife about that comment, she said I sounded "Just like a Liberian chicken."

My three years in Monrovia were to end on April 12. I was to go to Mogadishu, which had not had an ambassador for three or four months. While there was only one war in Liberia, there were three in Somalia. I left the decision on my future to Hank Cohen and his colleagues in Washington. Peter De Vos had already been selected as my successor in Monrovia. There was an expectation in Washington that his confirmation process would move along quickly and that Peter could be at post soon after my departure. I was instructed to leave and to head to Mogadishu; Dennis Jett, the DCM, could hold the fort in Monrovia as Charge' until the new ambassador's arrival. The departure instructions may also have been generated by Washington's perception that perhaps a new ambassador could have more impact on Doe. It was clear that I could not move him. He had tried to have me removed a year earlier when Judge Webster, the Director of Central Intelligence, came to Liberia while I was on home leave. Washington threw cold water on Doe's wishes; he just had to put up with me, regardless of his preferences. So that may have been an element in Washington's considerations. I did not make a farewell call on Doe; the Foreign Minister, to his credit because I am sure he acted contrary to his President's wishes, hosted the normal farewell party. He was pleasant to me personally. He was an intelligent man who realized the absurdity of what was going on.

We were getting close to authorizing a "voluntary departure" for the Embassy dependents and non-essential personnel. That is done when the situation in a country becomes a possible danger to life and the US government pays for the transportation costs of the evacuees. Such action is normally accompanied by an advisory to non-government Americans to leave as well. The Peace Corps contingent is also evacuated. As I said, we were moving in this direction; we were holding American community meetings on a regular basis during which we shared whatever information was available to us about the war. That was intended to enable US citizens to make their own decisions about their safety and welfare. My family and I left on March 30. As a farewell present, a couple of Embassy guards, unhappy about a salary issue which the Department had allowed to fester for three years, set fire to our warehouse in the dock area. We and the DCM and his wife were having a farewell dinner together when we received word of the fire. We rushed down to the port and found a scene reminiscent of Dante's "Inferno." The warehouse was going up in flames and of course there was no fire fighting equipment to be seen. Our own people were trying to put out the fire. The Liberian military, who had been mobilized by the MAAG Chief, provided a cordon of about 50 soldiers standing down the middle of the street, guns at ready. A crowd of 500-600 young Liberian men were on the other side of the street, yelling and screaming, and obviously anxious to get into the warehouse area at the earliest opportunity to "salvage" whatever they could. Colonel Staley and the security officer were trying to put out the fire. They

were unsuccessful in saving anything in the warehouse. Some personal effects which were outside the warehouse were doused with water and thereby saved. But we lost the half of our personal effects which were in the warehouse.

When I left Monrovia, I felt that there would be battle for the city. As I said earlier, I also believed that Taylor's advance would become more difficult once he left the rain forest because Doe's forces would give a better account of themselves, using their artillery and mortars and grenades and even the little light armor that the AFL had. AFL resistance was going to slow Taylor down, resulting in perhaps a long stalemate which would create misery for the people in the battle zone as well as the population in Monrovia.

We left about 36 hours after the fire, unaccompanied by anyone from the Liberian government. The Soviet Ambassador saw us off. We were at Robertsfield essentially with our personal friends and my Embassy colleagues. I returned to Washington, intending to begin my briefings on Somalia. But almost immediately I was appointed Director of the Department's Task Force to coordinate the administration's response to the crisis in Monrovia. I stayed with the Task Force until August 6. I found different degrees of understanding about Liberia among the Washington bureaucracies. At the upper levels of government there was little if any understanding. As the Task Force Director I was reporting to four different authorities: Hank Cohen, the Assistant Secretary; Bob Kimmitt, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs--he was also the State Department's representative on the deputies committee which became the policy making forum as we moved into naval deployments and evacuation of Americans; Ivan Selin, the Under Secretary for Management, responsible for issues relating to evacuation; and Roy Stapleton, the Executive Secretary of the Department, who was responsible for the Operations Center where we were physically located.

One of the problems that we had to confront early on was the need for evacuation.

There was a view held by some elements of the Department that Americans were able to survive civil conflicts in Africa because Africans generally respected foreigners and would fight around them rather than coming through them. When this view surfaced in a meeting chaired by Ivan Selin, I made the point that the American population was a little different than that typically found in other places on the continent--certainly different from areas where the Europeans were the dominant foreign element. Most of the Americans in Liberia were black, physically indistinguishable from Liberians. I thought that there would be a better than even chance that those Americans would be caught up in the violence simply because they could not be recognized as foreigners. I also added that there was an element of savagery in Liberia that went beyond that which might have been typical in other parts of Africa--for a variety of reasons. A senior CIA officer, with as much African experience as myself, held the same view. Between the two of us we were able to persuade Selin to take extraordinary steps to assist in the evacuation of Americans. Such steps ultimately involved the despatch of six US naval vessels and several thousand Marines and organization of airlifts. These moves in effect said to Americans in Liberia, who might have been tempted to stay and take their chances, that the US government thought the situation so dangerous that it was making special efforts to provide transportation out of Liberia for any Americans wishing to take advantage of the opportunity to return to the US without having to put any money up front.

As a result of this initiative, most of the Americans left either by commercial flights, overland to Sierra Leone, or on US-government organized flights to Abidjan and then to the US either by chartered commercial aircraft or as in two cases, by military aircraft. As a result, when the Marines helicoptered into the Embassy in August to assist with the evacuation of official US personnel, there were very few Americans left in Monrovia.

We did have some real problems with the US military. The naval task force arrived off shore in May. The Marines, as I said, did not come on shore until August. There were some Marine officers sent to the Embassy to work with the Charge' and later Pete de Vos, when he arrived in late June or early July. Some of those military officers proved very difficult to work with. They did not understand the politics of the situation; they were at times undisciplined, going into areas which they had been told were "off limits" and as a result, getting into difficulties. This situation is described to some extent by Dennis Jett in the book "Embassies under Siege" in which one chapter is devoted to the situation in Monrovia that summer.

The most serious problem that arose with the military concerned the question of who was going to be in command of the Marines, if a supplemental force were to be put into the Embassy compound. For a time there was a plan to put another 60-100 Marines into the compound to supplement the normal complement of Marine guards at the Embassy. This additional personnel would be ready to defend the compound in the event it came under attack. The Chief of Staff's J-3 (Operations) at the time--an Army Lieutenant General--insisted that any supplemental Marines would be under military command--not that of the Ambassador. The Department, on the other hand, maintained that all Marines in the compound would be under ambassadorial control; otherwise we would have some Marines under ambassadorial control and some under military control. The general was so insistent that one day, we had 60 Marines on an airplane sitting at National Airport on their way to Sierra Leone from where they would then be transported to Monrovia. The general kept those Marines on the plane for 4-5 hours because the command and control issue had not been resolved to his satisfaction. Consequently, the Marines never took off and ultimately were sent back to Quantico. Secretary Baker, to his credit, stood firm and insisted that the Ambassador would be responsible for all Americans in the compound. He would not accept an arrangement which would have someone in Washington, thousands of miles removed from the action, micro managing what was happening on the ground, while the Ambassador tried to maintain unity of local command.

There was a bizarre occurrence. Jonathan Howe, a four-star admiral based in London, somehow was put in charge of the naval force off Monrovia. I thought that it would be SACLANT in Norfolk who would be responsible for the ships. I had worked with Howe when he was the Assistant Secretary for Politico-Military Affairs in the Department; he was bright and I liked him and respected him--he was one of the youngest admirals in the Navy. One evening, after the naval force had been on station off Liberia for about two weeks, he turned up in the Operations Center. He asked me when he could have his ships back--a decision which obviously could only be made by the Secretary or perhaps even higher. At best, I could only give him my best guess. In the course of conversation, I asked why he needed the ships back. It turned out that he had some joint exercises scheduled with the Israelis and other foreign forces. When I pursued this further, it turned out that the exercises were intended to improve coordination and effectiveness

of civilian evacuations from areas of danger. I looked at him mystified and said: "Let me get this straight. You want to withdraw your forces now poised to assist an actual evacuation of our people in Monrovia to go practice a simulated evacuation with some other forces?" His answer was: "Right! We have a schedule to keep!" In point of fact, *Operation Sharp Edge*, as it became known, remained off the coast of Liberia and in Monrovia almost to the end of 1990.

Those were the major issues that I had to confront during the Liberian crisis. The evacuation of the compound was eventually ordered; that included not only the people in the main compound in Monrovia, but also the telecommunication technicians who had for a substantial period of time been cut off while manning the two CIA communication facilities. Those technicians were rescued very proficiently, even though one of the facilities had become the domicile for 5,000-10,000 Liberian refugees. There was considerable apprehension that if a helicopter landed to take out the American technicians, it would be over-run by Liberians who also wished to get out. The actual extraction of the Americans from that site was accomplished in less than three minutes, long before any of the refugees could even think about trying to jump on board. Eventually, over 2,000 people, few of them actually Americans, were evacuated from the Embassy compound by the Marines to the *Guam*--a helicopter carrier. The *Guam* had been off shore earlier in the year; had been relieved by a sister ship, and had then returned. A number of the evacuees were Embassy officers who had been, in effect, cut off in the Embassy from the time the voluntary evacuation had taken place in mid-April. All dependents and non-essential personnel had left Monrovia then via commercial airlines. A cadre of officers were left behind--they had been designated as essential to perform the tasks which had to be done if the compound became a safe-haven. Once the fighting actually reached Monrovia, it spread throughout the city and came very close to the compound. It cut off the "essential" staff; they lived very precarious lives in the compound, with shells flying over their heads. They could bathe only when it rained; water became too scarce to be used for that purpose. So they had a very uncomfortable and dangerous summer.

Starting in early summer and probably even after my departure from Washington in August there was a debate over whether our continued presence in Liberia was justified. The Deputies' Committee met frequently--either in person or by teleconference--to discuss the policy issues and the modalities of force projection and evacuation. There was some thought given to pulling everyone out. But that was over-ridden by recognition of the US-Liberia relationship. After all, the country was founded by Americans, even if those Americans did not enjoy the full rights of US citizenship. That historical linkage was reinforced by the fact that Liberians had rendered us innumerable services during the past century, particularly during WW II and the Cold War, when it allowed the US government to establish CIA and VOA facilities and gave us access to its airfield. This was used for deployment of US forces and shipment of war materials for African forces who were acting as our surrogates on the continent. This history created an obligation to continue to monitor the situation and to provide a measure of assistance to the victims of the civil war.

We also had some hopes of rescuing our investments in Liberia. The replacement costs of the VOA and the CIA communication facilities as well as the OMEGA navigation station was in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The US government owned a lot of property in Monrovia. So part of our policy was driven by financial considerations.

One incident occurred which was among the most disgusting I ever witnessed in the Foreign Service. When we made plans to charter aircraft to evacuate Americans out of Monrovia to Abidjan and then on to the US, the issue arose as to where in the US they would be brought. The NSC learned that the Pentagon intended that the planes land in South Carolina--that was the designated terminus for all evacuations. The NSC knew that most of the evacuees would be black Americans and concluded that many would be indigent. So we were instructed to examine the possibility of leaving them in West Africa--Abidjan and Freetown--instead of bringing them to the US. The suggestion was made that tent camps could be established for them, even though we were in the middle of the rainy season. This alternative was supposed to avoid the embarrassment that the administration might suffer by adding a substantial number of Americans to the welfare rolls in South Carolina. The assumption was that immediately upon disembarkation, these Americans would head for the nearest welfare office and apply for benefits. I found the whole idea outrageous. Bob Gates, then the deputy NSC advisor, was the proponent of this plan; he was the NSC representative on the Deputies Committee. I told Kimmitt and Cohen how disgraceful that idea was. They were as disgusted as I was, although more patient. They didn't believe that anything so inhuman would be allowed to occur and it didn't. In fact, only two Americans ended up on the welfare rolls in South Carolina. Most of the Americans who returned had relatives in the US whom they joined.

The Bush administration did not see that we had any obligation to try to mediate the dispute--unfortunately. In April and May, we tried to do that; we tried to set up "proximity" talks in Washington. A delegation came from the Doe government which included two members of the cabinet who were Doe intimates as well as some prominent private Liberian citizens. We arranged to have one of Taylor's principal deputies come from Liberia--he later became the Minister of Defense. We then tried to get the two sides to talk to each other. My motivation was principally to try to avert a battle for Monrovia which would result in very substantial loss of life and property.

Those talks were not successful. In fact, they really never got off the ground because a *sine qua non* for Taylor's people was Doe's agreement to leave. The maximum that Doe's people were willing to discuss was moving up an election date, when the Liberians could decide at the ballot box who should lead the country. The diplomatic scene then shifted to Freetown, Sierra Leone, where a group led by Liberian church leaders held discussions with Doe's representatives on the modalities for a regime change. Those talks were held in the American Embassy with the participation of the American Ambassador, who played the role of a facilitator. These talks also were not successful, but they did lead to second round. For those talks, the Bush White House issued instructions to the State Department that we were to cease our mediation efforts. The rationale, which was attributed to General Scowcroft and to the President, was that the President did not want to have any part in facilitating the assumption of office by a convicted felon; i.e. Charles Taylor. Whatever the motivations were, the instructions were quite clear and the second round of talks in Freetown did not take place in the American Embassy and did occur without the participation of an American representative. Pete de Vos had gotten as far as Freetown on his way to Monrovia. Because of the delay in his confirmation, he had to be sworn in at the airport in Freetown as he was about to board a plane headed for Monrovia. Over the course of the summer, the battle raged around Monrovia between Doe's forces and those of Taylor, which had

infiltrated close to the city from the east. There was also fighting between Doe's forces and a breakaway faction of Taylor's forces, headed by Prince Johnson, which had moved to the port area west of Monrovia.

Our colleagues in Monrovia had to devote most of their energy to staying alive. They sent trucks out daily to get water to at least satisfy the drinking needs of the Americans in the compound and in the adjacent buildings. The staff continued to report on the situation and provided such limited consular services as it could to the few private Americans left in Liberia. All other countries ended their diplomatic representation in Liberia during the summer. In August, the Nigerians proposed that they organize a peace-keeping force which would be inserted in Monrovia to provide a barrier between the opposing Liberian forces in the hope of bringing an end to the stalemated battle for Monrovia. Doe and the most loyal elements in the AFL were dug in around the Executive Mansion on the coast. Taylor's forces were just a few hundred yards away. Artillery and mortar exchanges along with light arms fire took place continually. But neither side was able to crush the other.

Over the course of the summer we had tried to persuade Doe to leave. At our suggestion, Eyadema, the President of Togo, offered Doe refuge. We had done some favors for Eyadema in the past; he also had close connections with Doe. Doe told me at one time that he had been given secret medicine by Eyadema's witch doctor which would make him invulnerable. He offered to have the efficacy of this medicine proved by giving it to a bodyguard who then could be shot at by a visiting American, or putting it on a goat which I could then shoot. Both the visitor and I declined with thanks. But Doe believed--to some extent--that this medicine was effective. In any case, he did have a close relationship with Eyadema. The Toguese President offered sanctuary to Doe and his family and whatever could be loaded on a C-130. We actually sent two C-130s to the area. As early as May, I had told a Doe confidant that we were prepared to make this transportation available. I don't know that he reported my offer to Doe. When the proposal was finally put to Doe directly, he refused because he considered himself a match for Taylor and was not willing to be chased out of Monrovia.

The carnage in and around Monrovia continued. The Nigerians proposed intervention and asked for our views. I was torn; I was not persuaded that the Nigerians would be able to mount a very effective military operation; the Nigerian military were no longer believed to be a very effective fighting force and were alleged to be corrupt. On the other hand, I was anxious to see the fighting in Monrovia stop. In any case, the decision was not mine. Hank Cohen and other senior officials indicated to the Nigerians that we would not oppose their intervention. The American military intervention was limited to the protection of the Embassy and our citizens there. It took place in August when Prince Johnson, having entered Monrovia from the west and moved his forces very close to the compound, threatened to attack us. Johnson is a psychopathic killer and an alcoholic--he shot people in front of TV cameras while guzzling beer. He was a very unstable character and we were no longer prepared to run the risks posed by his irrational behavior. About three hundred Marines came ashore; they established the Embassy compound's wall as their perimeter. Helicopters then began to land in the compound to fly out Embassy staff whose tours were coming to an end and to fly in replacements. The choppers took out many third-country nationals as well as some Liberians.

I should note that in an interview with "The New York Times" in July, Doe accused me of being the cause of all Liberian problems because I had "misreported" to Washington what was happening on the ground. The story ran on Page 1. Someone then brought to Doe's attention that I was in Washington running the Liberian task force, where I probably had some influence on US policy towards Liberia. A few days after "The New York Times" article appeared, Doe called me at the hotel where I was staying. He said that he was sorry to have learned that I had left Liberia; he had planned to have a nice farewell ceremony for me. He feigned surprise that I had left his country and then chatted about my family. In response, I told him a few things that I thought he needed to hear about reconciliation.

On August 6, I turned over the task force to Don Peterson, who was scheduled to go out as Ambassador to the Sudan sometime later. He therefore was available and was kind enough to agree to take over my job so I could have a little time to prepare to go to Mogadishu, which included brief visits with my family on both coasts. After that, I proceeded to Somalia.

Before we leave Liberia, I should note that I have been involved in one aspect or another of our relationships with that country up to and including today. As we will discuss later, after Mogadishu, I became the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Rights. The Liberian conflict was still on going and I became involved in human rights and humanitarian issues. A month after I left the task force, the Nigerians moved their forces into Liberia, augmented by other western African forces. That force became known as ECOMOG. The Ghanaians and the Guineans also have been with it throughout these many years; other countries, such as Senegal, contributed from time to time. Sierra Leone has been involved for many years, but only in token numbers. There were some non-west Africans forces that participated for a while.

This force entered Liberia in September, 1990. It pushed Charles Taylor's forces out of Monrovia and essentially out of artillery range of the capital. The opposing forces were pinned down along that line for several years. In September, Doe went to visit ECOMOG at its base on Bushrod island, which was near Johnson's headquarters. When Johnson learned that Doe was at ECOMOG headquarters, he stormed the West African base. The Nigerians all disappeared--out of the line of fire, although they did protect some Americans and journalists who were with them. Doe's Liberian escort was killed; Doe was taken prisoner and then tortured to death in front of a video camera--showing the atrocious wounds that were afflicted on him. But the civil war did not end at that point. The AFL remnants continued to fight because the tribal nature of the conflict had come to the fore. The Doe forces by now were mostly Krahn--there were some Mandingos as well. The Mandingos were the money lenders and were opposed by the Mano and Gib, who comprised the bulk of Taylor's forces.

After Doe's demise, the AFL held only the Executive Mansion on the shore and the adjacent military base. Their families were with them; so they had no option but to continue to fight. When we had been allowed by the White House to mediate, we tried to arrange an evacuation by sea of the Krahn troops and families back to the part of Liberia from whence they had come. That was an element of a game plan that never even came close to fruition. So the Krahn continued to fight. ECOMOG inserted itself between Taylor's forces and the AFL and between Johnson and the AFL. It pushed both Taylor and Johnson out of artillery range of Monrovia--both the main part of town and the port area. Then the protected area became a refuge for

streams of Liberians from the country-side; the population of Monrovia swelled from its pre-war level of 500,000 to a million people. Another approximately one million Liberians fled into the Ivory Coast where they settled with their kinsmen, into Guinea where they were located in refugees camps set up by UN agencies, and into Sierra Leone where the refugees settled both in camps and with their relatives.

The stalemate continued into 1992, when Taylor tried to take Monrovia by coming through the mangrove swamps that separated the peninsula on which Monrovia is built from the mainland. ECOMOG fought back with the Senegalese filling the gaps in the Nigerian lines--gaps which developed when some of the Nigerian elements broke and ran from the fighting. The Ghanaians fought fairly well. There was a see-saw struggle which included the use of Nigerian aircraft to bomb Taylor's lines. There was collateral damage suffered through these bombings--civilian deaths. Taylor was repulsed. The interim government which had been established by the time Taylor made his attack was headed by Amos Sawyer--another Liberian prominent in the anti-Tolbert activities of the late 1980s. Subsequently, he had been the chairman of a commission established during the Doe period to draft a new constitution. He had a falling-out with Doe, fled in the mid-1980s, and sought refuge in the US. He returned to Liberia in the early 1990s. The interim government he headed came to power as part of a political process fathered by Houphouet-Boigny and other senior West African political leaders acting within the framework of ECOWAS (the Economic Community of West African States), which had authorized ECOMOG--the peacekeeping force.

Under a series of agreements that transition government was to serve until elections could determine a democratic successor. Warlord Taylor continued his battle, confronted by the AFL within Monrovia and other forces which sprung up around the country. A Mandingo-Krahn element--called ULIMO--became active near the Sierra Leone border, with some encouragement from the Nigerians. ULIMO itself then broke apart into two factions--Krahn and Mandingo. At this stage, Liberia was essentially in a state of anarchy. This political/military vacuum gave rise to ever more factions, including one ironically called the "Liberian Peace Council", headed by George Bolely. This was another Krahn faction, also probably supported by the Nigerians, to put additional pressure on Taylor.

In the summer of 1995, there was a peace conference held under Nigerian auspices in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. Out of that conference came the "Abuja Accords" subscribed to by the leaders of all Liberian factions. The accords provided for a coalition government in which the three principal faction leaders would share power with three civilians--a 90 year old tribal chief, a university professor and a politician. These six would share power in the period preceding an election during which there would be demobilization and disarmament, supervised by ECOMOG and the UN observer team that had entered the country as a small force some years earlier.

The accords appeared to have some viability. During the fall of 1995, the US government, which had not been prepared to put resources behind the peace process, but had been quite generous in its assistance to refugees--both within and outside Liberia--agreed to provide a substantial--\$90 million--package of assistance to support the new peace process. This pledge was made at an international conference chaired by UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali. The US offer was made under considerable pressure from the Congressional Black Caucus and several non-

governmental organizations. The conference came up with an assistance package of approximately \$150 million to support the "Abuja Accords" peace process.

In part because it took the US government so long to get its act together and to engage other governments, tensions between the lord wars mounted. Their commitment to demobilization and disarmament--to the extent it was ever sincere--began to abate. The prospects of holding elections began to dim. No country had offered any financial resources to assist demobilization. All donors thought that this process could be accomplished on the "cheap". There were only token resources made available for the re-integration of the demobilized forces--60,000 people including about 20,000 teenagers (some in their very early teens). The warlords became disillusioned; fighting broke out again among some of the armed factions in the western parts of country, primarily over jurisdiction of the diamond mines which existed there. Those mines and other raw materials were the principal sources of revenue for the warlords, who exported, as had been the case for many years, diamonds and rubber and timber and coal. One of the warlords--Roosevelt Johnson, who was not a member of the six-man governing body, headed the Krahn faction of ULIMO. The AFL also had not been represented on the council. So the only Krahn representation came from the US--trained Ph.D. who was also a cannibal-- the George Bolely I mentioned earlier.

In late March and April of 1996, the warlords--who had been allowed into Monrovia as part of the governing council--began to fight each other again when Taylor decided to arrest Roosevelt Johnson, who had dug in with his armed supporters in downtown Monrovia. When Taylor tried to do that, Johnson retreated to the principal AFL base in Monrovia--the Barclay Training Center. There he joined forces with some elements of the AFL which were stationed there. A battle ensued for Monrovia between Taylor and Al Haji Kromiah, who was a leader of the Mandingo element of ULIMO and against the ULIMO elements headed by Johnson and the AFL.

The struggle precipitated very extensive looting by the militias. Their targets included the UN and ICRC properties and those of the diplomatic community. The sole exceptions were the American Embassy and European Community mission. All the NGOs were forced to leave; their properties were vandalized--computers stolen, vehicles stolen, etc. The militia fighting led the whole diplomatic community, except the Americans, to leave Liberia. Again a naval task force as despatched to Liberian waters; Marines were put ashore to protect the American Embassy, and the evacuation of Americans and others in the compound was started. The Ghanaians took the initiative to try to reconcile the war lords. Their first goal was to achieve a cease-fire to be followed by recommitment to the "Abiju Accords" or some other process that would bring peace to Liberia. This effort ultimately proved successful. The warlords withdrew from Monrovia, but continued to fight each other elsewhere in Liberia. The city was ravaged in the process. The NGOs and the UN were so discouraged by this third assault on them that they determined to limit the amount of assistance they would provide to Liberia. The West Africans condemned the warlords, using much stronger language in their pronouncements that they had in the past, including threats to institute war crimes proceedings against the perpetrators. On July 26, 1997, another meeting was held at Abuja. The issue of disarmament is currently still being debated.

DONALD PETTERSON
Charge D’Affaires
Monrovia (1998-1999)

Ambassador Donald Petterson was born in California in 1930. Petterson served in the US Navy for four years before graduating from the University of California Santa Barbara. Petterson joined the Foreign Service in 1960 and has served overseas in Mexico, Tanzania, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa and as ambassador to Somalia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Sudan. In Washington, DC Petterson served on the Policy Planning Staff and as a deputy assistant secretary in the African Bureau. Ambassador Petterson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy and Lambert Heyniger in 1996.

Q: You were in Liberia from when to when?

PETTERSON: I got there in early October 1998 and left at about the end of the following summer.

Q: What was the situation? How had things developed up before you got there? I mean, why was there so much interest in Liberia at that point?

PETTERSON: Liberia had always had what the Liberians called “a special relationship” with the United States. It stemmed from the way Liberia was founded and from the interest the United States took in the country after World War II, when we built an important airfield, Roberts Field, not far from Monrovia. In the post-war years, Liberia became important to the U.S. as the site of an intelligence communications facility, a Loran navigation facility, and a VOA transmitter for Africa. The Liberian government became a staunch U.S. ally in the Cold War. We had a very large embassy, a huge USAID mission, and a military mission. The close ties between Washington and Monrovia were buffeted by the violent, bloody overthrow of the Tolbert government by Master Sergeant Samuel Doe in 1980. Washington learned to live with Doe, but by the late 1980s relations deteriorated because of the Doe government’s corruption and human-rights abuses. Doe’s excesses and megalomania contributed to his overthrow in 1990.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: The insurgency that toppled Doe was started by a man named Charles Taylor. In my view, Taylor fully lived up to the negative impression I had of him when I met him in northern Liberia in 1990. He and other warlords, fighting the Liberian army and each other and clashing with a West African peacekeeping force, devastated the entire country. During the war, from 150,000 to 200,000 Liberians were killed and tens of thousands were displaced. Doe was captured and killed in August 1990, tortured to death by a man named Prince Johnson, one of the warlords. Taylor eventually prevailed. He came to power in 1997 through an election. Because the Liberians were so sick and tired of war, they were ready to vote for anybody if that would end the fighting. They knew that if Taylor were not elected, he would go back to war. In this way Charles Taylor became president of Liberia.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: Once in office, Taylor began to commit gross violations of human rights. For example, one of his political opponents was murdered by Taylor's security forces. Taylor also began to amass a fortune in various unprincipled ways. He made little effort to hide this, believing that it was his due as the elected leader of Liberia. The U.S. government at first gave Taylor the benefit of the doubt, hoping that democracy would take hold, that Taylor would be prevailed upon to change his ways. Some gullible Americans, including Jessie Jackson and some people on the Hill, thought that he would, with their guidance, become a responsible leader. That did not happen. In time, it became clear that he was a thug whose only interest was in feathering his own nest and maintaining himself in power.

There was internal opposition to him, but he crushed it whenever it appeared to take on momentum. In 1998 one of the other former warlords, Roosevelt Johnson, was ensconced in Monrovia with his own force. This became intolerable to Taylor, and a clash occurred. One of the results of that clash was that the Taylor security forces defeated Johnson's force and chased him and several of his men through a part of Monrovia. Johnson and his people, fleeing for their lives, headed for the American embassy, where they hoped they could get sanctuary. The embassy's chargé d'affaires, John Bauman, the regional security officer, and two American contract security officers who headed the embassy's guard force went out into the street to negotiate with the heavily armed Liberian security elements that had followed the Johnson party right to the gates of the embassy. Johnson and his men, unseen by their Liberian enemies, cowered behind a barricade by the gate. With the negotiations leading nowhere, Bauman walked back through the turnstile at the gate into the embassy compound. At the point, the leader of the Liberian security force, who had tacitly indicated to his men that they could use force, walked away. His men pushed toward the barricade and as soon as they spied the Johnson party, they opened fire. In the melee several people were killed. The turnstile, which had been opened for Bauman had not been closed, and Johnson and others, including the three Americans in the street, rushed through. One of Johnson's men was shot, and died in the embassy lobby. The regional security officer was slightly wounded, and one of the two contract security officers was seriously wounded.

All the Americans attached to the U.S. mission came to the compound. It seemed to the Americans that the embassy was under siege. Negotiations between the two governments began, conducted for the most part by telephone. Jessie Jackson in Washington took part in this, talking to Taylor. After several days, agreement was reached that Johnson and the other Liberians in the embassy would be flown out by U.S. military helicopter. They later were taken to Nigeria. That ended the standoff at the embassy, but the affair left a lot of bad feelings on both. It also raised questions in Washington about the way the incident had been handled, about the judgment of the chargé and the security officer.

Two weeks after this occurred, Washington called me, and within a matter of days I was in Monrovia. The African bureau wanted to allow the chargé to have his long-deferred home leave, and they believed someone with experience was needed to take over the embassy in his absence.

Q: Before you went out there, what sort of briefing were you getting about what from the State Department? You know, how were you prepared to go out?

PETTERSON: I prepared myself as well as I could by, first, mining the Internet. I had some familiarity with Liberia. I was the director of the Liberian Task Force for a few months in the summer and fall of 1990. I had met Charles Taylor during that time, as well as other Liberians and heads of state in the region, when I made a trip there. When I got to Washington, I read through files, asked questions, and got what briefing I could during the short time that arrangements were being made to put me on the rolls as a temporary employee and get me out to Monrovia.

Q: Had Jim Bishop been there?

PETTERSON: He had been ambassador from 1987 to 1990. The most recent ambassador to Liberia had been Bill Milam, who left Monrovia shortly before the shooting incident. His assignment had been cut short to enable him to fill, on an urgent basis, the vacant ambassadorship in Pakistan.

Q: This is Bill...?

PETTERSON: Milam, M-I-L-A-M, William Milam. When Milam left for Islamabad, the DCM became chargé d'affaires.

Armed with as much information as I could get, I went out to take over the embassy. I had, as I saw it, two essential things to do. One was to restore morale at the embassy. The second was to see if we could pick up the pieces of the relationship with the Liberians.

Q: This included Charles Taylor? I mean, now the relationship, Charles Taylor was still the president?

PETTERSON: Yes.

Q: Did we have any reservations about dealing with him at this point?

PETTERSON: Very much so. But we had to deal with him if we were going to pursue our objectives, the most immediate of which was to get an apology from the Liberian government, from Taylor, for the actions of the security forces. Not only had they had pointed small arms at the American embassy and then opened fire, but also they had fired at least two recoilless rifle grenades, which passed over the embassy. The chancery suffered bullet damage, and of course two Americans had been wounded. This was a very, very serious incident, and Taylor had not apologized.

The first problem I had to deal with was the state of mind of the U.S. mission personnel. They were still hunkered down, at least figuratively. They had believed that the embassy had been in danger of being overrun by armed Liberian security forces. They literally lived in the safe haven area of the building for a time, and then in embassy offices for about two weeks. Many of them

had been, I found, traumatized by the events. Some of them seemed fixated on what had happened.

When I landed in Monrovia (Roberts Field was still closed to large aircraft, but I took a small airline in from the Ivory Coast into Roberts Field), the administrative officer and the military attaché met me. This was the first time that anybody had left the embassy compound since the incident had taken place almost a month earlier.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: I went to the embassy, talked to people, and within an hour or so, said I wanted to go around the town. I got a third-country national who knew Liberians very well to drive me. We toured the devastated city of Monrovia and its environs so I could get a sense of what the situation was. Back at the embassy, I met and talked with everyone. I encouraged people to get out of the compound and move about the town. I said I believed that whatever danger had existed was now largely dissipated and that there was no threat directed against Americans. At a meeting of all hands, I let them know that I cared about their welfare, understood what they had been through, and sympathized with them. I commended them for what they had done. But I felt, and I let them know, that it was time that we got back to normal operations.

Before long, it was apparent that morale had picked up considerably. I'd never been to a post where morale was in such a bad state as it was when I arrived at Monrovia.

Q: An embassy being somewhat under siege was not new. I mean, it had happened before. Had there been an effort? Often we've sent in Marines or something like that. Did we have Marines around?

PETTERSON: As you know, there had been evacuations in Liberia before, in 1990 for example. With fighting taking place in the outskirts of Monrovia, when I went to the embassy on a two-day visit in October of that year, a U.S. naval vessel was standing by and a contingent of U.S. soldiers had been sent in to provide protection for the embassy. So the kind of trouble that had arisen in 1998 was nothing new. This time, there were no outside U.S. troops brought in for protection. The embassy's marine guard detachment was there, of course. In full battle gear, they manned posts at key points, including a sandbagged post on the roof. But, again, I felt that the problem was over with respect to any danger to the embassy and to the Americans serving in Monrovia. And quite frankly, a few people there were exaggerating the extent of the danger.

Q: Yes?

PETTERSON: After I had been in Monrovia for a while, I concluded that except momentarily at the time of the incident, the Liberian security forces would not have entered the embassy grounds, and that afterward the Liberian government had no plan to overrun the embassy. Nevertheless, the perception of the people who had been through the ordeal, and it was a real ordeal, was that there been great danger. Some were still jittery. They needed to be brought out of that state of mind and to get back to a normal existence. That certainly included leaving the embassy

compound. Monrovia is one of the few embassies we have where most or all the American employees live inside a compound.

Q: Yes, yes.

PETTERSON: Which isn't the best situation.

Q: No, it's not. The families had already been evacuated?

PETTERSON: Yes. Because conditions in Monrovia were so bad, even though the war had ended three years earlier, there was only one or two embassy spouses there when the trouble erupted. Children were not permitted at post. All the time I was there, the Department's ban on dependents remained in force. Before I left, I had concluded that the restriction on dependents should be lifted and said so to Washington. However, as I pointed out when I was talking about Sudan, once dependents are evacuated, it is very, very hard to convince the Department to let them return to post.

Q: Yes, yes.

PETTERSON: It generally takes a long time.

As I was saying, I did the kind of things any ambassador should have done to restore confidence, exert leadership, and put the post back on a good footing. I was pleased by the results.

Q: When they had been holed up in the compound, how were they getting food? I mean, was there any? What were they doing?

PETTERSON: [Laughter] The embassy had a very well stocked commissary. And people had some items in their apartments, foodstuff that they brought with them. And if they really needed something from the Lebanese-owned grocery stores in town, members of the Liberian guard force could go get it.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: The commissary had been a lifesaver and still was reasonably well stocked. But, again, I deemed it essential that people get out of the compound and return to a normal existence. This they began doing. I soon approved letting those who had apartments in the USAID compound across the street from the embassy return to them. In addition, within a month I had begun traveling up-country. I took an embassy officer with me. As a result of that trip, I lifted the 25-mile limit that the previous ambassador had placed on travel outside Monrovia and I encouraged mission personnel who had reason to travel up-country to do so.

Q: How about getting out, reestablishing relations with the government? How did you go about that?

PETTERSON: I went to see government officials. I met with the foreign minister and with advisors to the president. From day one, I persisted in seeking an appointment with Taylor. But because he knew that I would be presenting him with a demand for an apology, he didn't want to meet with me. Nevertheless, through my own contacts, and the contacts that the military attaché and other officers were now making, we were able to get a dialogue going with the Liberians. I made it clear to the foreign minister and to others in the government that there had to be an apology. Taylor's line, which was repeated by his advisors, was that the Liberians had done nothing wrong, that the incident had been a misunderstanding, that there was no intention to harm anybody, that the Liberian security people were fired on first, and so forth. I said that I had thoroughly studied the situation and knew that the Liberian security forces had opened fire without provocation. Washington was fully aware of this from the embassy's reporting. An apology was necessary.

This went on for weeks. The deputy assistant secretary of state who had responsibility for Liberia, Vicki Huddleston, came out and repeated what I had been saying. She told Taylor in a very forceful way that if Liberia wanted to resume a reasonable relationship with the United States, there had to be an apology. Soon afterward, it came. At first it was a left-handed kind of apology, an expression of regret that there had been some difficulty - something of that nature. Eventually, we got the apology from Taylor in the right terminology. Normal relations were resumed. It was not by any means a warm and cuddly relationship, given the government's continued human rights violations and the fact that Taylor was assisting the rebels in Sierra Leone. His support for them became the single most important bone of contention between the United States and Liberia during the rest of the time that I was there.

Q: What had happened? Did we still have our communications set up and all in Liberia, or was this being phased out?

PETTERSON: You mean the VOA?

Q: The VOA and all those things.

PETTERSON: The VOA transmitter and the other U.S. government communications facilities had long since been closed down. In fact, they had been trashed during the war. Even the power lines serving them had been stripped, stolen for their copper content. By the time that the facilities were closed down, the United States government had made alternative arrangements in other places in Africa. The importance of those facilities was no longer a factor in the U.S.-Liberian relationship.

Q: So we didn't really have much that we needed from Liberia? Our interest was more of a general one, a humanitarian and normal relations and all that?

PETTERSON: Yes. The passing of the Cold War eliminated whatever putative international political importance Liberia had had. Former President Doe played the anticommunist and anti-Libyan cards for all they were worth, and Liberia was well endowed with American aid. But those days were over for good.

Our basic interest was humanitarian. Beyond that was the continuation of an historical relationship that had begun with the establishment of Liberia by former slaves from America in the 19th century. At the outset, there was no close tie between the U.S. government and Liberia, for the American government had nothing to do with the repatriation of those slaves. Arrangements for the repatriation and the founding of the colony were made by the American Colonization Society, an anti-slavery organization. The United States was not in a hurry to recognize Liberia when in 1840 it declared itself a republic, and showed little interest in it until the 20th century, when Harvey Firestone established a rubber plantation and factory there. Closer ties came during World War II when the U.S. built an important airfield near Monrovia. Then came the Cold War and the establishment of the communications facilities that I mentioned earlier and the advent of the large U.S. economic and military aid programs for Liberia.

Liberians viewed the historical tie as a special relationship. This sentiment was shared by some African-Americans, including some prominent, influential individuals. There was a belief that the United States had benefitted in the past from the relationship and therefor had an obligation to help Liberia.

With the kind of government that Liberia now had, the concept of the special relationship was debatable. I believed very strongly that the United States had an obligation to do all we could to provide humanitarian assistance to Liberia, to help its people, who had been so mistreated by successive governments and whose lives had been disrupted beyond imagining by the awful civil war. Tens of thousands were still displaced from their home villages and were destitute. But I felt just as strongly that we owed Charles Taylor and followers nothing. We needed to avoid any kind of economic aid that would strengthen Taylor's control of the country and give him opportunity to add to his plunder. Instead of doing anything to revive Liberia's moribund economy, Taylor and his associates were robbing the country blind.

Q: How could we meet humanitarian needs without enriching Taylor and cohorts?

PETTERSON: Very easily, actually - not provide them with the kind of aid they wanted. They wanted capital assistance projects, the kind that would involve big contracts, from which they would get a cut. They wanted contractors who could be bribed and an influx of resources that could be ripped off.

The United States was having none of that. It channeled its aid mainly through UN agencies, such as the WFP (World Food Program), UNICEF, and UNHCR (UN High Commission for Refugees) - the kind of assistance that people needed to ward off diseases and to get food and shelter. In addition we provided assistance to help strengthen the judicial system and democratic institutions, such as a free press, and to bolster human rights organizations. We aimed to help give the Liberian people a greater ability to stand up to their government. And we hoped to promote a better attitude among key people in the country regarding how Liberia should be governed.

None of this was pleasing to Mr. Taylor, who continued to rule in an autocratic and undemocratic way and to violate human rights left right and center.

Q: You keep talking about violating human rights.

PETTERSON: Yes.

Q: Could you explain what this meant?

PETTERSON: In 1997, Taylor's security people murdered the most prominent of Taylor's political opponents. Roosevelt Johnson's tribesmen, the Krahn, were hounded. During the fighting that broke out in September 1998, three hundred or more Krahn were captured or otherwise seized and summarily executed. People were arrested without due process, some were tortured. The government intimidated the press. Freedom of association and speech were abridged. There was fear in the country that the security forces could work their will whenever they wanted. It was also a violation of human rights when the government failed to do anything to provide resources that were so desperately needed for basic services to people - running water, electricity, housing, schooling for children, medical services. In Liberia under Charles Taylor, egregious violations of the human rights of the Liberian were a constant.

Q: What was in it for them to deal with us at all?

PETTERSON: Because the United States is the strongest country in the world, it carries great influence with international organizations that can make decisions favorable or unfavorable to a country like Liberia. To make progress economically, Liberia needed to attract private investment. Its ability to do that was impaired by its poor relations with the United States. In addition, in Liberia there is a sense that no Liberian government can really succeed without the blessing of the United States, which is seen, as some Liberians told me, as "our father." Others told me that the U.S. was "our mother," and others called it "our big brother." So - father, mother, big brother. No Liberian leader could be totally comfortable if he was at odds with the United States.

Although our influence helped in some ways to improve the lot of the Liberian people, it was not such that Taylor would change his behavior and begin to do the right things not only for the Liberian people but also for the people of Sierra Leone. His support for Sierra Leonean rebels contributed to a terrible war in which rebel forces were committing the worst kinds of atrocities, cutting off people's hands and arms-

Q: Children's.

PETTERSON: Men's, women's, and children's. Wanton killing, a state of vicious anarchy.

Q: When you look at what happened in Liberia and then Sierra Leone, you know, what was the root of this viciousness? I mean, you know, there's a difference between taking over and destroying villages, and particularly when you start maiming children. But the whole thing seemed to have gone down to a level of depravity that we haven't seen in a long time.

PETTERSON: Well, we have seen it in former Yugoslavia.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: Why did it happen in Liberia and then in Sierra Leone? It's hard to say. The hatreds that grew between contending organizations were tribally based, for one. One side would do something to another, then the other side would retaliate, and then it would get out of hand. It got to the point that human life had no meaning for some of these fighters, many of whom were children, or barely teenagers, who often were plied with liquor or drugs and told to do things and did them - terrible acts that they normally would never have committed. There was a spiral downward of terrible, mindless violence. It happened first in Liberia, then in Sierra Leone.

Q: What was Taylor doing in Sierra Leone?

PETTERSON: Diamonds. Diamonds were at the heart of the descent of Sierra Leone, from a country that could have been prosperous to a country that is one of the most devastated, poorest countries of the world. From the time of Sierra Leone's independence greedy men sought to get a share of the diamond wealth that was being produced from the country's diamond mines. Diamonds corrupted the leader of the country, Siaka Stevens, and just about everyone else in high positions. The diamond producing areas were in the northern part of Sierra Leone. In years past, the diamond production had been largely a controlled enterprise, but even then there were many illegal diggers. A considerable portion of the illegally mined diamonds was smuggled out through Liberia.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: With the advent of the war in Sierra Leone, no longer was diamond mining a controlled enterprise, in part or in whole. The RUF made arrangements with the diggers and, in collusion with Liberians and with Taylor's blessing, got the diamonds into Liberia and from there to the world market. In exchange for his cut, Taylor was helping the rebels in various ways, including providing them with arms and ammunition. Some of this war materiel came from Libya and was flown to Liberia from Burkina Faso.

Taylor continued his involvement in this even though the United States government and others, the British government in particular, told him to stop it. A cease-fire in Sierra Leone was brokered in July 1999, shortly before I left Liberia. Later it broke down, and hostilities resumed. In 2000, a UN report implicated Taylor in his dealings in diamonds with the RUF, arms trafficking, and other kinds of profiteering. In May 2001, the Security Council imposed sanctions against Taylor for backing and arming the rebel group.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: As recently as a few months ago, accusations were still being levied against Taylor, charging that he was helping perpetuate the situation in Sierra Leone by continuing to assist the rebels.

Q: While you were there, was the United Nations playing any role, or the Organization of African Unity?

PETTERSON: The OAU (Organization of African Unity) wasn't, but some West African countries, Nigeria in particular, were. Going back to the early 1990s, a West African force in Liberia, ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) had been based in Liberia, first to fight against Taylor's National Patriotic Liberation Front and then to keep the peace. In 1999, the ECOMOG force was made up of Nigerians, the largest contingent, and Ghanaians. By that time, it was pretty ineffective. Because of the growing intensity of the conflict in Sierra Leone and with Freetown itself in danger of being overrun by the RUF, the remaining ECOMOG troops in Liberia were sent to Freetown.

The United Nations Special Representative did not take a strong stand against Taylor. Many members of the international community in Monrovia, including UN personnel, believed that he was too close to Taylor and to someone else in a high-level position in the Liberian government. I subscribed to that opinion.

Q: Who was he?

PETTERSON: Felix Downes-Thomas, a Gambian. He did not take firm enough stands on human rights violations. I tried to enlist his support for strong statements, which I routinely made publicly, that there had to be a change in the behavior of the Liberian government if the Liberian government was to be accepted internationally. Downes-Thomas said he said he would, but he did not follow through with anything approaching consistency. I did not get useful backing from the Special Representative. On the other hand, I had a good relationship with the United Nations agencies that were participating in the humanitarian aid program in Liberia.

Q: Was our unhappiness and distrust of this UN man from Gambia being transmitted back to various channels to the United Nations headquarters?

PETTERSON: I transmitted my thoughts on his performance to Washington. And yes, the State Department did make its displeasure known to the UN. But on what level, I don't know. Whatever was said apparently made no appreciable difference, for he remained in his post.

Let me emphasize, though, that the UN performance in Liberia was good. My opinion of the quality of the representatives of the various UN agencies with which I was associated in Africa ranged from excellent to abysmal. In Sudan, Phillip O'Brien, an Irishman who was the UNICEF representative in Nairobi and headed Operations Lifeline Sudan was superb. In Khartoum, one head of a UN agency was pathetically inept. But in my view, the problem with UN operations in a given country stems as much from the UN system itself as it does from the quality of UN personnel. The UN agencies are like baronies. Each head of agency is answerable to his agency's home office and not to the ranking UN official at the post. If, as was the case in Sudan and Somalia when I was ambassador, the head of UNDP, who was the ranking UN official, holding the title of UN coordinator, wanted the head of, say, UNICEF to do a certain thing, the coordinator had to rely on his powers of persuasion to get it done. Coordination could be, and often was, a sometime thing, not well done at all. I thought to myself more than once that if I, as ambassador, did not have authority over all U.S. officials in country, regardless of their agency, I would find it intolerable and be hampered in my effectiveness.

Having said all that, for the most part I had good relations with the UN people I worked with. This was generally the case in Liberia. I worked closely with officials of the UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees). They were doing an excellent job of helping rehabilitate refugees of the Liberian civil war who had returned to their devastated villages and Sierra Leoneans who were in refugee camps in Liberia. I went up-country with representatives of the UNHCR to various places, to see what was being done, and I have nothing but praise for them.

Q: Now, talking about up country, brings to mind, in earlier interviews with people serving in Liberia back in the good ol' (old) days and all...

PETTERSON: [Laughter]

Q: There were the Americo-Liberians, who represented a very distinct class, not really a tribe, but a class that sat there, and then everyone else was out in the bush, and we didn't have much to do with that. Had the whole dynamics changed?

PETTERSON: Oh, yes. The Americo-Liberians were descendants of slaves who had either established the colony or had settled in Liberia in ensuing years and of slaves who, after slavery was outlawed, were brought to Monrovia after the slave ships in which they were being transported were seized. The Americo-Liberians became the dominant political force in the country. They erected a kind of black apartheid to maintain power, depriving the indigenous people of equal rights. The overbearing, short-sighted ways of the Americo-Liberians led to their downfall in 1980, when Samuel Doe overthrew the government, killing the leadership in the process.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: Today in Liberia the clear distinction between the Americo-Liberians and other Liberians no longer defines the country's politics. Americo-Liberians and people of indigenous tribal origins alike occupy positions of importance in the government. However, underlying ill-feeling between those called "Americos" or "Congos" (as they are sometimes referred to) and those who are called "Country" remains and surfaces from time to time (especially on the Internet). In addition, other tribal animosities still continue to be a fact of life in Liberia. The killing of Krahns in 1998 testifies to that.

Q: Now, did the Libyans play any role in this, because they, over the years under Qadhafi, have been sort of troublemakers, at least one perspective?

PETTERSON: Libyan involvement in Liberia while I was there in 1998-1999 was confined to the supply of weapons through Burkina Faso and Liberia into Sierra Leone. Taylor had received military training in Libya before he started the insurgency in 1989 and continues to have close ties with Qadhafi. There is no question that arms and ammunition destined for the RUF in Sierra Leone originated in Libya.

Q: But it wasn't a major factor as far as...

PETTERSON: Not really, no. Qadhafi was not playing the prominent role that he had played earlier on in West Africa.

Q: The time you were there, was the Taylor regime beginning to become a more responsible one at all, did you feel?

PETTERSON: Absolutely NOT!

Q: [Laughter]

PETTERSON: I did finally get to see Taylor, in late January 1999. The main point of what I said to him was a warning from Washington to cease helping the rebels in Sierra Leone or face sanctions. I told him that U.S. evidence of Liberia's support for the RUF was incontrovertible and that it did the Liberians no good to keep denying the charges. As I expected, he reacted defensively, denying that his government was involved in Sierra Leone. I also expressed concern about his government's human rights abuses, especially those committed by the security forces. I suggested that the government should, among other things, rein in the security forces, allow full freedom of the press, and stop harassing judges. Taylor responded that much of what was being said about human rights in Liberia was untrue. I remember that in my reporting cable to Washington I said that although I was not in a position to comment on the often-heard view that Taylor was an inveterate liar, I could now say from personal experience that he took large liberties with the truth.

Although I had been very frank in our talk, I had tried to keep the conversation on a friendly level. But Taylor was not a man who liked to hear frank criticism, no matter how it was put to him. He avoided seeing me again for some months.

In private talks and public remarks, I stressed that while the U.S. government wanted to work with Liberia's democratically elected government, Washington remained concerned about the excesses of the executive branch and the misconduct of the security forces. I also emphasized that for Liberia's economy to improve, it needed a strong private sector, but that the government's misguided economic policies and rampant corruption discouraged private investment from both domestic and foreign sources.

U.S. admonitions did not have much appreciable effect. Now and then, Taylor would do something that we asked. For example, we got the apology, and eventually he did begin to do some right things with respect to Sierra Leone, at least momentarily. But essentially he was the same criminal that he always had been, and his actions were harmful to Liberia's relationship with the United States.

Q: You said you wanted to get the embassy out doing things. You mentioned morale, I mean, just to get out and see sunlight, not suffer from paranoia. But the other one is, I mean, where you've got a situation like that, say what does a political officer do, I mean if there's no real politics? It's all-

PETTERSON: Ah, but there was plenty to do. There was politics. There was politics within the governing party. There was an opposition, however weak it was. The beginning of a revolt against Taylor was evident in northwestern Liberia. Liberia's involvement in Sierra Leone and other foreign affairs issues needed to be reported. All kinds of crooked economic deals were being made in Liberia. There was no end of what a reporting officer worth his or her salt could do. I encouraged the political/economic section to be very active.

I participated with the officer in the political section who was in charge of the embassy's self-help program, which made good use of limited resources for grassroots projects. I would accompany her to projects she had developed, mainly within a two-hour drive from Monrovia. I traveled up-country as often as I could and would always ask people to go with me. And I encouraged them to do some travels on their own.

Q: Let's talk about the political situation a little. What were we looking at? What were we doing, not just reporting? How did the political officer or the economic officer operate in this situation?

PETTERSON: In the same basic way that a political or economic officer would carry out his or her responsibilities anywhere. You get out, go around town, talk to people, gather information, and travel outside of town. The embassy's political-economic officers did get around. Unfortunately, there were others in the embassy who were not inclined to travel very much, if at all. But, overall the embassy had resumed its normal functioning.

Q: Well, were there things like road blocks with a couple of pre teenagers with AK-47s who would stop you and say, "Give me your car!" or something like that?

PETTERSON: There were roadblocks, and you simply had to go through them. Our vehicles had diplomatic plates, and when I traveled, the flag was [laughter] flying. Occasionally there were some minor problems at roadblocks, but they eased off as the weeks and months went by.

Q: Did you have any problems with our staff? Sometimes you get people that start playing games with roadblocks, get angry and all, which is not the way to handle it. You know, I have served in Saigon and Korea, where they've had nighttime things, and you don't mess around with roadblocks.

PETTERSON: No, no one played games at roadblocks. For most of the time I was there, I did not allow nighttime traveling.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: Our people were well aware that some of the individuals at roadblocks were not the kind of people you wanted to trifle with.

Q: Because it was a pandemic, I guess, you'd call it, of AIDS, was that a problem in Liberia at the time you were there?

PETTERSON: No, there was not a high incidence of AIDS in Liberia. Liberia had major health problems - malaria, serious malnutrition, gastrointestinal diseases, and other maladies - but AIDS was not among them. It did exist, but compared to some other places in Africa, the infection rate was low. Less than three percent of adults had HIV/AIDS.

Q: What about other countries? Although Nigeria is at some remove, it was sort of, I would imagine, a major least English speaking country around.

PETTERSON: Nigeria played the leading role in the West African military force, ECOMOG, and in ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States). Nigeria is by far the dominant power in West Africa because of its size and its wealth. With the advent of a better government, when Obasanjo was elected after the death of the odious General Sani Abacha, it seemed that Nigeria could deal more effectively in the Liberia-Sierra Leone situations. It was hoped that Obasanjo could exert a fatherly influence over Taylor. That appeared to be a possibility for a while, but Taylor doesn't listen to anybody for very long. He'll often say the right things when you meet with him, but then he'll continue doing what he had been doing before.

Q: While you were there, was there much attention coming from Washington?

PETTERSON: Yes. Because of the historical tie between Liberia and the United States, the large number of Liberians living in the United States, and the empathy of the African American community, or segments of it, for Liberia, there was a continuing fairly high level of attention given to the Liberian problem.

Q: Did you get much direction, instruction, that sort of thing from Washington? Or were they, sort of, you'd been around the block, you knew what you were doing, and sort of let you say, "Well, go ahead and do it."

PETTERSON: I gave Washington my thoughts as to what we needed to do, and how I saw the situation. Certainly I got instructions, as all ambassadors do, but essentially my relationship with the State Department was one of mutual consultation. With the communications revolution having finally caught with State Department, I was able to pick up the phone and be immediately connected. Unlike my earlier days in Africa, it was now quite easy to talk with people in Washington as frequently as I needed.

Q: You left there when, in the summer of '99, was it?

PETTERSON: Yes.

Q: Who took your place?

PETTERSON: Let me explain why I stayed on so long and how that was done. After the first two months passed, the Department told me that the chargé d'affaires would not be able to return right then and asked me to stay on for another month. I agreed. Sometime during that month, I was informed that because of questions that had arisen concerning the performance of the

embassy during the crisis situation, the chargé would be getting another assignment. I was asked to stay on until a new ambassador, whose processing had begun, could be confirmed by the Senate. The Department expected that this could take place by the late summer of 1999.

I wasn't keen to stay on for that length of time because I would be separated from my family again, not all that long after our two-year separation when I was in Sudan. But I felt an obligation and a responsibility, and I said I would do it. This required me to be sworn in as a Foreign Service officer again. I stayed in Liberia until July, just before the arrival of the new ambassador, Bismarck Myrick, an African specialist.

Then I went back to Washington and resigned, and that was that.

Q: As you left, what did you think about the future of Liberia?

PETTERSON: I could see that as long as Charles Taylor was running that country, there was little hope for Liberia. Any idea that this man would change his spots was mistaken. He simply is not a good person, and he's going to continue to do whatever is necessary to maintain himself in power as long as he can, at the expense of the well-being of the Liberian people, at the expense of any possibility for a democratic system in Liberia. He continues to be in bad odor with the U.S. government and to be accused of doing the kind of things that he was doing when I was there. So, whether Liberia depends on how and when Taylor's despotic rule can be ended, and whether decent intelligent Liberians who really care about their country - and there are many Liberians like that - can somehow form a new kind of government, a government responsive to the will of the people. That's a big question. Who knows?

But for right now, the near-term forecast is not good because Taylor is still there.

PRUDENCE BUSHNELL
Deputy Assistant Secretary, Sub-Sahara Africa
Washington, DC (1993-1995)

Ambassador Bushnell was born in Washington, DC into a Foreign Service family. She was raised in Washington and at Foreign Service posts abroad and received degrees from Russell Sage College and the University of Maryland. After working as a clerk at Embassies Teheran and Rabat, she became a Foreign Service Officer in 1981 and subsequently served in several posts before serving as Ambassador to Kenya 1996 – 1999. There she experienced the bombing of the Embassy by al Qaeda. In 1999 she was named Ambassador to Guatemala, where she served until 2002. During her career, the Ambassador served in several senior positions in the Department in Washington. Ambassador Bushnell was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: Was the military corrupt?

BUSHNELL: Oh, yes. Liberia was also in my portfolio so I would go there now and then. On one of these occasions I was standing on the tarmac with our ambassador, Bill Twaddell, watching a plane being loaded up to head back toward Lagos. We were pretty sure the cargo was illicit stuff – diamonds, gold or drugs. The corruption among the Nigerians in Liberia was well known. On the other hand, Liberia had a multi-faceted civil war going on and the Nigerians were controlling at least part of the country, maintaining a peace of some sorts. So, as corrupt as these peacekeepers may have been, we were even more concerned about what would happen if they left Liberia.

Q: What about the other ones that were active, like Senegal?

BUSHNELL: Senegal fulfilled its commitment and suffered some losses, then got out.

Q: How did these troops that went use Liberia? Did they act the role of occupiers?

BUSHNELL: It depended on the military. Nigerians who occupied Monrovia did. Poor Liberia. It was divided up into territories under the control of warlords who represented different ethnic groups.

Q: Liberia was the second big problem wasn't it for you at the time?

BUSHNELL: Yes. Rwanda and Burundi were lumped together because what happened in one had such repercussions in the other. Liberia was a different issue. First of all, it is a country in which we have an historic interest, unlike Rwanda or Burundi. Liberia was settled by former American slaves and Monrovia named after James Monroe. We used the country for our radio relay stations during the Cold War and had strong ties. The Liberians had equally strong expectations that we would intervene in some way, but we did not.

George Moose would send me to Liberia now and then to bawl out the warlords but we had no active involvement.

Q: In many ways, when I talk to people about Liberia, the main concern is when do we haul our embassy people out of there?

BUSHNELL: I think it's been evacuated eight times.

Q: Yeah. I mean, if it weren't so tragic it would be ludicrous.

BUSHNELL: On the other hand we did not want to signal the Liberian people that we were washing our hands of them. Even if we could do no more than be present, we were determined to at least be present. I don't argue with that as long as there are colleagues brave and willing enough to go there. So, we had a fairly minimal presence that we could pull out and put back in.

Q: When people went there, during the time you were there, did they go unaccompanied?

BUSHNELL: Initially I think spouses were there, but certainly not children. I'm not sure about its current status now that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is president.

Q: Did we have any strategic interests there?

BUSHNELL: With the end of the Cold War, no. Liberia has lots of resources, but we were not particularly interested in those..

Q: Who were some of the characters that we were having to deal with?

BUSHNELL: Ha! Characters is right, none of them anyone you would want to meet. The most long lasting war lord was Charles Taylor. I went to his "capital" was in Gbarnga, which was in the middle of the jungle, via UN helicopter to deliver a demarche. He made us wait an absurd amount of time and by the time we finally got to see him in his throne room, as I called it, I was hungry and very irritated. Then he talk, and talked and talked. I have an agreement with myself that I will allow men to talk at me without taking a breath for only a certain amount of time – usually, 15 minutes for Americans, 25 for Africans. About 30 minutes into his monologue, Taylor began to call me "my dear." Twice I decided to ignore him. The third time I had had it. I interrupted him suggesting that he never again call a Deputy Assistant Secretary of the United States of America "my dear." He accused me of being culturally insensitive and told me he called everyone my dear. I retorted that I would call him Mr. President and he could call me either Ms. Bushnell or Madame Secretary. By this time, he had lost his rhythm to say nothing of face, and he ordered us out. He told the UN peacekeeping commander never to let me back in. I found out recently that Taylor really did call everyone "my dear." Still, I have no regrets at my action.

Another war lord was Roosevelt Johnson. I met him on the same trip to Liberia with the same message: stop it. Johnson reveled in telling how Charles Taylor's soldiers would kill people, slit open their chests and eat their hearts. I think he was trying to impress me so, of course I refused to show it. The last one I saw on that trip was El Hadji Kromah in yet another part of Liberia. To get to him we had to go through checkpoints of child soldiers who were often high on drugs. It was frightening. We sat in a living room with walls decorated with bullet shells. I had to use his bathroom and he locked me in. My first thought was that he didn't like my message and was going to keep my hostage. Actually, he had done it because there was no way to keep the door closed.

Q: Why did we want to go to Liberia and why did they want to see us? We were not a player were we, or were we a player?

BUSHNELL: As I say, we had a long and strong relationship with Liberia. While European governments maintained close relations with their former colonies, Liberia was considered ours, even though it was never a colony. We have always recognized that we cannot completely turn our backs on Liberia and therefore, we will continue to do what we can do to bring peace to that very rich resource country.

Q: Well, the French since the '60s have maintained significant troops; I mean effective troops which have kept out a lot of the nonsense. There's nothing like a battalion of paratroopers arriving in the capitol to make people calm down. Were we thinking of something of that nature?

BUSHNELL: No, we would never do that. The French relationship with their former colonies is very different, because they have considerable commercial interests, as well as continuing political interest in these countries.

Q: What were the battles that were raging in the State Department and the National Security Council about Liberia?

BUSHNELL: We were providing some financial and equipment support to ECOWAS. Not very much but enough to have our concerns recognized. I did whatever I could in interagency peacekeeping meetings to keep us from totaling withdrawing interest. By this time I had learned a little about bureaucratically delaying any final decision.

Q: Was Rwanda, the effective Rwanda or Somali playing a role as we looked at Liberia?

BUSHNELL: More relevant was the scrub that the Clinton administration was doing of all peace keeping around the world. We contributed 31% of all UN peacekeeping operations and wanted to make some sense of where, why, when, etc.

Q: Was peacekeeping money part of the fight that was going on between the administration and Senator Helms and others?

BUSHNELL: Very much so. The debate still rages about paying our dues to the United Nations and getting reforms in return.

Q: Did you get called in from time; I mean did you have to deal with Congress in this?

BUSHNELL: No, I dealt with Congress on countries specific issues. The Political-Military Bureau and the International Organization Bureau had the larger piece.

Q: Well sometimes, particularly staff members on the Hill would get focused on a country. Did you find any particular parts of Africa of special interest to them?

BUSHNELL: There was a good deal of interest in the civil war in Sudan, particularly among the Christian Right. Angola and Mozambique, as leftovers of the proxy wars in Africa initiated during the Cold War also attracted attention. It's a whole lot easier to start wars than it is to stop them, and peace in these countries was slow in coming. Somalia, of course, was getting negative attention, and Nigeria, the largest country in Africa, has always been important. But the greatest focus was on South Africa. We had huge hopes for that country, which was in transition at the time.

Q: While you were on duty did you have to evacuate our embassy at all or get involved from Liberia?

BUSHNELL: Oh, yeah. I did a number of evacuation and disaster management gigs, Liberia included.

Q: Was there an effort on our part, maybe to the annoyance of the Pentagon to keep the battalions or marines on a landing ship cruising up and down the coast for the next crisis?

BUSHNELL: Yeah, they were. They certainly were hovering about Liberia.

Q: What were the politics like during the decision making process around evacuations? Ambassadors often don't want to leave but Washington doesn't want any dead bodies, either.

BUSHNELL: Washington has always erred on the side of caution – at least until this Iraq War. If an ambassador showed reluctance or wanted to disagree with Washington's concern, I'd make a phone call to tell him to start saluting. Disagreeing, especially in writing, was not going to help anyone.

Q: You mentioned telephone calls. Were you doing during the '90s as the new era of communications came in? We might have still be using the old cables, but there was a lot of consultation on the phone wasn't there? Was there a lot more communication?

BUSHNELL: I 'm trying to think how much work we did by e-mail. Not nearly the amount of work we do now because a lot of embassies weren't connected. The state of our communications technology at State was shameful. I used the phones a lot. Coming from the administrative side of the house, I continued the tradition of completing whatever negotiation or discussion we needed by phone, then sealing the deal in writing. Much more efficient than arguing through cables – unless you wanted it part of the official record.

Q: Well, I've heard people say that they were concerned about the initial impact of easy communications, but they found in a way that embassies had really more of a say in matters than before. .

BUSHNELL: Oh, exactly. I think that one of the unintended consequences of e-mail has been to turn a notion that Washington makes policy and the field implements policy on its head. It really needs to be that way, too. Before, those sitting in the splendors of Washington would issue orders and people on the field would either implement them or ignore them. With e-mail people can actually discuss, educate and craft the instructions together. That's an ambassador's ambition – to craft the official instructions Washington sends. A lot of good policy strategies can come from e-mail consultations and conversations.

End of Reader