

MALAYSIA

COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

William L. Blue	1948-1949	Consul/Principal Officer, Kuala Lumpur
LaRue R. Lutkins	1950-1952	Consul/Political Officer, Penang
Hendrik Van Oss	1951-1953	Consul/Principal Officer, Kuala Lumpur
David Dean	1951-1954	Consular Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Oscar Vance Armstrong	1952-1953	Consular Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Walter K. Schwinn	1954-1957	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Kuala Lumpur
Charles T. Cross	1955-1957	Political Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Howard B. Schaffer	1956-1958	Rotation Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Michael E.C. Ely	1957-1959	Political/Consular Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Robert W. Drexler	1961-1963	Political Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Charles F. Baldwin	1961-1964	Ambassador, Malaya
Ronald D. Palmer	1962-1963	Economic Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Robert W. Duemling	1963-1965	Consular/Economic Officer, Kuala Lumpur
	1965-1966	Consul, Kuching, Sarawak
William Andreas Brown	1964-1965	Principal Officer, Kuching, Sarawak
Julia Chang Bloch	1964-1966	Peace Corps, Sabah
Robert William Farrand	1964-1966	Junior Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Samuel F. Hart	1964-1966	Consular/Political Officer, Kuala Lumpur

Parker W. Borg	1965-1967	Rotation Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Robert B. Petersen	1967-1970	Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Kuching
Earl Wilson	1967-1970	Public Affairs Officer, USIS, Kuala Lumpur
John J. Helble	1969-1970	Political Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Jack Lydman	1969-1973	Ambassador, Malaysia
Edwin Cronk	1972-1975	Ambassador, Singapore
Ralph J. Katrosh	1972-1975	Political Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Alphonse F. La Porta	1972-1975	Political Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Stan Ifshin	1973-1975	Political Officer, Kuala Lumpur
Francis T. Underhill	1974-1977	Ambassador, Malaysia
Robert S. Dillon	1974-1977	Deputy Chief of Mission, Kuala Lumpur
Robert H. Miller	1977-1980	Ambassador, Malaysia
Melvin R. Chatman	1977-1980	Director, Refugee Office, USAID, Malaysia
Peter B. Swiers	1979-1981	Political Counselor, Kuala Lumpur
Paul P. Blackburn	1980-1984	Public Affairs Offficer, USIS, Kuala Lumpur
Ronald D. Palmer	1981-1983	Ambassador, Malaysia
Donald McConville	1981-1984	Economic Counselor, Kuala Lumpur
Alphonse F. La Porta	1982-1985	Country Director, Office of Malaysia, Burma and Singapore Affairs, East Asia Bureau, Washington, DC
Joseph A. B. Winder	1983-1985	EAP, Indonesia, Malaysia,

		Singapore, and Brunei Affairs, Washington DC
Thomas P. Shoesmith	1983-1987	Ambassador, Malaysia
Francis J. Tatu	1984	Deputy Chief, Political Section, Kuala Lumpur
Charles A. Mast	1984-1987	Economic Counselor, Kuala Lumpur
Richard W. Teare	1989-1992	Director, Office of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore, Washington, DC
Paul M. Cleveland	1989-1992	Ambassador, Malaysia
David G. Brown	1992-1993	Director, Office of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore Affairs, Washington DC
Thomas R. Carmichael	1995-1997	Press Attaché, Kuala Lumpur
Marie Therese Huhtala	2001-2004	Ambassador, Malaysia

WILLIAM L. BLUE
Principal Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1948-1949)

William Blue was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1914. He received a master's degree from Vanderbilt University in 1936. After studying at The Fletcher School, Mr. Blue joined the Foreign Service in 1941. His career included positions in Canada, Venezuela, Italy, Switzerland, Portugal, and Washington, DC. Mr. Blue was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: Next you went in 1948 for a very short time to Kuala Lumpur. What were you doing there?

BLUE: I was the first consul in Kuala Lumpur. I went first to Alexandria by ship and then was in Cairo for a week and in Port Said for a week waiting for a ship to Singapore.

Q: You were principal officer there, weren't you?

BLUE: I was principal officer.

Q: Of course Kuala Lumpur in those days was part of...

Mr. Blue. It was the capital of Malaya which was still a British colony. But within a month after I got there the communists came out of the jungle. If they had had better intelligence, they could have taken over Kuala Lumpur, but they didn't. It was a fascinating period. This was before Templar. The British were completely unprepared for this emergency. I had the Americans, like the head of the Pacific Tin Company, after me all the time to get up there and tell the British what they had to do. When I left, it was very risky to go from Kuala Lumpur up to the hill stations. Not long after I left, Sir Henry Gurney, the British High Commissioner, was ambushed and killed on his way to a hill station.

Q: Here you were and found yourself as principal officer in a place which in those days was of only modest concern to the United States. What were you expected to do with this uprising going on?

BLUE: You had to depend on British sources, although there was an interesting guy there--a labor advisor to Sir Henry. He had been a railroad driver. He was in touch with the commies and knew quite a lot about what was going on. Somehow we got along very well. So I did get some information about what the thinking was on the other side. The whole colonial apparatus was there and some of them resented the fact that we had a consulate there. I wanted to go up to the installation of the new Sultan in Trenggano but the British political advisor there turned down my request. They wanted things to remain as they had been.

Q: Did you have the feeling while you were there that whatever happened the colonial system was on the way out?

BLUE: Yes. They had a legislative assembly which I went to regularly. And the Malays were becoming more important. I was pretty sure the British were on their way out.

Q: Were you getting any instructions from Washington or was it pretty much a matter of sending in your reports?

BLUE: Not specific instructions as I recall. Fortunately we had good relations with the British High Commissioner. He was a very decent man. He actually used to brief me and was fairly open about what was going on. But we didn't have any instructions saying, "You should do this and you should do that." There was no question that something was going to happen.

Q: But the United States basically exerted no pressure there.

BLUE: We didn't press them as I gather we did in New Delhi and places like that.

Q: Did the change over in India have any rumbling effect, I think India gained its independence about that time?

BLUE: No, I don't recall that it did. It was in 1947 when they had all those riots and got their independence, and I didn't get there until May of 1948. I don't remember that the situation in India had any effect on us.

Q: You left Kuala Lumpur around 1949.

BLUE: I left in September. My father was dying and I wanted to get back to the States. For one thing I wanted to get married. I was tired of being a bachelor and there was certainly nothing available out there. So I asked originally to return home at my own expense, but while I was back there I was called into Washington and told that I would be assigned to Personnel as I had requested a Washington assignment.

LARUE R. LUTKINS
Consul/Political Officer
Penang (1950-1952)

LaRue R. Lutkins was born in 1919 and raised in New York. His career with the State Department included assignments in Cuba, China, Malaysia, Japan, Hong Kong, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and South Africa. Mr. Lutkins was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 18, 1990.

LUTKINS: And it so happened that it was decided that we were going to beef up our presence in what was then called Malaya before it became Malaysia. One Chinese language officer, Oscar Armstrong, was assigned to Singapore. And I was assigned to reopen a post in Penang, Malaya, in northern Malaya near Thailand. So I went out there in the summer of 1950, reopened the Consulate there, and served there for two years.

Q: Malaya was then still under British rule?

LUTKINS: Right. It remained under British rule until 1957, when they gave independence to Malaya.

Q: You went with your family, I take it?

LUTKINS: Oh, yes.

Q: What was your main job while you were there from '50 to '52? The Korean War broke out about that time. Relations were nasty. What were you doing?

LUTKINS: I'd say it was 90 percent political reporting. A couple of years earlier, around 1948, what they called, euphemistically, "The Emergency" had broken out with the local

Chinese Communists in Malaya. They were not connected with the Chinese Communists on the mainland, but they were ethnic Chinese, part of the very substantial Overseas Chinese minority in Malaya, who had their own Communist Party. Actually, during the war they worked with the British against the Japanese, during the Japanese occupation.

Shortly after the war, they staged this uprising, killed a lot of British rubber planters and people in the tin industry, and made life very difficult. The British had quite a substantial military force there combating this emergency. It was a difficult period. At one point, the British governor general was assassinated on his way up to a weekend in one of the hill stations. And then they sent out a really tough man, by name of Sir Gerald Templar, to head up the thing and bring it under control. There were various efforts made by the army and the police to cordon off the dispersed Chinese farmers, gather them together in secure, guarded villages, and keep them from contact with the guerrillas in the jungle. It was a long, hard process.

I'm no expert on Malaya, but in retrospect I think probably they were only able to really get on top of this once they granted independence to Malaya in 1957, and undercut the argument of the Chinese Communist guerrillas that the country was a foreign colony and should be liberated. And the Malays who dominated the country, both demographically and politically, certainly never had any love for the Chinese, so that they were then also able to collaborate a bit more with the British forces in bringing the thing finally under control. But it was a rather tense period.

Penang itself was not affected. It seemed to have been regarded as a rest area by both sides. With the exception of one or two assassinations of some rather staunch anti-Communist Chinese newspaper and academic people there, there really were no incidents on the island itself.

My area included the whole of northern Malaya. At that time, we had no embassy, of course. The main office, the Consulate General, was in Singapore. And we had two consulates: one in Kuala Lumpur, which is now the capital, and in Penang. Both Kuala Lumpur and Penang had rather fairly loose supervision from Singapore. So, from the point of view of a junior officer, it was an ideal situation. We had a big and interesting territory to travel around and report on, and only rather tenuous control from Singapore.

Q: It varied from place to place, but here, this was obviously an emerging situation, with the emergency on and all. Were you constrained because of British rule so that you couldn't talk to the other elements, particularly the Chinese or the Malays, or not?

LUTKINS: Not at all, no, no. I think they (the British) kept an eye on and knew what we were doing, but in fact they encouraged me. Having just come from language school, I was eager to try to continue my Chinese (although the Chinese spoken there was not what I had learned in Peking). So I did have contact, to a certain extent, with some of the Chinese leaders, who were really not very political. It was a commercial class. But I made one or two speeches in Chinese at some of the Chinese schools in Penang. The resident commissioner, a Britisher, congratulated me on it, even felt delighted because I

was taking an anti-Communist line. They obviously knew what I was doing. I made it a point, of course, of working very closely with the British, obviously, because they knew far more about what was going on there than I could ever hope to know.

Penang happened to have been a place where the population was predominantly Chinese with almost no Malays. There were only a few Indians. The rest of the area, however, the provinces on the mainland like Perak and Kelantan, were the two main ones that I had supervision over. And I made a point of traveling to them and meeting the Malay officials nominally in charge, although the British still held the reins of power. I had to work with them, too.

Q: Were you beginning to feel any of the heat from attacks on our China policy, because you'd been associated, or on your reporting? I'm talking about McCarthyism.

LUTKINS: No, none whatever. Never that I experienced. I was too junior, for one thing, and not in a very controversial area, for another. But I was certainly reporting freely and as honestly as I could.

Q: How did you see the situation there? What was the thrust of your reporting? That the British were eventually going to get out, or that they could keep it?

LUTKINS: I think I would have been presumptuous to have tried to comment on that. The main focus of British rule was in Kuala Lumpur, where my colleague, Hank Van Oss, was doing that to the extent that he could, plus Singapore. No, my main thrust was just interviewing and seeing the people who were in present control, the British, plus some of the leading Malays who promised to be leaders in the future.

It was impossible, at the height of the emergency, to predict when, if ever, the British were going to grant independence. I know many of the British certainly were resisting this idea--the usual idea that the Malays couldn't stand on their own, and that if they left the country, the Malays and the Chinese would be at each other's throats.

I had no vision that the thing was going to happen quite so quickly as it did. In fact, when I left there in '52, I was rather pessimistic, frankly, as to how things were going to develop. I felt fairly sure they would get on top of the insurgent problem, but I was pessimistic as to the future of Malaya in terms of the difficulty of the Chinese and the Malays getting along together.

There had been, of course, a long history of problems there, with the Chinese dominating the industry and commerce to the extent that the British didn't, and the Malays being rooted to the land and having some of the old traditional power of the Malay rulers, plus a favored position in the British local bureaucracy.

The Malays were very fortunate in getting a man as their first prime minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was on good terms with the Chinese, and who was enlightened enough to realize that it was important for the two communities to work together. So that

even if the Malays have dominated the situation politically and militarily since independence, the Chinese have been willing to go along.

Interestingly, I think I was one of the first official Americans to meet Tunku Abdul Rahman, who came from the royal family of the State of Kedah, which is near Penang. I think I may have been one of the first American officials to entertain him after he was elected as head of this fairly new organization called the United Malay National Organization. Most people regarded him as a bit of a lightweight and a figurehead, but he certainly turned out very well in the final analysis.

Q: Well, you left Penang in 1952, is that right?

LUTKINS: Before I go from Penang, there is an anecdote that I think is amusing. I don't know if it's any earthshaking revelation or not, but anyway.

In the course of one of the trips that I took around my consular district, I stopped off in Kuala Lumpur for a night or two, staying with my colleague, Hank Van Oss, who was the consul there. And it so happened that at that particular juncture there was a visiting congressional group, consisting of then Representative John F. Kennedy, his brother, Robert, who had just gotten out of Virginia law school, and one of his sisters, I don't remember which. They were invited to dinner by Hank Van Oss. I was staying with him, so I was there, too, and one of other members of Hank Van Oss's staff. His wife was in the hospital at the time.

It turned out to be a rather lively evening, because then Representative Kennedy (who was in Malaya after a trip that had started in England, I think, and came all the way around by way of India and various other places) was rather critical. He thought, if I recall correctly, that the only place that was doing reasonably well, among the places he had visited, was India. He had a very isolationist bent to his remarks. It reminded me very much of his father, Joseph Kennedy, during his years in London. So I got my hackles up arguing against it.

On the subject of Malaya, he thought we were paying too much for Malayan tin and rubber. He thought that they were ripping off the United States on this. And my argument was that it was better to let countries like this earn their way by trade, rather than have to be impoverished and then have to receive aid from us. He didn't care much for that line either.

But anyway, during dinner Hank Van Oss and I were arguing against him in certain respects. At some point during the dinner, he drew himself up short and said to Hank and me, "Well, it's obvious I have nothing further to learn from you." The rest of the dinner was rather chilly.

When he got down to Singapore (I'm told by my friends, including Oscar Armstrong who was there), he apparently complained about our attitude.

It was the year after that, in '52, that he was elected to the Senate. I was amazed to find out that he, all of a sudden, had become an internationalist, not an isolationist at all. I like to think that possibly something that we said might have influenced him, but I guess he found much more important reasons for changing his views.

Q: He probably read the political winds a little bit.

LUTKINS: And then, a very amusing follow up. It was when I was in the Senior Seminar, in '61-'62. At the very end of the session, as frequently happened in those days (I'm not sure whether it still does), we had a meeting with the President in the Rose Garden. As we were introduced to him, Kennedy said, "Lutkins, we've met before, haven't we?"

I said, "Yes, sir, at Kuala Lumpur."

And then he said, "And where is Van Oss now?"

He obviously had been briefed. But to the best of my knowledge he never held the episode against me.

**HENDRIK VAN OSS
Consul/Principal Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1951-1953)**

Hendrik Van Oss was born in 1917 in Pennsylvania and graduated from Princeton University. He joined the Department of State in 1942 and the Foreign Service in 1945. His career included positions in China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Austria, Uganda, Mozambique, New Zealand, the Congo, and Washington, DC. Mr. Van Oss was interviewed by Lillian Mullins in 1991.

Q: We now move on to the period of 1951-53 when he was Consul and Principal Officer in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya. When did you arrive in Malaya?

VAN OSS: Well, I arrived in April, 1951. I was sent first to Singapore because Kuala Lumpur was a subsidiary post to Singapore, the Consulate General there. This was a somewhat strange situation because while the Singapore Consul General was my immediate supervisor, I was instructed to report directly to the Department and simply send Singapore copies of what I produced. This led to all sorts of problems because the Acting Consul General at Singapore was under the sway, or listened very closely to Malcolm MacDonald who was the British Commissioner General for the whole area. He had very pronounced views on what was going on in the Federation of Malaya. I, however, was under the High Commissioner of the Federation of Malaya who was actively engaged in the very things that Malcolm MacDonald was also covering but had a very different view of these matters.

Anyway, I stopped off in Singapore and was assigned first to attend as U.S. observer a regional rice conference there sponsored by the British. I did this for about a week and reported on it. Bob Huffman was Economic Officer in Singapore and he was an observer along with me. We wrote a long despatch on it. The conference was highly interesting. I had known nothing about rice, but I learned a lot and came to realize how important rice was to the countries represented at the conference. For example, the Ceylonese representative would try to figure out how much rice India wanted to import. He wanted to be sure they didn't import so much that his country wouldn't be able to get what it needed. There was quite a bit of bargaining and negotiating.

When the conference was over I prepared to go up to Kuala Lumpur. Those of you who were in the Foreign Service, may recall that at one time informational material on what the Foreign Service was like used to say, "Now you may be posted to London, Paris or Rome, but you also may be assigned to Kuala Lumpur." Well, I was assigned to Kuala Lumpur and at the time was not at all happy about it; I wanted to go to Vienna. Needless to say my wants were not paid attention to and I ended up in Kuala Lumpur.

This had been a very small post, opened, if I remember correctly, by Bill Blue four or five years earlier, possibly around 1947. Dick Poole was my immediate predecessor there. He and his whole staff lived in one house which was also the Consulate office. It was on Ampang Road, right next to tin tailings and an open pit tin mine. A nice old house with four large bedrooms upstairs, it was completely open with only shutters to keep out the elements. We slept under mosquito netting. Larry Nichols was the public affairs officer and was in one room with his wife and a young daughter. One of the clerks was in another room and another clerk in the third room. Dick Poole himself was in the fourth bedroom. The office took up all the downstairs except for the dining room.

Dick Poole asked me if I would mind if he left his seven dogs with me. All of them except one were of the female gender and able to breed, which they did regularly. I said, "No, please get rid of them." He tried and got rid of about three of them, but there were four left and I eventually ended up by keeping three of the four. Then I got rid of another one and retained two, including the one male. The female bred several times to our dismay, although I tried to keep her from doing so. So we ended up with a third dog, one of her puppies.

It was an impossible situation because here was this whole small group jammed together, all of them living right on top of each other and working in the same building. I protested vehemently before I went out there and finally got the Department to agree that Anne, who was expecting our first child, and I would have the house to ourselves. They were planning to move the office down town anyway, which they did a few weeks after I got there. We found much more suitable housing for the secretaries, clerks and the USIS head.

The new office was in what was called the Loke Yew building. The Loke Yew building was the skyscraper in Kuala Lumpur. It was seven stories high and far and away the

tallest building in the place. Now, I understand, nobody knows where it is and there are dozens of buildings that are at least three or four times taller. But in those days it was the giant. It was right beside the river from which Kuala Lumpur got its name. I think it means something like "muddy confluence of rivers." Two rivers met forming one river just at that point and there was a mosque right in the angle of the Y.

Q: Do you remember the names of those rivers?

VAN OSS: I would have to look that up.

This was in the pre air conditioning days. The only concession we made to the hot sun was to have tinted windows. But I remember that in those days we were much more formal in our working habits than the Foreign Service is today. We all wore suits and ties. Sometimes we would take our jackets off, but I perspired through at least three suits a day, especially if I went out in the evening. It was very, very humid. The heat was perhaps in the 85-90 range, but the humidity must have been close to 100 percent.

Q: Is Kuala Lumpur close to sea level?

VAN OSS: I think so, yes. There are hills around it but it is almost at sea level. There is a spine of mountains that goes down the center of the Malayan Peninsula, but Kuala Lumpur was not very high up.

The reason that I think of Kuala Lumpur as one of the most interesting posts I have ever had and, perhaps, one of the most important posts as well, is that it was then the scene of the third hottest war or military conflict in the world. The Korean war was going on, next came the Vietnamese conflict, and then you had the Malayan "emergency" which was a very, very troublesome affair for the British.

The Federation of Malaya was then a British dependency. The British High Commissioner was the top man. He had been faced since 1948 with a communist insurrection which had been started by Communist Chinese who were holed up in the jungles of Malaya. For years they made the life of the British and the Malays miserable. There weren't very many of them. I think during the period I was there, there were some 2000 or 2500 Communist Party members. There was the MRLA or Malayan Races Liberation Army, which numbered about 4000. Then there was a group of from 10,000-30,000 called the Min Yuen comprising the supporting infrastructure which gave the MRLA and the Communist Party their provisions. The Min Yuen was the "water in which the fish swam," to use Mao's famous metaphor. In other words at the most there were 4000 or 5000 fighting guerrillas. These managed to keep something on the order of 150,000 to 200,000 armed forces busy until the mid-fifties, long after I left.

Q: These forces were British?

VAN OSS: Well, there were some British, about 25,000. There were another 25,000 from other countries in the British Commonwealth like Fiji Islands, South Africa, etc. Then

there were about 50,000 police and 50,000 militia and say another 50,000-60,000 in what was called the home guard.

Q: And those were Malaysians?

VAN OSS: Yes of one sort or another, mostly Malays. The Communist guerrillas were surely 98 percent Chinese. They had what they called a "Malay" regiment stationed somewhere but these regiments were the size of battalions at the most...500 men, let's say. I don't think there were that many Malay communists. This was a Chinese movement and one reason why it never succeeded. It eventually failed because the majority of population did not support the communists. There are more Malays in Malaya than Chinese, not many more but about two and a half million Malays, to about two million Chinese and then another 500,000-600,000 Indians, Ceylonese and indigenous people. The Malays were always on the side of the British, so what little support the communists had, had to come from the Chinese community. Most of the Chinese community was pro-Nationalist China and supporters of Chiang Kai-shek. Many of them were businessmen and the city Chinese were certainly overwhelmingly pro-Nationalist and anti-Communist. So there wasn't very much support in the country for these guerrillas.

But the one thing they had going for them was the environment. They knew how to operate in the jungle. They had been trained to fight the Japanese...the British had helped train some of them. They made their camps deep in these jungles or rain forests. Malaya was in those days at least 80 percent covered by dense forests. For example, a plane flying over the forests would spot the trickle of smoke coming out of the trees and would assume that down there was some kind of a guerrilla camp. This would be about 20 miles from Kuala Lumpur, let's say. The plane would go back and report the location and a detachment of troops would be sent out to get to the camp. They would get there about two weeks later because of the difficulty of hacking their way through the jungle and by that time the camp would be empty. So finding the guerrillas was very difficult and required a very strong intelligence effort on the part of the British. They had to be quite innovative in order to smoke these people out. Some of the tactics they adopted were used by us and the French in Vietnam in succeeding years.

The High Commissioner when I got there was a gentleman by the name of Sir Henry Gurney. A very fine gentleman. Very, very helpful. He told me when I called on him the first time, "Anything you want from us we will give you. Any information we have you may have." And he was as good as his word. I had weekly meetings with one of his assistants who would pass official reports over to me which I would take back to my office and use in my own reports to Washington. At that time I think we had just about as much information on military operations as there was to get. What the British knew, we knew. I don't mean every last intelligence operation and that sort of thing, but I think they were very forthcoming. Sir Henry himself certainly was very cooperative.

The security situation in Kuala Lumpur was rather sensitive. In fact, when I was in Singapore, Bill Langdon, who was then Consul General, offered to sell me one of his Mauser pistols. He said I would need it because every time I went outside Kuala Lumpur

I should be armed. I bought this thing and have been saddled with it ever since. I have never used it or fired it in anger. In fact, I never carried it anywhere. But I also had a .38 caliber police positive which I did carry with me on occasion.

Q: *What is a police positive?*

VAN OSS: A police positive is a .38 caliber, short muzzled revolver, what the police used to carry in those days. A six shot revolver.

Q: *Was it that dangerous on the street?*

VAN OSS: Oh, yes. Well, not so much on the city streets, but if you went into the bush or forest outside the town. I didn't carry it everywhere I went, only whenever I went out on an expedition of some sort. There was one place you could go safely by car and that was Port Swettenham which was the seaport on the west coast about an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur. You could also drive up to Frazer's Hill, which was in the mountains. It was a resort which people went to to escape the heat. Indeed when you went there you found yourself in a little bit of merry old England. Lovely cottages with beautiful flowers. It was about 70 degrees rather than 85, dry, and went down to say 60 at night. It was really a wonderful change. There was afternoon tea and a log fire in the fireplace even though it was a bit too warm for that.

Apart from those two places, anywhere you went...when you went out to the tin mines or to the rubber plantations...you always made sure that you were armed and that nobody knew you were going...that you didn't tell anyone by telephone. If you went out into the countryside you were usually required to have a military escort of some sort.

In fact, my predecessor one time was sleeping soundly in his house when shots rang out right on Ampang Road. He got up and remembered he had locked his revolver in the office safe, so he made his way downstairs in the dark and managed to open the safe and get his gun out. But by that time everything was all over. It turned out that one of the guards had had a nightmare or something like that and had shot off his rifle. The other guards heard his shot and fired off in all directions.

Q: *These 4000 or so guerrillas were able to harass this whole huge country?*

VAN OSS: Yes. It wasn't so much actual harassment as the knowledge that they could do so if they wished.

They permeated the place. They were down in Johore in the southern part, in Malacca, Selangor, everywhere except the main cities. They didn't thrive in the cities and as far as we know they didn't have much support in the cities. But they did terrorize the rubber tappers, the villagers...I'll go into this a little bit later.

But I wanted to mention the security aspect because it was brought home to us with shocking clarity one day in early October when we heard the rumor that Sir Henry

Gurney had been assassinated. It turned out to be true. He had been ambushed on his way to Frazer's Hill. It was determined that the people in the ambush knew, probably by tapping his telephone, he was coming up there because they were hidden around a certain bend in the road and several vehicles were allowed to go through without harassment. They knew exactly when and where Sir Henry Gurney's vehicle would be. I think he always had two military vehicles accompany him. One of them had to stop for some reason or other. I have forgotten whether it broke down or whether there was an obstruction on the road. The other one, the leading one, went through the ambush and then the ambush closed in on Sir Henry Gurney. They started firing. He had his wife with him and told her to get down on the floor. Then he left the car to draw fire away from her--I have no doubt that he tried to do this because he was a very courageous and honorable gentleman. They got him. He died in a ditch. If he had stayed in the car, according to the police chief at that time, he probably would have survived.

So that was a shocker to all of us. His place was eventually taken by Sir Gerald Templar, who I will have quite a bit to say about later on.

What I want to say about Gurney is that he and his director of operations, Sir Harold Briggs, were responsible for some very farsighted and interesting policies that were over a long period of time expected to win this guerrilla war. Briefly, the Briggs plan was to get the Chinese squatters...well I guess I have to go back a bit.

The Chinese entered this country about 70 years before this, mainly as businessmen or as tin miners. A lot of them came in and as the mines wore out they became squatters on land all throughout the peninsula. These squatters were the main people from whom the Min Yuen got their recruits and from which the MRLA got their supplies. These people had no protection, it was very difficult with them squatting all over the place. So the Briggs plan in brief was to bring them into areas that would be fortified. They would be given houses, there would be schools and they would be protected by armed guards.

This eventually became the strategic hamlet program in Vietnam. Sir Robert Thompson, the famous expert who advised our people in Vietnam, was the man who actually drew this up for Sir Harold Briggs and Sir Henry Gurney.

After Gurney was assassinated, Sir Gerald Templar came in and applied muscle to this whole policy and drove it through to a successful conclusion. Sir Harold Briggs left shortly after Sir Henry Gurney was assassinated and his place was taken by Sir Rob Lockhart, who had been the international head of the Boy Scouts, among other things.

While Sir Harold Briggs was in effect the brains and muscle behind the Gurney policy, Sir Rob Lockhart was completely eclipsed by Sir Gerald Templar, Sir Henry's successor. Sir Gerald Templar was really quite a remarkable man, one of the most remarkable I have been associated with. He was a former hurdler, a slender person. He had been head of British military intelligence, I believe. He had been one of the youngest full generals in World War II and had been the only general to have been wounded by a piano.

He was riding in his staff car and there was a truck in front of him carrying a piano. The truck rode over a mine and the piano went up in the air and came down on top of poor Sir Gerald Templar. As a result he always had trouble with his back. He wasn't crippled, but he was rather physically frail. But spiritually, very strong. He was very outspoken, lavish in his use of profanity, and quite an interesting person in every respect.

I remember him telling me at one point that he should have been born in the 18th or 19th century. He said, "If indeed I had been born at that time, the first thing I would do would be to invade Siam, and the second thing I would do would be to invade Singapore and take over Phoenix Park."

A little explanation of this. The communist guerrillas had safe havens in Thailand. When things got too hot for them in the Federation, they would just disappear over the border and go to their safe havens in the jungles of Thailand. So you just couldn't put your fingers on them. First of all they were dispersed and secondly, even if you knew where they were, they were much more mobile than the British forces so they couldn't really get at them. Thailand did not look kindly on hot pursuit or anything like that, so Sir Gerald was always having trouble with Thailand.

Phoenix Park in Singapore was Malcolm MacDonald's headquarters. MacDonald was on a completely different track from Sir Gerald Templar. The son of former Labor Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald, he was a liberal, a very nice man. He was very much interested in the Chinese and had very good Chinese contacts in Singapore from whom he was getting a pro-Chinese point of view. Not the point of view of the communist guerrillas, but that of the Chinese merchants. Sir Gerald Templar had little patience with any Chinese. He wanted them to shape up or ship out. Every time Malcolm MacDonald had suggestions as to how one should be careful about Chinese sensitivities, etc., Templar would gnash his teeth, dig in and do what he darn well pleased anyway. The two weren't actually hostile to each other, but they were just thinking along different lines. Templar was a pragmatist and military man and he wanted to wind up the guerrilla war quickly. He was going to protect people and force them into these new villages and make sure they went there whether they wanted to or not. He had little patience for Malcolm MacDonald's liberal, anthropological approach.

Q: So after you moved into the new Consulate premises in the skyscraper in Kuala Lumpur, what was the size of your staff?

VAN OSS: I will have to count it up. It was a pretty small office. I had a young Vice Consul named David Dean, who was consular officer, and deputy political reporter. Kuala Lumpur was his first post and he later went on to fame and fortune and became head of our mission responsible for relations with Taiwan after we recognized Communist China. My economic officer was first Bob Myer and then Dick Peters. We had a political attaché named Bob Wall. We had two secretaries and a code clerk. The head of USIS was Larry Nichols and later Jack Gertz who had a deputy, whose name I can't remember at this point. Then we had an administrative officer. There were about eight or ten local employees.

The office, itself, was certainly adequate. We had a security area where only Americans were allowed to be because even in those days we were very security conscious. At one time at Bob Wall's urging, I ordered some carbines so that when and if we ever had to evacuate our post we would have a means of protecting ourselves. As you know all offices in those days had to have an evacuation plan and we had one. Unfortunately, the Department or somebody went overboard and we found ourselves the proud possessors of no less than sixteen carbines, all of them packed up in some foul smelling grease. Under Bob Wall's tuition, because he was the only one, I think, who knew anything about weaponry, we locked all the doors, pulled the blinds, because no one was supposed to know we had these carbines, and started to clean them up. I think we got through four and by that time I was thoroughly sick and tired of the whole business. We all stank of this oil, our clothes were ruined. I called a halt and said that we would keep twelve as they were and use the four we had cleaned. After all there were probably only four of us who could shoot anyway.

We were on the third floor, but my memory may be faulty there, and the USIS was downstairs on the second floor. The work that we did...I was delighted with this post because I could get up in the morning and say to myself, "What am I going to do today? Shall I cover the guerrilla emergency? Shall I go down and get briefed by the military? Shall I go downtown and talk to some of my Chinese and Malay contacts?" It was like an embassy in microcosm. It had everything that an embassy had except that there wasn't as much of it. I just was happy to be in charge and responsible for what was going on.

We did a lot of economic reporting. Malaya in those days exported tin and rubber to the United States. These were their main exports. They also had palm oil and the usual other tropical products. But those two were far and away their main products. Kuala Lumpur itself was right in the middle of important tin mining operations. We had a fair sized American community...several dozen at least. They were largely concerned with tin mining.

Pacific Tin Company had its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. Norman Cleaveland was its President and Managing Director. He became a very close friend, was a great fellow. Eventually he wrote a book called "Bang, Bang In Ampang," in which he was kind enough to mention me once or twice. He had a big gold dredge outside of Kuala Lumpur which was working a tin mine. He had about a half a dozen Americans working for him and I was close to all of them.

We also had an American engineer on the east coast in the Kuantan area of Pahang. There was a big iron mountain there and he was in charge of the mining operation.

There were some American missionaries in Kuala Lumpur. One was a fellow named Gunner Theilman, who was a Methodist minister, a very fine fellow. He didn't drink or smoke, of course. But he was extremely kind and nice. And there were several other Americans attached to his mission. I would suppose there were several dozen Americans in all.

One of the first things we had to do when we first arrived was to throw a July Fourth party. This was 1951 and the 175th anniversary of American independence was being celebrated. Our party was a big one by our standards, with something like 300 guests. Anne was pregnant at the time and had to stand in the receiving line to greet all the guests as they came in. That was the first social event that we hosted. There was a very thriving social life, lots of entertaining to do. There were contacts to have lunch with. Lots of people were inviting us over. A typical Foreign Service post where you are on duty literally twenty-four hours a day. You get very little sleep. That, plus the heat, plus the fact that there was no air conditioning at all, and that the monsoons leach vitamins out of food, made all of us get physically run-down and lose weight. It was both physically and mentally wearing. I suppose the fact that we were constantly worried about security matters too, had something to do with the tension we were under.

There was always a great deal to report. We also had many visitors, important visitors. We had, for example, at one time Justice Douglas. This was quite amusing because he arrived and came off the plane (reporters were all out at the airport en masse to meet him) wearing an old fedora hat, a dirty old shirt open halfway down his chest, khaki pants of which one pocket had torn open, and carrying a canvass water bag. In other words he was dressed for the wilds. He was not there on a protocol visit. The reporters looked past him. I recognized him and greeted him. He had a friend with him, Gilbert something. He stayed about a week with us and was a delightful visitor. It is a shame that his last days in the Supreme Court were so unpleasant because when I saw him in Malaya in 1952, he was all man, vigorous and interested in everything.

One interesting anecdote: when Sir Gerald Templar heard Justice Douglas was in town, he invited him to dinner. I said, "Yes, I am sure he would like to come, but I don't think he will have brought his tuxedo with him." (All dinners at King's House were black tie affairs.) Lady Templar said, "Oh, I am sure you could find something for him." I said, "Well, I probably could, but I am not sure he would be terribly happy about wearing somebody else's tuxedo, but I will try." So I did try. He had a pair of dark pants and I found a white dinner jacket and a black tie for him. But we couldn't find black shoes. So we went to the dinner.

The format at King's House is that all guests assemble downstairs and then at the appropriate moment Sir Gerald and his wife descend the grand stairway and go around and shake hands with each guest. So, as Lady Templar came to...

[end tape 3]

...Justice Douglas, her eyes started at his face, then came down to his black tie, white jacket and black trousers. She said, "Ah, I see that you found something and all is well." He was blushing. Then her eyes fell down to his brown shoes and she did a double take and went on to the next person. He was trying, as he said, to get his shoes under the carpet to hide them.

One thing that bothered me about that dinner. The guest of honor was Lord Tweedsmuir, who was the son of John Buchan, the author of "The Thirty-Nine Steps." He was a mere lad in his early twenties. He sat at the Templar's right and Justice Douglas sat way down "behind the salt" opposite me. Justice Douglas had been a presidential candidate and was a Supreme Court Justice, and I thought surely British protocol could have done a little bit better for him. On the other hand he was an unexpected guest so I guess we had to make allowances. Anyway, neither of us said anything or even thought about it at the time.

We had other guests. We had Thomas Dewey but nothing of great moment happened there, except that he couldn't hear anything when he got off the plane. We had somebody or other Foster, then Under Secretary for Defense. I remember he was supposed to arrive at a certain time to go to lunch at King's House and his plane arrived an hour and a half late coming from Burma or some such place.

We had John F. Kennedy and Bobby, who had just graduated from law school, and one of their sisters. But the sister never showed up in Kuala Lumpur, I think she stayed in Singapore.

Q: Why were they all coming to Kuala Lumpur?

VAN OSS: Well, because this was an interesting place. It had the third hottest war as I told you and economically it was very important. Tin and rubber were both very important to us in those post-war periods.

Q: Was John Kennedy in Congress at that time?

VAN OSS: He was a Congressman at that time. I am ashamed to say that although John F. Kennedy entered Princeton the same time that I did, spent several months there and lived in the same dormitory that I lived in, I never knew him. I didn't know at the time he came to Malaya that he had ever gone to Princeton. He got some blood disease, perhaps hepatitis I believe, left Princeton after a few months and subsequently went to Harvard. I may say that if I had known he was a classmate, his visit would have been a far more pleasant experience than it turned out to be.

Adlai Stevenson visited Malaya after he had been defeated in the 1952 presidential election. I may interject that all the British wanted Adlai Stevenson to win, even Sir Gerald Templar. He liked and was a great admirer of Ike, but as an intellectually superior person himself, he thought Stevenson's speeches were great stuff and that he would be a much better president than Eisenhower. Stevenson came with Barry Bingham, the head of the Louisville Courier Journal. Anne's parents were great friends of the Bingham and I knew them reasonably well. He came with Bill Attwood, who was then one of the editors of Look magazine and later became Ambassador to Guinea and Kenya. There were several others whom I can't recall.

I might mention one little episode that gave me a gray hair or two. I had arranged to have Stevenson taken out by helicopter over the jungle so that he could get an idea of what the

terrain was like. There were only two operating large helicopters at that time, which we had supplied the British. My boss from Singapore, Chuck Baldwin, was up for the occasion and there was no room for yours truly on either helicopter. So I stayed morosely at home while Adlai and all the others went off on these two helicopters.

I had been at my desk for a couple of hours when the phone rang. General Templar's aide was on the phone and he said, "Hank, there has been a slight to-do." I said, "What do you mean, a slight to-do?" "Well there has been a spot of trouble on one of the helicopters." I began to tense up a bit. I said, "There has been? Which helicopter?" "Oh, I'm not sure," he said, "Don't panic. I'm sure everything is all right. But as a matter of fact, one of them has gone down." And I said, "Which one?" I was getting highly excited at this point. He said, "As a matter of fact it is the one with Stevenson on it." I really began to sweat, wondering where I could find a flag to cover the casket, etc. A few minutes later the aide called again and said, "Nothing to worry about, the other helicopter has landed and taken Adlai Stevenson off. Nobody is hurt, everything is all right."

Well, what happened was that the main rotor stopped whirling on Stevenson's helicopter. Its descent was slowed by the tail rotor which was still turning. The pilot with great skill brought his machine down in a small clearing in the jungle and everybody was safe. But boy, I was trying to figure out how I could have explained why I had allowed the Democratic presidential candidate to risk his life in a helicopter in a zone of hostilities.

Q: Without going with him too.

VAN OSS: Without being there to help him. My boss (Chuck Baldwin) was there to hold his hand.

The point to all this is that Kuala Lumpur was on the milk run for many prominent people. We did have a number of visitors of one sort or another and that always made for tough work as any Foreign Service officer knows. When you have an important visitor, a Congressman or political figure, you have to do what you can to see that his visit is successful and that takes time. When your facilities and resources are limited that means that you have to do a lot of things yourself. The rest of the work goes on so you have to squeeze them in in some way. So we were very, very busy.

Another man I might mention was Donald MacGillivray, the Deputy High Commissioner under Templar. When I first saw him I thought, dear me, here is the epitome of the British public school, wimp-type Britisher. He was thin with a prominent Adam's apple and looked as though a breath of air would blow him over. But I couldn't have been more wrong. He turned out to be a very fine person. He supplied the human touch that Sir Gerald Templar had but kept under wraps.

He was the one who did most of the traveling throughout the peninsula. He was kind enough to take me along with him on several occasions. Otherwise it would have been very difficult for me to get to some places. Everything was laid on for him, and I just piggy-backed along and saw a lot of things that I otherwise might have had great

difficulty seeing. We visited a number of rubber plantations. We stayed in a Malaya Kampol. The Malays often lived in houses on stilts. They built their houses up off the ground so that air could circulate and domesticated animals were kept underneath. We spent a night or two in one of those. We visited the British advisers in the various Malay principalities.

I might point out now at this point that the Federation of Malaya consisted of nine Sultanate states and two settlements: Penang and Malacca. The nine Sultanate states were ruled by sultans. The British had a special arrangement with each sultan who had his own governmental structure, with his own administrators headed by what they called the *mentri bazar*, who was in effect the prime minister of that particular Sultanate state. The *mentri bazar* was the man who really ran the state, the sultan was the ceremonial head and ruler, but really didn't have many substantive functions. I would say that the sultan of Johore, if I remember correctly, was somewhat of an exception to that rule. He was a bit more independent and feisty than the others.

I wanted also to say that the Consulate in Kuala Lumpur was responsible for the southern part of the Malayan Peninsula. I had a Foreign Service colleague in Penang who covered the Sultanate states of Kedah, Perak and Kelantan. I had Selangor, Trengganu, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Malacca and Johore. I don't know why the distribution was so uneven, but I had a much larger office than he. I think he was the only officer at his post. Larry Lutkins was consul at Penang at that time.

One thing I probably should start talking about now is the independence movement that was going on in Malaya, which was highly important and has gotten lost in the shuffle in this tape. The British were obviously at that point resigned to the fact that eventually Malaya would become independent. But they wanted to be sure that they would be independent in the image that they envisaged for it and not as a communist satellite. And don't forget that these were days just after China had been taken over by the Communists, North Korea had invaded South Korea, and Ho Chi-Minh and his Viet Minh were fighting the French. The common belief in those days was that the Soviet Comintern had orchestrated all these conflicts and that the Malayan conflict was part of the communist master plan to conquer the world.

Q: *Well, they said it was.*

VAN OSS: Yes. We all believed it.

In any event the British wanted to be sure that this guerrilla insurgency did not succeed. So they conceived this Briggs plan of creating new villages which were established not only for the protection of the squatters but also for their education. It would put them in contact for the first time with schools. There would be medical facilities. It would create a medium for conducting elections and for teaching people the rudiments of democracy.

But, as always, there were people in Malaya who felt the British weren't moving fast enough. There were a number of Malays and Chinese who felt that Britain should move

faster towards giving up its hold over Malaya. Malaya was not a colony, incidentally, the Sultanate states were all protectorates. The only colonies were Penang and Malacca, the two settlements I mentioned earlier.

One very interesting person who was being groomed to lead an independent movement and take over the country was a man named Dato Onn bin Jafaar. Dato Onn had been the head of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), which was a nationalist Malay movement. No Chinese members. While he was head of UMNO he was very popular. He was a good rabble rouser and potential leader. Also he was a favorite of Malcolm MacDonald who felt that he represented the voice of the future in Malaya.

The British made a great mistake. They felt they had to bolster Onn's status so they made him, as I recall, minister for home affairs in the government that existed at that time. In other words, they took him out of his role of nationalist leader and made him in effect a British bureaucrat and expected him to keep his leadership and following and remain the political force that he had been up to that time.

This was a naive thing that the British did constantly at that time. The minute they saw people who they thought were promising political figures whom they approved of, they tried to help them by giving them jobs as administrators, not realizing that although this might have improved their knowledge of how government works, the British were really giving them the "kiss of death." They were destroying their political base among the masses, who didn't like the British or persons who collaborated with them.

As a result Dato Onn, who had been moving along up to this point as the British had hoped he would, was compromised with his base of popular Malay support. Part of the British vision was a cooperative venture between Malays and Chinese, because the Malays couldn't run the country alone. They didn't have the drive, or knowledge. They needed the help and support of the Chinese who did have the drive and were the businessmen, the pragmatists.

At one point Dato Onn resigned or lost the leadership of UMNO. He formed his own party, the Independence of Malaya Party. This was going to be a party which would cooperate with the Chinese and other ethnic groups. The main Chinese honcho of the period was Tan Chen-lok, a wealthy person Malcolm MacDonald had cultivated. Tan did have a great deal of prestige among the Chinese community. But in forming this new party, Dato Onn, in trying to include all the factions in Malaya--the Chinese, Malays, Indians, etc--cut himself loose from the Malays and besides, did not win Tan Chen-lok over. In essence the only people who really supported him were the Indians, a very small minority.

Then the British gave him the final nudge to oblivion by appointing him minister for home affairs and giving him all these administrative duties. To cut a long story short, Dato Onn's image plummeted. He realized this and got crankier and crankier. I saw him many times and he would get madder and madder at life in general. He found himself in a situation that he just couldn't handle, couldn't control.

Tunku Abdul Rahman, an hereditary Malay prince, took over and was elected head of the United Malay National Organization. The British at first made light of Tunku Abdul Rahman because although he had been well educated he never got very good marks. He managed to get a law degree, but they scoffed at that. Some people considered him rather a clown. I found him a very nice guy. I didn't consider him politically very charismatic at that point, but I am not a Malay and Malays apparently did find him appealing because he became the head of UMNO, eventually formed some affiliation with Tan Chen-lok and the Chinese, and eventually took over as prime minister of Malaya when it got its independence in 1957. He became a tremendous force.

But at the time I was there this was not at all apparent. One knew he was in charge of UMNO but apart from being an awfully nice person he had not shown all that much political skill.

The British, as I say, didn't like him, but he was the one who ended up on top and they had to work with him eventually. All the people who became ministers remained bureaucrats. Dato Nik Kamil, for example, was the Mentri Bazar of Kelantan. He was a fine, very intelligent fellow. The British appointed him minister for something or other and he eventually became ambassador to the United States. He had a fine career, but my point is that the British had probably envisaged him as an eventual prime minister and he never quite blossomed into that.

I want to say something about Norman Cleaveland, the head of Pacific Tin Company. He had been in Malaya for a long time. He had seen, long before the British, that whatever was going on in Malaya was something important and dangerous and something that had to be watched carefully. In the 1947-48 period a gentleman named Gent was the British High Commissioner. When the first evidence of terrorist activity took place, some tin miners, including Norman Cleaveland, and some rubber plantation owners came to Gent and said that something had to be done. He said, "Are you gentleman sure that you are treating your laborers properly?" He thought the guerrilla uprising was just a labor movement.

Well, Norman Cleaveland lost patience, chartered a large plane, bought weapons I think with his own money, flew them in and armed his miners. As a result they survived and were not taken over or run over by the guerrillas. Sir Gent was replaced by Sir Henry Gurney, who knew very well what was going on and who was responsible in the first instance for the policies that eventually Sir Gerald Templar carried through to a successful conclusion.

Norman Cleaveland was really a great fellow. He had been in the back field on Ernie Nevers' undefeated football team at Stanford, graduating in 1924. He had been a member of the first and only, up to that point, Olympic U.S. rugby team, going to the Olympics in France. The team eventually won the gold medal.

Norman's mother was one of the first women ever to go out to New Mexico. She settled in the Sante Fe area and wrote a book, which I think was called, "No Life For A Lady," which has been very popular, has run through several editions and is still in print. He, himself, was a bachelor when we knew him in Malaya, in his late 40s. He had gained fame there by rescuing some young lady who got caught on a field by a Brahman bull. He rushed over to the bull, grabbed it by the horns and wrestled it to the ground in true cowboy style, a technique he had learned in Santa Fe, having grown up in the far West.

He was a great admirer of Herbert Hoover, which will give you some idea of his political inclinations. I used to consider myself somewhat of a liberal in those days. We used to have great arguments. He used to take me on pig hunts. We would go out early in the morning from Kuala Lumpur with a group of other men, dogs and beaters. It was dark. I never could fire a gun accurately and went out just to get the atmosphere, although he made me carry my police positive .38 caliber revolver, just in case.

We would go into a hiding place in the bush while the beaters were beating up the pigs. Then Norman would get arguing about economic matters and what was wrong with the United States. His pet hate was Democratic Senator Symington because Symington in his Senate Committee in Washington accused the Malayan tin miners of "gouging" the American taxpayer. Of course, the price of tin was indeed high, but these tin miners were mining tin under rather difficult conditions. Tin was in great demand at that point so the price rose. I don't think the tin miners themselves had very much to do with it. Then Senator Lyndon Johnson echoed Symington's sentiments, to Norman's disgust.

Norman would get riled up over whatever the subject might be and you couldn't get him off the subject of tin, once he got started. So there we would be out in the boondocks of the jungle listening to the beaters in the distance, Norman declaiming what should be done with people like Symington, and a pig would jump out of the bush and run across our path and he would say, "Uh oh, there's a pig. Just a moment." By the time he got his gun armed, the pig would be gone and he would resume his economic diatribe without a loss of breath.

He stayed in Malaya quite a long time after we left. How long exactly, I don't know. I think he was there when the country became independent in 1957. To our amazement he got married while there in the late fifties to a girl who was at least 25 years younger than he. I think she was the daughter of a British admiral. They had several daughters. He kept a home in Sante Fe and one in England. At the moment they are separated. He is living in Sante Fe and is a very senior citizen, being in his early nineties. He is still full of fun, as feisty as ever and as conservative as ever. In my opinion he was the best that American enterprise can produce--honest, intelligent and courageous.

Q: I would like to talk a little about the Department. How interested was the Department in what was going on and what was your relationship with them? What were their directions to you considering what the British were doing?

VAN OSS: It is a little difficult for me to reconstruct the instructions that I got from them. I think they were pleased with the reporting we were doing and I think I was carrying out my mission. We were there to support the British. There was no question about that. We were to encourage the British in their efforts to lead this country into independence and we were to aid the British tangibly in any way we could.

One of my bosses was Phil Bonsal, I think he was the director of the Office of South Asian Affairs...he might have been deputy Assistant Secretary also...he came out and we had very cordial relations. While he was there I was a little bit peeved because Sir Gerald Templar asked him for helicopters and Bonsal magnanimously agreed to see what he could do. Even though I was a mere "youngster" at the time I thought that if Sir Gerald really had confidence in me he would have raised the helicopter issue with me so that I could have had a chance to help out. But these are the things that happen.

As I told you before, we were a subsidiary post to Singapore. I got along very well with Bill Langdon, but he didn't stay long as Consul General. His place was taken by Jack Goodyear, in an acting capacity. Jack felt very strongly that Kuala Lumpur should fit into the Singapore command structure and that I should follow his lead in my political reporting. I had had considerable experience with political reporting in China and in the work I had done in the Department, with biographic intelligence and that sort of thing. Jack had never done political reporting and he was really listening to Malcolm MacDonald. Whenever what I said, reflecting my contacts, went against what he had heard from Malcolm MacDonald, he would pooh-pooh it. He would say, "Well, this isn't right."

So we thoroughly irritated each other, although I liked the man and still do, but we didn't work together very well. I had my instructions to report directly to the Department, which I insisted on doing. My reports didn't go through him but I sent him copies of everything I did.

Then Chuck Baldwin came out as the regular Consul General. He was a much more amenable person and much broader gauged, at least from my point of view. I got along extremely well with him.

The only bane to my existence was in the USIS activity. The USIS man in Kuala Lumpur had to work under and through the USIS chief in Singapore, even though I had the right to report directly to the Department, he didn't. The USIS head in Singapore was named Elmer Newton, a very nice man but also very feisty, and with his own ideas. He had the impression that USIS was really the organization that carried out U.S. policy. He considered that consuls and consuls general were there to take care of Americans, to give visas, to report on economic matters, maybe military matters, but when it came to carrying out policies it was up to USIS to do that.

Q: *Where did he get that idea?*

VAN OSS: Well, I suppose from the idea that USIS is a spokesman for American policy and was in charge of cultural exchanges. For example, he took it upon himself to advise the Chinese in my district to beef up their labor union activities. I knew, from my contacts, that this was just asking for trouble. The Chinese Communists were trying to get their foothold in the unions and by beefing them up you were fertilizing the field in which communism might grow. In any event, it was not up to him to make that decision. He could have a hand in it, yes, but this was a policy matter which should have been articulated in the Department and not by him blundering around in what I considered to be my area of responsibility.

This led to some unpleasant set-tos that he and I had. Nevertheless, I always respected the man. He was good, his heart was in the right place, but he just couldn't stand for what he considered interference by me in things he was doing, when he was really the one who was interfering in my work.

As far as the Desk people in the Department were concerned, Dick Poole, my predecessor was eventually on the Malaya Desk. We had very cordial relations and as far as I know he was satisfied with what I was producing. Ken Landon was another one back in Washington. Another person who eventually came out to Kuala Lumpur was Oscar Armstrong, a close friend of mine. He was a Chinese language officer who had been stationed in Singapore. The work load in Kuala Lumpur was really very heavy and we were far too small to handle it properly. Also I felt very strongly that...I was only a class 5 officer at the time when class 6 was the bottom rank...my job should have been held by an FSO-3, somebody who could pull rank a little more than I could as a young FSO-5. So I recommended that my successor be a more senior officer, especially if the place was going to become independent, so that he could operate a little more freely and without worrying too much about protocol and having to work with people who greatly outranked him.

This is not something that preoccupied me to any extent, it was just something that became obvious. The work load was extremely hard. I knew the office would have to grow and that unless the principal officer had a higher ranking it would be very difficult to assign experienced persons there. If my successor was not at least an FSO-3, he would be assigned relatively inexperienced officers under him, and thus wouldn't get the quality personnel I thought the place should have. Anyway, the Department assigned an FSO-2, Eric Kocher to replace me.

Q: Which would be a senior Foreign Service officer today.

VAN OSS: Yes, and it was in those days.

Q: You mentioned a number of famous American visitors, did any British royalty come?

VAN OSS: Not exactly royalty, but royal family yes. The Duchess of Kent, whose husband had died, came and brought the Duke of Kent, heir apparent, with her to attend some celebration. Their visit took a tremendous amount of time on everybody's part, the

British especially. This was great stuff for them. They organized everything down to the last second. I can remember being with one of the organizers at some point along the parade route. He looked at his watch and said, "I reckon she will now be getting out of the gate at King's House." We looked up and indeed her car was just being driven out of the gate at King's House.

Anne and I were invited to the receptions, and other events. We were given instructions on how our wives should curtsy, but I didn't think it was appropriate for the wife of an American official to curtsy so I suggested to Anne, who didn't want to either, that she simply bow her head as she shook hands to show that she was respectful, without being obsequious. And, indeed, that is what she did. But the wife of one of the British rubber planters, Headly Facer's wife, didn't curtsy as a matter of principle. She, being a British subject, got into hot water. The King's House people noted her act, and she was boycotted. She never went to another reception in the King's House. That shows how the British work.

And this protocol business was so annoying because all these people, these young officers...I was on good terms with most of them...I used to play water polo with them for example...but at a reception when the Duchess of Kent would come into the room these men would come in and officiously push everyone out of the way and say, "Make way for her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Kent." They didn't see anything amusing about it at all.

Speaking of British protocol, this is one of the less pleasant aspects you run into when you are in a British preserve. For example, the British Advisers...each of the Sultanate states had a British Adviser, or Resident. When he would visit the Kampongs and villages carrying out his duties, he would always wear a hat or a necktie. Not because he wanted to, but because this marked him as being different from the "natives."

I remember very vividly one trip Anne and I took out to Trengganu, a Sultanate state on the east coast. I might say that Kuala Lumpur was essentially a modern city. It had Malay Muslim type architecture and things of that sort, but had all the conveniences...elevators, electricity, etc. Selangor was a fairly advanced Malay state, but when you went out to the east coast, Trengganu, you went out to Malaya as it always has been. There is where you see Malayan huts on poles to account for the high tide. The moon shines, the waters are sparkling, the women are in sarongs, the men wear their black Malay hats. Very colorful.

On this particular visit we stayed with the British Resident. I can't remember his name, but I do remember that his wife was a "Lady," one of noble birth. He was very hospitable. He laid on a venture in which we were to go out in his yacht and motor up the coast, where Malay villages were having some sort of harvest festival on the shore. We would be picked up by a Malay canoe and brought through the surf to the shore where we would join the festivities. We approached the shore. It was dark, the middle of the night. We could see the bonfire burning brightly and people dancing around it. The first canoe came up and the Resident told me and a few others to get on board. We were brought in through the surf which was quite a hair raising experience. Then apparently the surf

picked up so it was decided that it was too rough to unload the other passengers from the yacht. They would have to wait until the surf subsided.

Then as I was standing on the beach, I heard somebody say, "Oh, one of the row boats has come in from the yacht and it has capsized." I didn't pay much attention to that and then someone said, "Oh, it is the Resident and he has some lady with him and they both capsized in the water." I got a little nervous at this because I had been a lifeguard in my past and I know how difficult it is to bring an ordinary rowboat or dinghy through high surf. So I rushed to where this happened and there appeared before me Anne, looking like a drowned rabbit, and the Resident, equally moist, and a couple of his crewmen. Apparently they had decided before the warning came in that they would come to the shore by dinghy. They got caught by the waves and were lucky they didn't get hurt. I was quite angry. But I noticed the Resident did not have his necktie on. I said, "Well, I see that you have finally relented, you don't have your necktie." He said, "Oh yes I do. Here it is," and he pulled it dripping out of his pocket and put it on.

Trengganu was a delightful spot. It really was the Malaya of Somerset Maugham and myth. It was always pleasant. And I might add in general that it was always pleasant to travel and see other towns and villages. While I had little opportunity to do that in the early days because of the security situation, I had many opportunities our second year because security had become much, much better.

Q: So Templar was able to accomplish something with his safety villages?

VAN OSS: Yes. These villages were extremely successful. That is why, I'm sure, they were adopted years later for the Vietnam scene. The British became very much more efficient. Templar was a superb leader. In fact, he is one of the finest leaders I have been associated with. Head and shoulders above most of the people in similar positions that I have run into. He had a very good chief of police, Arthur Young, who had been the chief of police in the Borough of London, the original old city of London. He was a big 6'6" fellow. He taught the Malay policemen to help Chinese women across the street, go unarmed and treat people civilly. He tried to make London bobbies out of them, and succeeded to a certain extent. Their relations with the populace, which had been very dicey before that time, especially since the policemen were mainly Malays and the population was at least half Chinese, became extremely good. Also the British trained a lot of home guard people in the new villages to carry arms and build up their own little security forces. They eventually became quite successful. They weren't too successful in the beginning, of course, because the people were still scared of the guerrillas who would approach a settlement in force and terrorize people.

I haven't said much about the rubber plantations, but they were very interesting too. They were highly organized, very efficient.

Q: Who owned them?

VAN OSS: Mainly British, but there was one large Belgian plantation. I don't think we Americans had any rubber plantations out there.

Q: *No Firestone?*

VAN OSS: I don't remember any. I don't think so. Tin, yes, and iron. Well, the iron mountain near Kuantan was owned by an Australian, but had an American engineer who was chief of the operation.

Q: *You mentioned that the Malays were Muslim.*

VAN OSS: Yes, the Malays were all Muslim.

Q: *And the Chinese?*

VAN OSS: The Chinese were a mixture of Buddhists, Christians, and Taoists. They were not a particularly religious group. The Chinese had their own schools, their own communities. They were quite exclusive.

The Indians were a force to be contended with. There were a number of Indians and Ceylonese in the government.

But the Chinese were very exclusive and wanted to be taught in their own language. They felt their education was quite as good or even better than the British on the one hand and the Malay on the other.

Q: *The Malay language is related to Thai is it?*

VAN OSS: No, it is related to Indonesian. I was supposed to learn Malay and I tried, but all my contacts were with English-speaking people so I really had very little opportunity, except when I was traveling, to speak Malay. The traveling that I did was usually in the second half of my stay there and I just never did get any degree of fluency in or even working knowledge of Malay.

Q: *The Chinese probably spoke Chinese, Malay and English.*

VAN OSS: Yes.

Q: *How widely was English spoken by the Malay?*

VAN OSS: Oh, I would say in the country, not widely at all, but among the people that I met, the officials, all spoke fine English.

Q: *Was English taught in the schools?*

VAN OSS: Yes, in many of the schools.

Q: Was it compulsory?

VAN OSS: As far as I can remember, yes. A large percentage of Malays went to school. The new villages opened up all sorts of possibilities for education that hadn't existed before.

Q: Before that they were scattered?

VAN OSS: Yes, along the rivers and forests.

Q: In those scattered areas was there any kind of farming or did they live on fish, etc.?

VAN OSS: I would say there was a lot of fishing. I don't really recall much in the way of farming. They must have grown some crops.

Q: They ate rice.

VAN OSS: Yes, they ate rice. My orientation was almost 100 percent political and military. While I had to sign everything that Dick Peters and Bob Myers did, of course, I can't say that I knew all that much about the economics of the country. They had poultry, fresh vegetables, coconuts, fruits, the usual tropical food products.

Q: Some place rice was probably grown or imported.

VAN OSS: Oh, I think it was imported largely. I don't think...well maybe they did produce rice. I am afraid my memory doesn't help much on that.

Just to conclude, my time in the Federation was thoroughly enjoyable. The people were extremely pleasant...Malays, Chinese, British, Indians. It was one of the nicer posts. The story has a happy ending because Malaya did reach its independence and did become a viable entity. It had its problems when it united with Singapore, but then it separated because Tunku Abdul Rahman did not want to have a majority of Chinese in the new Malaysia. Singapore with its overwhelming number of Chinese put the numbers of Chinese over the Malays and they didn't like each other. Lee Kuan Yew, a bright, aggressive, highly educated Chinese and easy going Tunku Abdul Rahman were not exactly soul mates and didn't get along. But they parted in a friendly way and the two countries still work closely together to this day.

But in contrast to some of the African countries where I have served since, which have gone through all sorts of troubled times since they have become independent, I think free Malaya has done relatively well.

Q: Certainly better than Burma for example.

VAN OSS: Yes. From what little I know about Burma, the psychological atmosphere in Malaya is much more benign. In Burma, from what little I could learn when I visited Rangoon in 1947, everybody was scared to death of the Burmese, of the security situation. I really can't say anything about it but I gathered that it was an entirely different atmosphere. Heavens, shortly before I arrived in Rangoon virtually the entire cabinet had been rubbed out, machine gunned to death. Malaya was much more benign, ...with the exception of the guerrilla insurgency which was tough and rough...but today I think it is one of the pearls of Southeast Asia.

Q: So you left in 1953 with some regret.

VAN OSS: Left with great regret, yes, but with happy memories. And I have never been back.

DAVID DEAN
Consular Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1951-1954)

David Dean was born in New York City in 1925 and graduated from Harvard. He entered the Foreign Service in 1951. He served in numerous posts including Kuala Lumpur, Rotterdam, Taichung, Hong Kong and Taipei. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

Q: You were in Kuala Lumpur from what, about '52?

DEAN: Yes, at the turn of the year; it must have been from '52 until about the middle of '54. Just before I got there, the British High Commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, had been assassinated in an ambush on the way up to one of the hill stations, Fraziers Hill. He was a very courageous man. He was going up there with his wife and just a driver and a police constable in the car. They had no other type of protection. He saw the road blocked with a tree trunk, and he knew what it was because that is how the communist guerrillas would attack. They would block the road and then fire on the cars when they stopped. So, he got out of his car and let them fire away. They killed him, but his wife was not injured. The British sent Sir Gerald Templar to take his place. Templar, who was later chief of the Imperial general staff, was a livewire and he energized the campaign against the terrorists.

Q: He was a name to conjure with.

DEAN: That's right.

Q: Were you there at that time?

DEAN: Yes, I knew him and his family quite well and saw him frequently, not on

official business, but socially. He was very active. His daughter invited a lot of younger people to various functions. She was about my age, so I would go there fairly frequently with a number of friends. He would join these parties and have a very good time. He was really quite a brilliant person too. It was he who organized the home guards around the Malay kampongs. He also instituted resettlement areas to bring the Chinese squatters off the land and guard them in a barbed wire village which would have schools, hospitals, and places for them to work. because the communist guerrillas were pressing the squatters for food and information. Templar was trying to isolate these people from the guerrillas and to deny the guerrillas both food and intelligence. I used to go around occasionally with the patrols into the jungle looking for communist camps. There were several different kinds of troops there besides the home guards which just supported the Malay villages mostly. The police and the army would guard the resettlement areas. Then there would be patrols into the jungle by whatever units of the British Army that happened to be stationed in Malaya, Australian units or Fiji units, and Gurkhas, too. One of my friends, John McKay had been a brigadier general in the Indian army. He had gone to Nepal and recruited three or four police jungle companies from the Gurkhas, most of whom had been retired from the Indian army. Some of them were quite young people; maybe they hadn't even joined the Indian army. He brought them to Malaya and established them around certain key areas in the mountain chain that runs up and down the Malayan highlands. They would try and interdict the movement of the communists going back and forth and sent out patrols to try and find out where they were bivouacked and to kill them. I went out with them a couple of times. One time, it was during the Dashira festival, the new year's festival, during which they stack all the arms of their company in a square, behead various animals and sprinkle them with blood, and then have three days of plays and drinking and everything else you can imagine. It is their major time to let off steam. I was present during one of these rituals and it was quite a sight to see. Anyway, travel through the jungle with these patrols was very difficult. The jungle was so thick, you had to hack your way through if you didn't find any trail. Most people said the British soldiers could only get one or one and a half miles a day whereas the Gurkhas were able to go at least three, sometimes more. They were really good troops. The whole atmosphere of the time, of course, was one of tension because of the emergency situation. The communist guerrillas were trying to disrupt the economy of the country by slashing rubber trees and blowing up the tin mine dredges in an effort to cripple the country and eventually take it over. So, General Templar was really like a breath of fresh air coming in from the outside. The former Sir Henry Gurney and the Malayan civil service had never seen anything like him before. They had more of the old fashioned Somerset Maugham type of attitude.

Q: Sitting on the veranda at night waiting for the sun to go over the yardarm.

DEAN: Indeed there was a lot of that. It was a really fascinating time. A lot of the rubber planters existed in an almost besieged state. They lived on their rubber estates, their bungalows surrounded by barbed wire, with special troops hired to protect them. Inside their bedrooms, they would have sandbags stacked so that if someone fired or threw grenades from outside, they would be protected. They would drive around their plantations in old Fords that had an armored sheet underneath it. Even the windshield

would come down; a piece of metal with just slits in it. The windows would be thick sheet metal. There were many instances when they were ambushed and killed, so if you got an invitation to a rubber plantation, you would usually go out in a convoy and spend the night and come back together the next day. The rubber planters had some fairly intense parties. They lived under siege, so it was a hard life for them. A lot of rubber tappers were killed or their trees were slashed. Depending on where the communists were, it was a dangerous life for them. When they got into town they lived it up a lot at the Dog, a popular sports club, or the Lake Club or the Selangor Golf Club or other places where they congregated late at night, such as Nanto's Milk Bar. I don't think Nanto ever saw a glass of milk in his life! I joined another group there, the Hash House Harriers. The Hash House Harriers in Kuala Lumpur was the original club. They organized a sort of paper chase. The hares would go out with small sacks of paper and would lay a trail, including false trails, and then come back in a gradual circle to where they had started; the hounds are then a half-hour head start and then tried to catch them by following the paper trails. At the end there would be a great big tub of beer and lemonade. One of our members, John Yates, who is still a close friend today, went out with a colleague as hares and at the edge of the jungle they came across a communist guerrilla camp in atap (palm leaf) huts. They saw them with their weapons but my friends were unobserved. The hares came back and warned the rest of us. The police and the army were told and they encircled the guerillas and captured them. In those days there was a reward on the heads of the leadership of the communist guerrillas. Central committee members were worth so much and so on up the hierarchy. Two of the people captured had \$10,000 rewards on their heads. My friend and his colleague each got \$10,000 for finding them and they gave a succession of rather remarkable parties through every restaurant in Kuala Lumpur for the other members of the Hash House Harriers in 1951.

Q: Other than that, the U.S. presence was a Consul General at the time?

DEAN: No, it was still a Consulate from 1951-1954.

Q: A Consulate. Well, what were you doing?

DEAN: I was the administrative and consular officer. We had a very small staff, a political officer and an economic officer. Hank van Oss was the Consul. Then there was a small USIA group, too. The consulate consisted of seven or eight Americans and four Chinese staff and two Malays.

Q: What were our concerns at that time? What were we doing?

DEAN: We were concerned with the emergency and with the communists, whether or not they would succeed or whether the British would be able to cope and restore political stability and the economy. The U.S. had large commercial interests there. Some of the tin mines were owned by Americans. We bought a lot of Malaya's rubber. The U.S. had stockpiled lots of rubber and tin, and whenever we sold something from the stockpile, it would affect the prices in Malaysia to the nth degree. I think our unpopularity there grew

with the manipulation of these stockpiles. I can't remember how many American citizens lived in Malaya then, but not many, and we didn't have much visa or consular work to tell the truth. Most of my work was on the administrative side, except the Consul asked me to write airgrams and telegrams about my contacts with the military and the jungle companies and others just as a commentary on how the war against the communists was going.

Q: Of course, to put it in perspective, at this time we were still at war in Korea most of that time, so this was not an esoteric exercise.

DEAN: No, no. It was quite important. There was no evidence that the communist Chinese had sent arms or other supplies to the guerrillas. They were using mostly arms that the British had given them during the war against the Japanese. The British had helped organize them and had used them in attacks on the Japanese. But the guerrillas were getting moral support you might say through communist Chinese radio broadcasts, and perhaps training too, although that wasn't too clear at the time. Of course, it was a serious time because of the Korean War, but everyone in Kuala Lumpur was focused inward on their own emergency rather than what was happening elsewhere in the world, so this occupied everyone's attention.

Q: Were you seeing at that time a pretty solid split between the Malays and the Chinese?

DEAN: Oh, yes. There was a big ethnic divide. The British were seen to be coddling the Malays and protecting them against the ravages, economic and otherwise, of the Chinese merchants. The Chinese were fending for themselves. I don't mean the guerrillas, but those Chinese in the business community. There was the Malay Chinese Association which was very powerful. In fact, there was a Chinese, Henry Lee, who was Minister of Finance. In everything economic and financial, including ownership of shops and businesses, just as the Chinese did and do in Indonesia, they controlled most of the commerce. There was a lot of jealousy against the Chinese on the part of the Malaysians. Occasionally a Malay would go amok and slice up a lot of the Chinese. There was a great deal of tension and hatred on the part of the Malays toward the Chinese.

Q: Did you have much contact with the Chinese? I'm not talking about the guerrillas.

DEAN: Oh, yes. I had a lot of contact with the Chinese because they were merchants, including as I said, the Minister of Finance. They were involved in all aspects of the rubber and tin industry.

Q: What about in the Malay group, I was wondering if you saw a political class begin to emerge?

DEAN: No, not then. The British were occupying all of the positions, not just of power but also administrative positions in the civil government, the police, almost every other aspect, including immigration control. Malays were not then a major power. That came later when the various Malay leaders were helped by the British to come to the fore. The

British were running everything as far as government went at that time. It wasn't the Malaysians and it wasn't the Chinese.

Q: Were the British people you talked to sort of making noises about leaving at some point?

DEAN: No, I don't think they were thinking in those terms. This was early, you see, in 1951-'54. They were not really that much aware of the big forces going on around them in Southeast Asia and China, except by reading the newspapers, but they really weren't thinking in those terms. The Malay civil service was, as I said, a very old-fashioned civil service. The military were there for a very specific job. People weren't thinking of leaving and being replaced.

Q: What about Singapore? That was part of the whole.

DEAN: That was a separate crown colony at that time, also ruled by the British.

Q: Lee Kwan-Yu...

DEAN: No this was before Lee Kuan-Yu's rise to power.

Q: Is it possible that anything went on before Lee Kwan-Yu?

DEAN: I'm sure he was there, but he was a young man. He must be in his 80s now, so he certainly was there. I don't think there were too many people in evidence in the government structure except those nominated and put there by the British.

Q: Was there any effort made on our part to say these people are going to get free at some point and we want to make sure as we started to do later on.

DEAN: At that point, when I was in Kuala Lumpur, there weren't any discussions of that, at least among our staff.

Q: We weren't pushing de-colonization or anything like that?

DEAN: No. We may have been pushing it elsewhere, in London and in Washington, but not in Kuala Lumpur, and certainly there were not any instructions or messages that I saw to that effect.

Q: I was just wondering why you were allowed to go out on these patrols. Was there any thought that...

DEAN: Well, I just did, you see. I was a member of the Hash House Harriers and some of the military officers were members, so we just became very friendly and we'd just go. I was also on the Selangor rugby team then, and we would go off to different capitals in Perak or Penang or to Singapore, and play rugby with the various teams in these places.

Some of the members there were also in the military and we'd go off with them, too. But, it was very informal. We didn't go through lots of bureaucratic red tape. In fact, even the books we had in the office to guide us on various consular issues and other guidance were so old that I once remember the widow of an American sea captain coming in. She was, I think, part Malay, and she had married a sea captain in 1905. Her sons wanted her to go to the States as one of them was thinking that would be a better place for his mother. So she applied, and I looked it up in these old books, and there was a provision that before a certain date in 1925, people who married sea captains would gain American citizenship. So, I sent a paper into the State Department, giving them all the citations from our meager supply of manuals. They sent me back an airgram stating that the law I cited had been repealed in 1935 and, "in the future, please send your messages in on the proper forms." I had to tell the lady that she couldn't become an American citizen. Eventually, she got an immigration visa.

OSCAR VANCE ARMSTRONG
Consular Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1952-1953)

Oscar Vance Armstrong was born in China to American Parents in 1918. He received his bachelor of science degree from Davidson College in 1939. Subsequently, he served in the U.S. Army during World War II. His Foreign Service posts included Canton, Peiping, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong, London, and Taipei. He was interviewed by Willis Armstrong in March 1991.

Q: How long were you in Singapore?

ARMSTRONG: Two years, from 1950-52. Then went up to Kuala Lumpur. That, of course, was much more interesting because you were in the middle of a very interesting country and the insurgency was still going on. Not long before we got there the British High Commissioner had been ambushed on the road up to one of the hill stations and been killed. By the time we left, about two years later, they had declared the first "white area" which meant it was free of insurgency and life could return more to normal. As you know, this was one place where a communist insurgency was effectively quelled.

Q: I know. I visited KL in 1954 and again in 1956. In '54 I was put in touch with some of the British people who were handling the insurgency problem and went to a command post where I had an interview with General Templar who was a fascinating guy. I was taken around and shown their defensives, war maps, etc. by officers in the British establishment. It was very interesting. I also got out and looked at some small rubber plantations. But you were in KL until 1950....

ARMSTRONG: 1955.

Q: We were there at the same time but I didn't know you.

ARMSTRONG: No. I don't recall.

Q: I have forgotten who the consul general was.

ARMSTRONG: It might have been Eric Kocher.

Q: Yes, it was. I remember staying with him. He gave me a dinner party. He was very horrified that I was traveling around the tropics without a dinner jacket. All I had were my Washington cotton suits.

ARMSTRONG: I hope some of our military that were involved in Vietnam were briefed on the British experience in the Malaya. The situations, of course, were different.

Q: Totally different because the Chinese were the guerrillas in the woods. The Malayan population was on the side of the British.

ARMSTRONG: That's right. And there was no equivalent to North Vietnam.

Q: Right, they couldn't be infiltrated.

ARMSTRONG: Thailand was reasonably cooperative in helping the British control the border area there. So the situations were very different, though it took them many years.

Q: Did you think there was any significant connection between Peking and the insurgency in Malaya?

ARMSTRONG: There certainly was in terms of moral and propaganda support. In terms of physical assistance, money or arms, I think the evidence was that there was not very much of it.

Q: Well, it was hard to get at.

ARMSTRONG: That's right.

Q: And the British controlled the ports, railroads and roads pretty much.

ARMSTRONG: It would have been difficult for them and, of course, the communist insurgents were almost all the time in the jungle. They were not occupying any significant urban areas in Malaya. The jungle was sometimes very close. One of our younger officers in the consulate general joined some Britishers that called themselves the Hounds and Hares. They used to go out on these paper trails. One person goes out and leaves pieces of paper and the others try to catch up with him. This time they flushed out a small guerrilla group, dashed back in town, reported it, got a reward and had a huge,

what the British call a "bash" to celebrate their exploits. They were fairly close at times, but they were not at any time threatening to take over.

Q: They didn't take the bus into town.

ARMSTRONG: No.

WALTER K. SCHWINN
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Kuala Lumpur (1954-1957)

Walter K. Schwinn joined USIS after serving as a colonel in an economic intelligence unit in World War II. His career included assignments in Poland, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Mr. Schwinn was interviewed by David Cartwright on June 24, 1987.

Q: In Singapore did you do much the same thing as you had done in Warsaw?

SCHWINN: That's right, although the emphasis changed there. As a matter of fact, I was assigned to the Consulate-General in Singapore, the Consulate in Kuala Lumpur, and the Consulate in Pinang. So I lived in Kuala Lumpur, which was a charming little town at that time, tin mines, the rubber...just a few other diplomatists around-Australia, India, France-just a handful of us, and living was very good, very comfortable, and I knew nice people....

But the job there, again, changed, and one of the nice things about the way the information agencies run at that point, you weren't told from Washington what to do specifically. If you were a Public Affairs officer, you made a decision as to what was important to be done and spent your money that way.

Well, here it was in 1954, and the Korean War barely over, all the guns were silent, but Malaysia had a very large minority of Chinese. Particularly a large, young population, I mean 20 and under in school, and to them the pink-red dawn over to the east was very attractive. China was rising to its feet. It was no longer on its knees to every Britisher and American and Frenchman...it was standing up, standing tall. (Laughs) What do you do? It was kind of comical to think now we're in such close relations with Communist China, but then we regarded this as an enemy. On the same scale, I was now operating on the other side of the Communist world. So we put almost all our money and emphasis into dealing with the Chinese in the middle schools, in the colleges-what to do to impress them. Do two things: impress them with the virtues of the United States, and also to draw them away from their fascination with Maoist China.

We had a nice little guy, Jimmy Anderson, who was down in Washington with his wife, who was the Information Officer and.... Well, we sought out these things, trucks which

carried films, books, literature, all up and down the peninsula on a regular schedule, stopping at the high schools-middle schools, they're called-for a day and a day and a half, running films.... Then we had great good luck in discovering the enormous power of athletics on the young mind. And we had basketball coaches basketball was pretty high in Malaysia - come out and spend weeks at a school, teaching the kids basketball, American-style, swimming stars coming out and working in the pools.

Q: *Who sponsored these people?*

SCHWINN: USIA.

Q: *USIA. And the books and the movies and so forth that you circulated were all USIA?*

SCHWINN: All USIA, yes.

Q: *Did you have the opportunity to tailor anything to the local situation, or were you using more or less standard films and books that were simply translated? Or did you have a chance to do something creative?*

SCHWINN: Well, I don't think I had a film made specifically for Malaysia, but it came in Chinese, in Mandarin Chinese. It also came in Malay, but these were the films that were in general stock. But they were good films, I mean, they served the purpose. We discovered one thing-again, Jimmy Anderson was very smart about this-he said, "We must always have something going at four in the afternoon until six at these schools." I said, "Why?" "That's the time when these Commies try to set up their meetings with the kids. And if we can compete with the basketball coach at four o'clock, or a swimming coach, or a good film, they won't go to the meeting."

Q: *Were these separate Chinese schools or were these integrated schools?*

SCHWINN: These were separate.

Q: *Separate Chinese schools.*

SCHWINN: See, one of the shortcomings, shall we say, of the British rule in Malaysia was that they were so conscious of the need to stratify the Malay rulers and Malay people, that they brought out these Chinese laborers to do the tin mines and rubber things without wives for a long time. Then [came] wives, and of course then children, no money for the schools-the Chinese had to build the damn schools and run them.

Well, we were so concerned about the Chinese, that it took me a while to realize that we had to do something about the Malay population, too. Then we hired a couple of Malay boys, very bright kids, to do a newspaper for the Malay population, and particularly for the east coast. You see, the Chinese were all along the west coast of Malaysia, where the tin mines and rubber plantations are...and, of course, the Chinese, they were just so damned energetic and enterprising.

This did not affect my work, but it was interesting to me: most of the crime was Chinese crime. So, the decision was made to get more Chinese in the police force because they had the same problem we have here. The Malays arresting Chinese. Get more Chinese in the police force. God, they just had a hell of a time getting the Chinese to join because young Chinese men would say, "Why should I join the police force? I could make more money selling cigarettes in the street." So, all this kind of difficulty presented itself, and, of course, I keep wondering now what is happening in Malaysia because I have sensed that the Malays have really taken over more and more, and they're more fundamentalist. And this means the fundamentalists on the east coast are calling the tune. This is going to be hard for the Chinese to accept, and hard for the economy to accept because it's the Chinese that run the entertainment industries, run the bus system, run the transportation industry...it's all Chinese.

Q: Now, the newspaper that you mentioned was aimed at a Malay audience.

SCHWINN: That's right.

Q: Did you edit that paper yourself?

SCHWINN: No, I left it to the Malay boys.

Q: What I was driving at was whether or not you were drawing on your previous experience as a journalist in this.

SCHWINN: No. No, all I did was to...once the decision was made, that we had to do something about the Malays and this would be a good thing to do, I sought out advice among governmental people whom I knew as to who would be a good person to do this, and got these two names. They were bright kids. Indeed, one of them has since become a minister (laughs) in the Malay government.

Q: Who was that?

SCHWINN: I forget his name now, it was several years ago. But, he....

Q: He was upwardly mobile.

SCHWINN: He was upwardly mobile. But he knew what to do, and so I said, "You have so much money, you have so much staff, get it done."

Q: Now, for most of your professional life, out of government or in government, you have been involved in the shaping of public opinion in one way or another. How do you determine to what extent you had succeeded? Let's take the example of the Chinese, which I find very interesting. How did you measure, or did you attempt to measure, the impact of your activities on the Chinese students?

SCHWINN: We had no funds for surveys, and so it just was what we felt.

Q: Did you ever worry that your attempts might backfire and be perceived as simply propagandistic or meddling?

SCHWINN: No, no. Now mind you, the British Raj was still there, so you didn't have an indigenous government to worry about. You had sympathy and support from the British. But the example of what Jimmy Anderson told me about interfering with the Commie meetings was as good evidence as I can now think of that we were succeeding in diminishing the attendance, of causing the kids to have-you know, "What shall I do?"

Q: You could count the number of students shooting baskets as opposed to the number of students reading the Red Book.

SCHWINN: Well, I don't think we ever saw the Red Book. Again, the British were not encouraging this. Any guy that would carry the Red Book around would have trouble. But we knew that a large number of the kids were shooting baskets and assumed if they weren't, they were at least open to go to the meeting.

CHARLES T. CROSS
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1955-1957)

Ambassador Charles T. Cross was born in China in 1922. He attended Carleton College and Yale University, and served as a lieutenant overseas in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1942-1946. His assignments abroad included Taipei, Jakarta, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Alexandria, Nicosia, London and Danang, with an ambassadorship to Singapore. Ambassador Cross was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: Then you went to Kuala Lumpur. Was it then Malaya or Malaysia?

CROSS: It was the Federation of Malaya. I was there for a little more than two years - winter of 1955 to the summer of 1957. As I said, I was the political officer - the only one at that post. I covered the first elections, the "Emergency" - i.e. counterinsurgency which I really learned on the ground - and the negotiations for a new constitution. None of these were bilateral issues; all were internal which left me with the major burden of reporting. We supported the British as they were leaving the country. They left the country in good order, quite stable after the "Emergency," in the hands of a popularly elected prime minister elected by the Malays and the eligible "Overseas" Chinese. That person was Abdul Rahman who was the right person for the times - a very unusual circumstance.

Q: What was the situation when you went to KL [Kuala Lumpur] in 1955?

CROSS: The communists began their full scale insurgency in 1948. They started these activities at about the same time in India, Burma, Indonesia and Malaya. The latter was the strongest movement because there it involved ethnic Chinese. The peak of the insurgency was reached approximately in the 1950-51 period. Then it began to de-escalate. So by the time we reached KL, there were already areas designated as "White Areas," mostly along the coast in such towns as Penang and Malacca. Nevertheless, travel around the rest of the country required a convoy. We had to have a convoy escort if we wanted to go from KL to the Cameron Highlands. During our first few months, we needed a convoy to go from KL to Malacca. But slowly, the government forces began to whittle away at the insurgents.

The government, as part of its counter-insurgency program, established what were called "New Villages." This was an idea of Sir Robert Thompson, who not only established them in Malaya, but later was also instrumental in establishing the same kinds of villages in Vietnam during our experiences there. There they were called "Strategic Hamlets." They were not that in Malaya because there the government took the Chinese who were targets of the insurgents and moved them away from the areas bordering the jungles which is where the insurgents operated. The removal of these Chinese not only protected them, but also denied the guerrillas easy access to food, medical supplies, and intelligence.

So by the time we arrived in KL, the insurgents were in bad shape. The government used a lot of tricks to defeat the insurgents. They infiltrated them with government agents who then assisted the government forces in wiping out some guerrilla units. In addition to these tricks, the government was offering independence to the Malays and economic opportunities for young Chinese. While the British were still in Malaya, they fought the insurgents. When they left, the government used enticements as well as power to finish the insurgency. They promised protection to the Chinese and pretty soon, the insurgency was no more. Since my time in KL, there have been tensions between the Malays and the Chinese from time to time, but they were managed without major recourse to violence. I think the British did a great job; they kept the Malays united behind the idea of cooperating with the Chinese while at the same time keeping the Chinese united behind the idea that co-existence could take place if the Chinese who made up the Malaysian Communist Party ceased their insurgency.

Q: I assume that our representation in KL was a consul general. Did you have many dealings with the British.

CROSS: I did work in a consulate general. We dealt only with the British - or Malay officials who were part of the British colonial government - there primarily to train so that the new Malay government could function once the British had withdrawn.

Q: What about the election and the new constitution?

CROSS: First, there was an election for parliament. This legislature was not totally in charge, but it established a party structure for Malaysia. One party was Negara, which

was a Malay nationalist party. It lost the election to the Alliance Party - a consortium of the united Malay National Organization, the Malayan Chinese Association, and the Malayan Indian Association. The Alliance was led by Abdul Rahman, whom I mentioned earlier. The Malays governed in those areas that were primarily populated by Malays: the Chinese of the Malayan Chinese Association did run in areas where the Malay might have been a small majority and yet many of them won. So the Alliance swept this first election for the new legislature.

Q: What was the consulate general's impression of Rahman at that time?

CROSS: I think we were great supporters. He was very personable. In some ways he was like Reagan. He would say something, and it would be misinterpreted by some people. He would never bat an eye and deny that he had said whatever he said. The whole country knew his style; it never questioned his statements, but rather praised him for sticking to his guns - whatever he really meant.

Q: Did you ever have any contacts with the communist insurgents?

CROSS: Almost never. Every once in a while, the special branch would ask me to interview a former member of the insurgent groups. These were not people who had been imprisoned but rather had changed sides. Howie Schaffer and I watched one of these operations once. We were on our way to call on the Sultan of Johore. We were riding in the consul general's Chevy. On the way, we stopped for a night and stayed with the chief of the Special Branch in a town which was still surrounded by communist terrorists. We had a briefing about the local situation; then the chief, who was a flamboyant Welshman, asked whether he could take our car to carry some supplies to one of his patrols. Both Howie and I knew that our bosses as well as the Special Branch higher ups would disapprove of any such use of a CG vehicle. But we went happily anyway. We drove down narrow little roads - lanes really - between rubber plantations and finally came to a rubber estate. The high jungle really shades an area; it is practically dark if you are in it. Nothing grows in it, but on the edge of such a jungle, there is some heavy growth because the sunlight is able to shine there. That is called blukar.

So we were driving along this lane and the Special Branch chief asked us to stop somewhere along the road. He asked us to get out and lift up the hood of the car to pretend we had car trouble. It was very quiet and all of the sudden there was a whistle and a group of insurgents came out of the jungle. They had little red stars on their caps. I was somewhat concerned because I didn't know what would happen next. It turned out that this group was composed of former terrorists who had been captured and had changed sides. They had to stay in the jungle for a while - I guess to prove their *bone fides* - and then they were permitted to re-enter society. While in the jungle, they were led by a British army non-commissioned officer. The group was also accompanied by two Chinese Special Branch members, all in their jungle get-ups. These groups would live in the jungle for months on end, although the British leaders would change because they could not remain in the jungle as long as the natives.

Q: So you spent a lot of time just observing what was going on in the country?

CROSS: Yes. We had no political differences with either the British government or the Federation of Malaya. There may have been some discussions about the size of our representation; it may have been larger than one might expect from a consulate general, but that was because it soon would become an embassy.

Q: Who was the consul general?

CROSS: At the beginning it was Eric Kocher. He had been the labor attache in Belgium and perhaps at another post before being assigned to Kuala Lumpur. He was a very good political reporting officer. His wife, Peggy, was related to Lillian Hellman - the playwright. Eric was very good with the staff; he introduced me to Rahman the first week I was there. I was also helped greatly by Oscar Armstrong, whom I replaced. He was also a son of China missionaries. Oscar gave me a very good list of people whom I should contact, along with his own ratings of these individuals. I also got a lot of help from Lucian Pye of MIT, who had studied the communist movement and was an expert on its motivations.

After Kocher came Ken Wright. He had been in the Navy prior to joining the Service. He was very military minded; he liked everything to be neat and tidy, as if we were going to be visited by a VIP. He used a lot of nautical expressions. One that I found quite descriptive and useful was his characterization of a bureaucratic impossibility: "You can't piss up a rope." He didn't like political reporting; he didn't like to write. So I became the political reporting officer of the consulate general. If he had talked to someone who might have had some interesting things to say, he would ask me to go see the person and write something to send to the Department.

Q: Did you get to Singapore at all?

CROSS: Yes, although we didn't do anything in Singapore. Elbridge Durbrow was the consul general there. Technically, he was responsible for our operations in KL. He would visit us periodically. He was always very friendly and helpful to me. I think that the Singapore staff was more worried about Rahman than they were about Lee Kuan Yew, even though the British saw the latter as potentially quite dangerous. Lee played the game as it had to be played. Early on, he played "footsie" with the Communists briefly in order to get control of the Overseas Chinese on Singapore; when that was accomplished and the British left, he was ruthless in eradicating the Communists.

Q: You left Malaysia in 1957. Did the Vietnam Geneva Conference of 1954 have any impact in Malaysia?

CROSS: None whatsoever. I think the British felt that they had done extremely well in Malaya, particularly with respect to the spread of communism to South Asia. I think they in fact had done well. I should mention that I was asked to stay in KL for another year, but I really didn't want to stay on in an embassy. All of the Malay leadership were

personal contacts; once the U.S. had an ambassador, how could I as a lowly FSO-5 officer maintain those contacts?

HOWARD B. SCHAFFER
Rotation Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1956-1958)

Ambassador Howard B. Schaffer was born in New York in 1929. He graduated from Harvard University and then served overseas in the US Army before joining the Foreign Service in 1955. Overseas, Schaffer served in Malaysia, India, Korea, Pakistan, Cyprus, and as Ambassador to Bangladesh. In Washington DC, he served in the Office of Personnel, as the Country Director for Nepal, India, and Sri Lanka, and as the Deputy Assistant Secretary for South Asia. Ambassador Schaffer was interviewed by Thomas Stern in 1997.

Q: So in early 1956, you were assigned to Kuala Lumpur? How did that come about?

SCHAFFER: I had decided, probably based on my Japanese experience, that the Southeast Asia area seemed interesting, although I had never been there. I wasn't that interested in returning to Japan; China was closed; Korea had not shown up on my screen. I wanted to do something different and therefore Europe was not a great attraction--I had traveled there during my senior year in college. I was looking for different cultures and sights. Southeast Asia seemed to fit my requirements. So I asked for Indonesia or Thailand. In those days officers did not get a list of upcoming vacancies; you were just asked to indicate country or regional preferences. As it turned out, there just happened to be a vacancy in Kuala Lumpur, which was halfway between Indonesia and Thailand. So I was assigned there.

I knew where Kuala Lumpur was because I had followed the military moves of the Second World War closely as a high school student. I remembered plotting on maps the advance of the Japanese forces down the Malay peninsula in late 1941/early 1942 as they headed towards Singapore. So I knew exactly where KL was. Many of my classmates, not to speak of people outside the Foreign Service, did not have the vaguest notion where Malaya was. I soon decided that if anyone asked me where I was going, I would explain that KL was near Singapore. Of course I didn't know what KL was like in the mid-fifties. So I was amazed and delighted when I read the post report and other material and found that of all the cities in South East Asia in those days, KL was the most comfortable and most livable. For example, the city had a 36-hole golf course and water that was safe to drink out of the tap. I told my friends that all of this was the result of the Imperial Amenities Act of 1876" which established the basic living requirements in colonial headquarters towns. Some of them believed that foolishness.

At the time, the U.S. establishment in Kuala Lumpur was a consulate general. I got there

in a most interesting way. My uncle - Dr. Bruner, the one I mentioned earlier - happened to be teaching in Cambridge, England, in the 1955-56 academic year. He suggested that I route myself through the UK on my way to Malaya. In fact, the Department encouraged me to stop in London to talk to the embassy people since Malaya was then still a British protectorate. So I did that; I flew first class--as was the practice in those days--to London. We were unable to land there because of the customary January fog and were diverted to a small airport in the west of England. Then I boarded a train to London--Waterloo Station.

I made my way to the embassy where I was told to talk to someone in the political section who dealt with Asia. That was a strange conversation; it was an eye-opener then--I don't think I would find it strange today. The officer knew I was coming, but I found that he was not particularly interested in talking to me about policy. He wanted to know the latest gossip about personnel that was making the rounds in Washington! That struck me as very strange indeed, particularly since I was junior officer--hardly a good source for that kind of information. But he was looking for any scrap, even though my larder was pretty bare. His interest just surprised me; only later did I learn that such gossip in the mother's milk of the Foreign Service.

I stayed in London and then went to Cambridge to see my relatives. Then I returned to London and flew on to Bangkok on a PAA [Pan American Airways] flight 1 - that well-known globe-circling flight. I changed planes in Beirut, where I got to see something of the city by night because of the delayed arrival of a connecting flight. Then I flew on to Bangkok, with stops in Karachi and Rangoon, my first brief exposure to the subcontinent where I would spend so much of my career. After a night's rest, I went on to Singapore, where I changed for another plane that would take me to Kuala Lumpur-- a DC-3 of the Malayan Airways. All of this was a new experience; I was very proud of my brand new diplomatic passport and my new role as a diplomatic representative of my government--at the age of 26. I was met at the airport by one of my new colleagues from the consulate general.

I was told before leaving Washington that I would be the fifth officer in the consulate general, which until my arrival had consisted of four experienced officers under the leadership of Consul General Thomas K. ("Ken") Wright. They dealt with all of the functions of a standard diplomatic establishment--political, economic, consular and administrative. I was to be rotated from one section to another, starting with consular affairs, while also helping John ("Jack") Knowles, the administrative officer. I was the first rotation officer to come to the post. I think at first there may have been some question how best to use me, but eventually all concerned in the Department and at post agreed to the rotational program. As far as I know, this program was the post's idea and not Washington's.

Being the first rotational officer, I received a lot of attention. Furthermore, KL was a small post and all the staff were very friendly. Indeed, until I found an apartment of my own, I lived with three of the officers at one time or other. They showed great interest in my education as a Foreign Service officer. It was a warm, rewarding assignment. I got a

chance to use my Malay and enjoyed that very much.

I found both consular and administrative work somewhat routine and not particularly challenging. Then I worked in the economic section with William J. Ford, a knowledgeable and conscientious officer indeed. Following a few months there, I was shifted to the political section, working first with Charles T. ("Chuck") Cross and later with John Farrior. Consul General Wright took a great interest in me and met with me periodically. As I said, KL was a small post; the atmosphere was one of considerable informality. We would inevitably meet when off-duty; we belonged to the same clubs, went to the same movies, ate at the same restaurants. KL had all of the attributes of a small town. Since we all got along quite well, we would see each other both in the office and outside. My exchanges with Wright were both very pleasant and professionally rewarding.

My contacts went beyond the British and American communities. My knowledge of Malay helped me to become particularly well acquainted with the Malay community. Of course, the better educated segment of Malayan society knew English quite well, but I found Malay useful. After having reached a certain level of proficiency, I was able to carry out some of my political reporting responsibilities in the language. I was never tested, but I would guess that I reached a 3 or 3+ level in speaking.

I think the whole staff tried to pass on to me some of the flavor of the Foreign Service--its do's and don'ts. I learned many of the established diplomatic practices when I was named protocol officer in connection with Malayan Independence ceremonies that took place in August, 1957. I would become more proficient in these matters later in my career. Consul General Wright was probably not the best officer to initiate me into the rites of the Service. He was a "Wristonized" officer--a term that I quickly learned meant that he had been brought into the Foreign Service from the Civil Service without having to go through the three-and-a-half day entrance examination. So he did not fully share the punctilio of people who had come in at the bottom and had risen in the old Foreign Service in the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, I was still very much unmarried at the time and I think a good deal of the protocol folkloric atmosphere of the Foreign Service was maintained by officers' wives -- there were no officers' husbands in those days. Junior wives had been taught the rites by "dragon ladies"--the wives of ambassadors or DCMs [deputy chiefs of mission]. Mrs. Wright, like her husband a wonderfully outgoing if somewhat naive person, had not had that learning experience. She was as much a newcomer to the Service as I was. So the protocol dictates in Kuala Lumpur were considerably less stringent than they might have been at another post.

My colleagues were quite knowledgeable about Malaya, particularly Chuck Cross, who later rose to become ambassador to Singapore, consul general in Hong Kong and our principal representative in Taiwan. He had made himself familiar with all aspects of Malayan political and social life. As the son of an American missionary, he had grown up in prewar China and spoke Mandarin well. So his connections with the Chinese community were particularly strong. But he had also made many contacts among the British authorities--the Army, the police, the civil government--and the Malay officials

and politicians I came to have the greatest admiration for him professionally and personally; I still do.

Living in KL was very pleasant, particularly for someone who had been living first with his family in New York and was then cooped up in a small room in McLean Gardens in Northwest Washington. As I said, it took me a while to find permanent quarters. There was still a very large British element in KL. In fact the “good” clubs had very, very limited Asian membership. So during my first half year at post, I lived in a succession of temporary arrangements. In July, 1956, I managed to rent a lovely bungalow right next to a golf course together with a couple of Americans in their twenties--a businessman and a U.S. Army doctor who had been assigned to Kuala Lumpur to conduct research in tropical medicine. We had a couple of servants and lived very well. I had no complaints.

Just as I was arriving in January, 1956, the British and the Federation of Malaya government headed by Tunku Abdul Rahman, had come to an agreement on the future of the country. Malaya was then wracked by disturbances (“The Emergency”) sparked by communists--all of Chinese background. Nevertheless, the British and the Malaysians were able to reach agreement to grant Malaya independence on August 31, 1957. So during my first eighteen months, I was able to observe a process leading to independence --called “Merdeka” in Malay. The original time-table was adhered to.

The consulate general kept very close touch with political developments on the road to independence. We had to be very careful-- and I think we were-- because there was widespread suspicion in the British community and elsewhere that the United States was seeking to supplant the British as the dominant power in Malaya and the region. I don’t really know how deep this British concern was, but we heard it enough so that we were quite careful in our comments and actions not to give this prejudice any basis. Ken Wright made it his business to keep in close touch with all major elements in the political community. As I recall, he would have a formal dinner monthly with the British including whenever possible the high commissioner, who played the role of governor. He would also meet monthly with the predominantly Malay leaders of the government. Cross would keep in touch with the Chinese community, as well as the Malays and the Indians.

As I have indicated, there were three principal communities in Malaya--Malay (the largest or about 50% of total), Chinese (38%), and the Indians. The Chinese were divided into several major group--one called itself the “Queen’s Chinese.” They traced their presence on the peninsula to the 17th or 18th centuries. They were quite proud of their past and spoke of it in the same terms as would New Englanders in the United States who could trace their ancestry back to the Mayflower. They were particularly prominent in Penang and Malacca as well as Singapore, which then and now is separate from the Federation. They drew a distinction between themselves and the Chinese who had immigrated more recently. These included large groups in the countryside who were being resettled as part of the British anti-communist terrorist campaign--a pattern of anti-terrorist strategy which we later copied in Vietnam.

Most Chinese had no right of citizenship in Malaya. Politically they were left out in the

cold. They were also for the most part very poor. They suffered discrimination in government employment. In other words, they were ripe for the kind of political activism that the mainland government was involved in at that time. So many Chinese became terrorists. They had support--weapons and money--from mainland China. The leadership was home-grown.

All of us, even in the cities, had to be aware of this security threat. Europeans, a term that included Americans, were certainly targeted, but the activities of the communists were not a daily concern as I went about my job. Nonetheless, we were all mindful of instances when CTs (communist terrorists) would infiltrate the cities. For example, there was a shooting on a golf course not far from my house. The year before I arrived, the British high commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney, had been assassinated by a CT. There was a state of emergency in effect, which limited travel for example. When a traveler left KL, there were a series of check points; the military checked vehicles for such things as food which you were not allowed to carry--as a means to quarantine the terrorists. However, in actual practice, a white person had a much easier time passing these road-blocks than did Asians.

The Indian community was interesting because it comprised two very distinctive groups. The larger group were descendants of people who had been brought from India to work on the rubber plantations. Rubber plantations were described in the 1950s as "Little Indias." If you visited a plantation you would meet the manager who was British and spoke to his workers in a demotic Tamil. The others on the estate were Indians from Tamil Nadu, Madras as it was then called, plus some Malayalam-speaking Indians from the state of Kerala who occupied many of the administrative and clerical positions. They had lived their whole lives on the estates and had been educated in schools there. They had very little to do with the indigenous population, who were not at all attracted by the work on the plantations--routine, demanding labor. The Indians worked hard. They would go out every morning and tap the rubber trees, drawing off the latex. They also worked in the processing plants, preparing the sheet rubber which was exported to be used in manufacturing.

I visited a number of the plantations which I always found fun. But that life was separate from that lived in the rest of the country. As I said, the government had had to import labor from India because the life on an estate was too different from that to which a Malay was accustomed. That is not a unique situation; we find the same thing elsewhere in parts of Indonesia, in South Africa, and in Sri Lanka for example. There the "coolies" as they were called, were brought in because the indigenous population just wouldn't put up with the working conditions. They won't get up at the crack of dawn day after day to tap rubber trees in a prescribed, routinized way.

There were other Indians who were professionals and well educated -- teachers, lawyers, doctors. They lived in towns. They played a political role, particularly as labor leaders. They had to be reckoned with. They were organized in a political party called the Malayan Indian Congress. It was allied with Chinese and Malay parties that held similar, moderate views. All three belonged to an Alliance led by a dominant Malay political

group, the United Malay National Organization (UMNO). These Indians were among the most recent immigrants, as were some Ceylonese (now known as Sri Lankans). Most came from South India.

This was my first close experience with a multi-cultural society. I thought it was a very fascinating situation because you basically had four groups of people, with each having sub-groups--some of which I have already described. The fourth group, which I have not mentioned, was, of course, the whites. They were still an important element and remained so even after independence, particularly in commerce. Much later, this group sold its interests to members of the other groups.

We were quite concerned about the four ethnic groups being able to work together after independence. We were particularly concerned about the relationship between the politically dominant Malays and the Chinese, who were the economic powerhouse. The memories of the South Asian "Holocaust" following the separation of Pakistan from India were still fresh--even after ten years and even though few if any inhabitants of Malaya had witnessed the 1947 events in India. But there was such a calamitous loss of life and property then that it could not soon be forgotten and there was no assurance that it would not be repeated in Malaya. I remember vividly one of the persons who came to cover the transfer of power in August 1957, Keyes Beech of the Chicago Sun Times. He had been in India in 1947 and recounted in great detail the events of that time. He also expressed great fear about a repetition of the slaughter in Malaya. Fortunately, it did not happen, even though there was a serious confrontation between the two communities in the late 1960s. With that exception, Malaysia (as it came to be called) has had remarkable communal harmony--certainly far exceeding our anticipations.

Much of this cooperative atmosphere has been due to the skillful political management exhibited by Tunku Abdul Rahman and his government. They developed an alliance in which the Malays had (and still have) a predominant role but the Chinese have a sufficient voice to give them some sense of participation. The Chinese on the other hand have shown a willingness to share their wealth. This has led to comparative communal harmony and today's prosperous Malaysia.

The arrival of independence in 1957 did not bring any major revision of the government that ran the country in the preceding period. The composition of the government did not basically change after August 1957. In the previous period that government had gradually been given more and more responsibility as British authority was withdrawn. For example, the Malay states had been ruled by local sultans with the assistance of British advisors. Those advisors were withdrawn in the period leading up to independence. The British did retain control of the military and the police until August 1957. Indeed, even after that time, they maintained an active involvement in those functions. This arrangement was essential to the successful fight against the CTs. The British and Australians also maintained an airbase near Penang.

The Malays developed a fascinating arrangement for the selection of their titular ruler. It was a rotating system in which every five years the sultan of a different Malay state

becomes the paramount ruler--by election of his fellow rulers. After five years, the incumbent steps down and another paramount ruler is elected head of state. It is a thoroughly unique form of government. There is also a deputy paramount ruler. But the rulers were essentially symbolic and ceremonial; the work of government was carried on in a parliamentary system borrowed from the English model, which was familiar to the Malay, Chinese, and Indian leaders. Many of them had studied in England and had observed that system in action. The real power rested in a prime minister elected by his fellow parliamentarians.

During my tour, the government was a conservative one--in the best sense. It was not a fundamentalist Islamic government. It believed in all of the things we liked including a foreign policy oriented towards the West, a conservative economic policy, more rights for the Chinese minority, communal harmony, and political democracy.

As an economic officer, I covered a lot of subjects. In the 1950s, economic sections were beleaguered by mandatory reports on all sorts of commodities and activities. In the political section, I was assigned to follow the minor parties. That put me in touch with Malay leaders. Cross and Farrior were principally interested in the Chinese, whom they knew well and with whom they could communicate in Chinese since both came from missionary families. I did a lot of traveling, doing such things as observing by-elections.

It was a busy and rewarding two years. I look back on KL with great fondness; I have always been happy to return there for visits. It was an excellent experience, even with the difficult time I had at the end. That experience was an instructive one. I have already mentioned what a pleasant working environment Thomas K. Wright had built as CG and then, after the consulate general had been elevated to embassy status following the independence of Malaya, as chargé. We had a great staff including the USIS people who shared the rather rundown office building we used in downtown KL. We were all up on the third floor. To get there, we had to pass a Chinese betting parlor. The corridors were often crowded with scruffy types waiting to place their wagers. Our offices were very inadequate--although the full flavor of this slum really didn't hit me until I had seen some of the better establishments that we had elsewhere. But the post was very congenial despite our inadequate working quarters.

With the coming of independence, when the consulate general became an embassy, we moved to larger and more handsome quarters. These were also rented, but there was no Chinese gambling parlor downstairs at that place. Wright's tour ended soon after independence. He was followed by Homer M. Byington, Jr. on his first ambassadorial assignment. He was the typical old line Foreign Service officer and the son of an old line Foreign Service officer who for years had been the head of the Office of Personnel. He had never been east of Suez. He didn't like the informality that governed the relationship among the staff and the relationship it had with outsiders. I found Ambassador and Mrs. Byington very difficult to deal with. I should note that by the time they arrived I was the last of the officers who had served for any length of time under Wright when he was the CG. I guess I didn't know how to deal with Byington. I was used to the Wright informality which obviously was not the Foreign Service that Byington was accustomed

to. I think the ambassador did not feel that I had treated him with proper respect. He objected to the way I dressed--he had insisted that all officers wear coat and tie; that was absurd in that climate.

When I was leaving, Byington let me know that he had been very close to requesting my reassignment several months earlier. He did vent his unhappiness in my efficiency report, which made me quite concerned about my future. My situation was illustrative of what happens when a stuffy EUR type is plunked down in newly independent nation in a non-European region. The fact that he had arrived having hurt himself on ship board, requiring that he present his credentials while on crutches, made him even more sensitive to real or imagined slights. Byington's standing, with me at least, was not helped by his being married to a dreadful woman--a "dragon lady" of the old school. Fortunately, I only served in KL for a couple of months after their arrival. I have been told when the Byingtons left in 1961, the whole post went on a 48-hour drinking binge. They went off to Naples, where Homer became the CG; I am sure that he was much more at home there and probably did a much better job than he could have in a non-European post. I am sorry that I was a witness to this misassignment, but it was good lesson for me in personnel management. I learned what a great difference there was between an old line Foreign Service officer like Byington and a Wristonee like Wright, as well as the difference between Europeanists and specialists in the developing world.

Fortunately, I think the efficiency report had little effect on my career. When a new Foreign Service salary schedule was instituted in 1956, I had been downgraded, but not as far as I might have been. I went from FSO-6 to FSO-7--although it could have been FSO-8, the lowest grade in the revised system. Some of my colleagues found themselves in a similar situation and we had a glorious "demotion" party in which we toasted one another with the worst liquor we could find in our storerooms.

Finally, I should say that my KL tour gave me an opportunity to witness the transfer of power from a European colonial power to a local authority. It was exciting to watch the Union Jack come down at midnight on August 31, 1957; to watch the Duke of Gloucester come from London to turn over the reins of power to the Malaysians. That was a rewarding experience because for me it symbolized the tide of history taking place--the retreat of a European power from its Asian colonial possessions. The turn-over was celebrated by major festivity. As I suggested, there was some apprehension that trouble might break out with the departure of the British. None did. So it was indeed a touching ceremony, both at midnight and early the next morning. The ceremony had to take place before the heat really took hold. I remember going out to the Selangor Golf Club (now the Royal Selangor Golf Club) that afternoon. It was a holiday of course, but things seemed to be carrying on much as always with the usual dearth of non-European members. I had to go to the manager's office to pay my bill. I happen to look in the corner of the office and noticed a small bundle lying there. It dawned on me as I stared at it that the bundle was the Union Jack which had been hauled down from its pole for the last time and now had been wrapped up and quite unceremoniously placed on the floor in the corner of the office.

I should make a point about the club. It had had a few Asian members for some time. There was, it seemed, a tacit understanding that these handful of members could play golf or tennis, but that they would be expected to avoid swimming in the club pool, which implicitly remained for whites only. But at some time during 1957, a young officer by the name of Ted Liu was assigned to USIS. He, like just about all members of the diplomatic community, could afford to join the club and he did. One day, while we were sitting around the pool, Ted Liu jumped into the water. That act integrated the pool at the club. After that, the pool was available to all members and had swimmers regardless of race. I don't think that Ted understood what he had done--he had just arrived and it was hot-- but no one objected and the wall of segregation fell in one instant.

There was another club in KL which was much more renowned. That was the Selangor Club--known as the site of some of Somerset Maugham's more interesting short stories. That club always had a number of Asian members, probably dating back to the twenties or even earlier. It was for that reason--so the story went--that it was known as "the Dog" since "even a spotted dog could be admitted." We are talking about a time when race was very important in social life in Malaya. Because of its more liberal admission policy, I used that club on occasion for meetings with my contacts. However, as a rule I used restaurants or my own home for such sessions.

MICHAEL E. C. ELY
Political/Consular officer
Kuala Lumpur (1957-1959)

Michael E.C. Ely was born into a military family. After receiving a degree in international affairs from Princeton University, Mr. Ely entered the military as a second lieutenant of artillery during the Korean War. In addition to service in Algeria, his career in the Foreign Service took him to China, France, Somalia, Italy, Belgium, and Japan. Mr. Ely was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 9, 1992.

Q: You were in Kuala Lumpur from '57 to '59. What was the political situation at that time?

ELY: I got there one month before independence and at the very end of what they called the Emergency, which was a Chinese insurgency against the British and the colonial system, and against the world. Lucien Pye and a number of people have done a good deal of research on the real root of this Chinese Communist rebellion in the jungle, which had actually broken out in the late '40s, developed into a major Vietnam-like civil war in the early '50s, was eventually suppressed but not eliminated in the mid-'50s, and lasted until the '70s, in a flickering, reduced way. It was, to make a long and complicated story short, a drama of alienation in the Chinese community, of son from father, brought on by the rapid and intense social change that movement from mainland China to Malaya had brought about. It was a revolt against Confucianism.

The Emergency was technically still in effect when I got to Kuala Lumpur, so it was a hardship post. But there was very little hardship, believe me. It was still British and colonial, and had clubs and restaurants and golf courses. A hierarchical society. I was amazed by it; I didn't think that such things still existed. But they certainly did. But at the same time, it was a well-run country, no corruption, relatively prosperous. Kuala Lumpur was and is a Chinese city. I was amazed at the racial content of life there; everything depended on ethnic grouping.

I was back four years ago, found everything had changed and nothing had changed. The city was built up, beautiful and modern, with skyscrapers and heavy traffic and all that, but the same racial tensions still prevailed: the Malays fear the Chinese; the Chinese hold the Malays in contempt for their passiveness and laziness; and both sides look down on the Indians, who...

Q: This was in the '50s, before we had what we probably today would call sensitivity training. How did the embassy deal with the--by the time you were there--mostly ex-colonialist British, the Malays, the Chinese, and all?

ELY: Well, we had an ambassador who had come from being deputy chief of mission in Rome, and he was an old-timer, very formal.

Q: Who was this?

ELY: Homer Byington, Jr.

Q: Oh, God.

ELY: You know him?

Q: Well, yes, his ghost lingers on in Naples. He was born there and served there for eons.

ELY: Well, he was an enthusiastic golfer. Actually, he was a likeable man, but really stuck in the past. His wife was a grande dame; she insisted that all the ladies wear gloves and stockings and hats, and pay calls. There was much printing of formal calling cards. Sort of a European invasion of the post. It was probably the most European post I've ever served at, in some respects.

The British were phasing out. The Malay politicians who were running the country were unsure of themselves. The Chinese were desperately worried about political repression. And the country was very uneasy. The planters at the Selangor Club on Saturday night, when they'd all go and drink a lot, were saying, when independence comes, there would be fighting from Johor Baharu, which is down on the tip of the peninsula, clear up to Alor Star. As it turned out, there was no such conflict. It took place 15 years later.

I rotated, did a little consular work, a little political work, and then ended up doing rubber and tin, which was the main substantive economic activity there, and rather enjoyed it.

My wife had a baby, the first American born in independent Malaya. And we were transferred from there to Paris. In Kuala Lumpur, I had virtually no culture shock at all--everybody spoke English, you were immediately inserted into the clubs, you had a charge account at the department store, and the amah (the maid) came along with the apartment.

ROBERT W. DREXLER
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur(1961-1963)

Robert Drexler was born and raised in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He received his Bachelor's degree from Harvard University before entering the Foreign Service in 1957. In 1975 he served as Deputy Chief of Mission in Bogota, Colombia. In addition to Colombia, he was posted to Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Geneva. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

DREXLER: That's right. We all aspired to Hong Kong as an assignment, but there were only so many places at the time when we graduated, so we were instead sent to what were called peripheral posts, around China, where there were overseas Chinese communities, and once you got such an assignment, you were able to study at FSI the dialect spoken there, and I was assigned to Singapore, so I had three or four months learning the Hokkien dialect, which was terribly difficult, but then at the last minute, the assignment was changed to Kuala Lumpur, where they speak Cantonese mostly, and I didn't have time to learn that. I became the first Chinese Affairs officer at the embassy there. And I was very frostily received, because Kuala Lumpur in those days was the Indonesian language officers' bailiwick. They had a tough language to learn, and few places to speak it. There was Jakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and then there was Kuala Lumpur. I was received at the airport by an Indonesian language political officer with whom I had to work. He said, "Welcome Bob, but frankly, we don't know why they sent you here." But actually Kuala Lumpur is mostly a Chinese city, and I developed contacts in the Chinese community to such an extent that the Police Special Branch complained to the Ambassador about it because they didn't want the US to start sympathizing with the Malaysian Chinese.

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

DREXLER: I got there in 1960 and left at the end of 1963.

Q: *That was the Emergency?*

DREXLER: The Emergency was officially over. The guerrillas, largely Chinese, were still up in the northern jungles. They were no longer killing people in the city, but you were not allowed to go up into the northern territories adjoining Thailand. This Communist insurgency had been mostly put down, and that was a remarkable success in those days. You know, when Americans were still trying to fathom how to deal with such guerrillas, the British showed how it could be done. They were successful. But there were circumstances in Malaysia that couldn't quite be duplicated elsewhere. At first I found myself at loose ends in our Embassy there, because as I said, people didn't welcome me, and they put me to work as visa officer again, which I objected to, because I hadn't learned Chinese to give visas there, and I asked to be reassigned to another post. And then they gave in, and made me the junior political officer in the Political Section, and that's when I began to work with the Chinese community.

Q: *Who was the Ambassador?*

DREXLER: When I first arrived, it was Homer Byington, who had largely a European professional background.

Q: *An Italian hand.*

DREXLER: Yes, of the old school. He later retired there in Naples. And he ran the embassy in a colonial style. We men were all required to wear white cotton or linen suits. The Post Report said that full dress was required of officers, that is, silk hat, white tie, tails, as well as morning coat, white and black dinner jackets, and white suits. This was before the era of polyester, and that sort of thing. And Byington changed suits twice a day at the Embassy. He would come in looking starched in the morning, go home for lunch, dump his suit, put on a fresh one, and looked fairly well starched throughout the day. The rest of us wilted. I fell afoul of him very early when I was observed going to the men's room without my jacket, and my supervisor called me in and said the Ambassador took a very dim view of this. It was a small post, but run in a very stiff way. His wife, known as "Lady Jane," made frequent shopping trips to Singapore, and all the other wives were required to turn out at the airport or the rail station to see her off, wearing hats and gloves, in a tropical climate. This was also of course, the style of the British who were still there in important numbers, and whose style the Byingtons found attractive.

The Peace Corps arrived when I was there, it was one of their pilot projects. Just before they arrived, and after I'd been there perhaps six or seven months, we held a weekly staff meeting about the Corps' plans. We were sitting around the Ambassador's office, about eight or nine of us in all, and the DCM said they had to designate an officer for liaison with the Peace Corps. The Ambassador looked around, and pointed to me, but he didn't recall my name. And this is after I was there for six months as part of just a nine or ten officer staff. Anyway, I was put in charge of the Peace Corps. The Corps did not really want such a person, but that's another story.

The Ambassador's residence was located alongside the golf course. And Byington made himself notorious for not allowing people to come in off the course to retrieve stray golf

balls, which were numerous, as you would expect, if you had a lawn near the 17th or 18th hole.

Finally he left to retire, and then Charles Baldwin came in as the new Ambassador. He had retired from the service a few years earlier as a career officer, but then he was recalled. He was a fine gentleman. A very distinguished diplomat. He didn't know much about Southeast Asia, but he made a great hit with his staff, and with the local people. He was a wonderful antidote to Homer Byington. He brought in a secretary, Olga Hladio, who had served previously in Vienna and Tehran, and was going to go to Moscow, but at the last minute her assignment had been canceled. Baldwin interviewed her and selected her as his secretary. And I married her. So that's why Kuala Lumpur will always be an especially important post to me. It was Ambassador Baldwin who gave my wife in marriage, and walked with her down the almost endless aisle of the great cathedral there, and who gave us a wedding reception.

Q: He learned your name.

DREXLER: Yes, he learned my name. I have the warmest feelings toward him. He was there when Malaysia was formed, that is to say, when the federation of Malaya joined with Singapore, and what was then Sarawak and North Borneo. And he was very close to the father of that country, Tunku Abdul Rahman, a Malay prince, and it was very good to have Baldwin there, because the transition was difficult. It finally led to Singapore's breaking off, under Lee Kuan Yew. We didn't have a major role to play, but such a role as we did play was discharged very capably by Mr. Baldwin.

Q: Let's talk a bit about what you did. You had to sort of make a place for yourself as the Chinese language officer. How did you do that?

DREXLER: First of all, I established contacts with the local Chinese, which hadn't been done before. The country was governed by a coalition party, which was responsible for its independence, and still is in charge up to today, called the United Malay's National Organization. And it formed an alliance with parties representing the other two major communal groups, the Chinese and the Tamil Indians. The Tamil Indians were a small community descended from persons brought in to work in the tin mines, as were some of the Chinese. There was a Malayan Chinese association and a Malayan Indian association, part of the alliance. No one much bothered with the Indian association, which was a tiny party, but no one in the embassy had established a relationship either with the more important Malayan Chinese Association. So I did that for the first time. Actually, I called on the Indians too, but mainly got to know the Chinese leaders of that political party, which was part of the government coalition. There were also Chinese who were in opposition to the alliance. And particularly in the city of Penang, a coastal city on the Straits of Malacca, which is largely Chinese, an island. One of the local Chinese politicians there, Lin Chong Eu, had formed an opposition party, and I was the first embassy person to go up and talk to him. The government frowned on this sort of thing, but both of the Ambassadors encouraged me to do it, and they never tried to curb my

activities. Of course, we just had chats with these people. It was the sort of contacts that are normal in posts around the world.

There were one or two occasions when I was asked to help the Central Intelligence Agency in Kuala Lumpur, because they didn't have any Chinese language officers either. They occasionally ran operations which required some knowledge of Chinese, and asked me to work with them on this, pledging not to tell my State Department superiors about it. So I did this, and helped them with a couple of operations, which they found useful. And I also had a Chinese lady as my assistant, who formerly worked with the Special Branch during the Emergency, doing press translations. There was a very large number of Chinese newspapers, locally as well as in Kuala Lumpur. And she had been working for some time before I got there, but nobody was paying attention to what she did, and her work production fell off, and she nearly left as well. My arrival, of course, delighted her, because she had at least one more reader, but also someone who was willing to work with her and see that her work focused on things of interest. So we revved up what I think was a very good Chinese press translation service, of documents that we circulated to the other political officers, and to the Ambassador, who were not getting it from anybody else. So this was important. I became pretty well established in the embassy, when they could see I could be of use to the CIA and to the other political officers. I could help out in the Consulate. USIA would sometimes ask for my help too; I would occasionally serve as an interpreter for the PAO. And of course friends always wanted you to take them to local Chinese restaurants and order the meal in Chinese, which was something I never learned to do, but tried to finesse. So I came to enjoy the post quite a lot.

Q: I assume you were looking for influence from Mainland China at that time. Did you find any?

DREXLER: No, not really. I found Nationalist influence. The government, of course, was very anticommunist, just having put down a communist rebellion. And the penalty for being found with a weapon was hanging. The Emergency was a terribly bloody affair, and the Communist Party was banned, and so on. There were no relations with Peking, of course, and there must have been a Nationalist Chinese Embassy, but I don't really remember it, or I certainly didn't have anything to do with it. My interest in the Chinese was as Malaysian Chinese, and how they were faring in their own country. The big question was Chinese education, the future of the language, the Malay's national language policy, these were the hot political issues; that the Malays were imposing their own language officially on the Chinese, forcing them to learn, Malay, English, which they did, and their own Chinese dialects at home, and sometimes Mandarin at school. Many of these young people were learning four languages. And the future of their schools, which were largely privately funded by the local communities, was jeopardized. And I was in touch with the Chinese School Teachers Federation, and I was following that. What we wanted to know was, was the country going to blow up. There have been cases where there were severe racial riots.

Q: One thinks of Indonesia. Amok is a Malay term.

DREXLER: In fact, it did not happen while I was there. Shortly thereafter, they had a terrible riot, with great loss of life. So my job was to keep my finger on that pulse. The Mainland - Nationalist thing did really not figure.

Q: How about the counter thing that was happening in Singapore and Lee Kuan Yew. Here was a real Chinese city and leader, who is around today?

DREXLER: He was regarded as a dangerous leftist, and 110% Chinese. Not in a Communist or Nationalist sense, but just too Chinese. He represented a great threat to the Malays in Kuala Lumpur. They had great qualms about bringing Singapore into the Federation, and they did so only in connection with North Borneo and Sarawak, which had a non-Chinese indigenous population, which they thought would help balance the Chinese. When they saw these Dayaks and former headhunters come into the Parliament for the first time on the day I was there, the Malays, I think, had their doubts whether this was really going to be the counterbalance that they had anticipated. But it didn't work with Singapore and Lee wanted it to. He was in tears when they broke up. But Singapore and Lee were just too Chinese, and at that time, Lee was regarded as a leftist. And of course some even thought he was a Communist. The DCM in Kuala Lumpur at that time thought that he was almost in the pay of the Chinese Communists. This was James O'Sullivan. But it was very easy to tar Chinese who resisted Malay dominance, to tar them with a Communist brush. I thought that was unfounded, that the connections did not exist.

Q: You were there when Kennedy, particularly Robert Kennedy came. And this tremendous emphasis on youth, a real arrogance. Can you talk about Robert Kennedy coming there?

DREXLER: He made a bad impression on me personally, though we awaited his arrival with a great deal of enthusiasm. I was there when his brother was assassinated, and scurrying around to find a condolence book and hanging the black streamer on our flag, and having our stationery edged in black, and attending an unforgettable requiem mass in the cathedral. We were all devastated. So Robert still had heroic proportions to us. But when he got there, his behavior -- well, you used a word I would find very apt -- his arrogance and his self absorption were so strong, that as he waltzed through the office and greeted us, not perfunctorily but, well, arrogantly, I can't improve on that -- the charm wore off very soon. He also was involved in mediating a quarrel between Indonesia and Malaysia, the "Confrontasi," the confrontation by Sukarno of the federation. Robert Kennedy thought that he could bring this mediation off quickly and prove his skills, his diplomatic abilities. And he made, I remember, demands on the communication system which we simply were not up to, and he was totally unrealistic and short tempered, and unforgiving when neither our embassy, nor Jakarta, nor Manila, where he went off to, was able to provide him with the backup which he felt he needed, and which I suppose he got in Washington with his entourage. So I think he left thinking badly of us, as we did of him. The one virtue of that experience was that shortly after his trip, a much more modern, sophisticated communications system was installed, which we

all benefitted from, and which was probably overdue. He, of course, did not succeed in mediating this dispute, but made a lot of waves.

Q: Just to sort of wrap this up, as this Confrontasi was going on with Indonesia, were people in the embassy taking sides on this?

DREXLER: We were hostile to the Indonesians. We didn't like Sukarno at that time, and we, among the younger officers there was dislike of the American Ambassador in Jakarta, Howard Jones, who was sometimes called Sukarno's court jester; that's how we viewed him. And of course it was Jones and his country against Baldwin and our country. And in true foreign service fashion, we identified with our host country on this. And of course Sukarno and the Indonesians were easy to identify against. There was poor little Malaysia, a democratic country. And we admired the Tunku, the leader, the prime minister, very much. So we were all for them. I remember when the crowds charged right past my apartment to go to burn the Indonesian embassy, which was just three blocks away, I didn't mind at all. No one was hurt, but we thought they were getting what they deserved. The Indonesian Ambassador and his entourage were all military men and made it clear that they looked down on the Malays. They also felt that the Malays were handed their independence by the British, unlike the Indonesians, who had to fight a bloody war against the Dutch.

Q: What was your impression of Tunku Abdul Rahman?

DREXLER: He was a prince, literally, and also in character. He played an indispensable role at that time. He was the royal line of the House of Kedah. At that time, as now, the Federation of Malay States, which had been formed by the British, of course, had I think nine, or at least seven sultanates. The Sultan of Johore, for example, was well known and even had his own army. These were people who had the almost slavish allegiance of their Malay citizens, who were loyal to their Sultans before anything else. And Malaya, when it became independent, had a king, who served for four years, who was elected by these Sultans, and the role of king passed from one to the other. So the Sultans were very important. They were the cultural, and religious leaders of their sultanates, their states, as we called them then. Kedah was one of these. So the Tunku came from an aristocracy that played an important role. He was English educated, he was trained as a lawyer, he spoke English fluently. And he was a democrat, basically, despite his aristocratic background. By the time I got there he was already on top of the political situation, so I can't really account for his rise. But I certainly witnessed the hold he had. And most important, the Chinese trusted him, and that was vital. They did not trust his deputy, Razak, who succeeded him, who was regarded like most Malays, as basically anti-Chinese. But the Tunku, by his previous political career, by his friendships and his demeanor and conduct, won the confidence of the Chinese, and of course the Indians too. So this was vital. There was no one else like him, no one else near him. So the great fear was that he might die, he might have a heart attack or something, and then what would happen? Of course, he was lucky that he was working with a very enlightened colonial government, the British, at a time when they realized they had to let go. So the transition and the relationship during the transition with the former colonial masters was ideal, very

smooth, to the extent that many Brits were kept on after Independence -- the Chief of the Supreme Court, the top military commander -- to ease the transition until the Malays could work their way up. That showed how relaxed both sides were. It's impossible to think of the Dutch staying on as head of the Indonesian Supreme Court under Sukarno. But this is what happened in Malaysia. And then of course they both had put down the Communist insurgents during the Emergency. This of course was a terrible experience for the Chinese community. But by the time of independence, it had been put down. The Chinese Communist guerrillas had clearly lost, order had been restored, and the Chinese community in the cities wanted to get on with their lives, educate their children, make money, be secure, and so on. They realized that the pro-Peking communists had no future. They were beaten and they didn't really have to worry about them. So they got over the Emergency experience fairly quickly. I think the one mistake, perhaps, and Ambassador Baldwin cautioned the Tunku against this, was adopting Malay as the national language, rather than English. We said, why not English? After all, it's not the language of either of the three major communities, yet the leaders of all three know it. It's an international language, and so on. But the Malays couldn't have it.

CHARLES F. BALDWIN
Ambassador
Malaya (1961-1964)

Ambassador Charles Baldwin graduated from Georgetown in 1926. He served in Australia and Singapore and was named ambassador to Malaysia in 1961. He was interviewed by Kenneth Colton in 1990.

BALDWIN: So far as I can recall, it was the latter. Do you remember Tunku?

Q: Yes.

BALDWIN: Well, when I was in Malaya Tunku was in power, and I did my best. I had known him when I was out there before. I had known him slightly. I did get along very well with him. When I was out there before I gave a reception, one day, and I was looking at the guest list. I came across this little Malaya prince--Tunku Abdul Rahman. I told my secretary to send an invitation to him. To my amazement he came down, dressed in his formal Malay--and came to my reception. I was a little bit taken aback. In any event, Tunku never forgot that. When I went back years later, he welcomed me with open arms. And all the time I was there he was a great help to me, because it facilitated my contacts out there, tremendously. For a long time I had the inside track on what was going on--including the relations with the Philippines.

I will never forget one day. Tunku was a great golfer, and there was a very good golf course right outside the official American residence. I was playing golf with him one day, and suddenly he slammed his club down, and said, "Why don't you make those bloody beggars [leave]?"

And I said, "What 'bloody beggars are you talking about?"

He said, "Those Philippine bastards."

That was the time the tensions were beginning to develop. And you had the confrontation.

Q: Then when you got to Malaysia, as ambassador, the emergency had really ended in 1960. But there were still some problems. Were you involved? This was when they began to move toward developing the Malaysia Federation, with [Singapore], and created the differences with Indonesia. Was this your main problem?

BALDWIN: Yes, by any measure at all. I was up to my ears in that, all the time. It was very difficult, and sometimes a little dangerous. It was fascinating to me, because it was of very major importance.

Q: Did you find it was very important for you to have the support of your colleagues? For instance, you were down there in 1961, and Jack Kennedy's Presidency developed the overseas diplomatic corps--sort of a country team aspect. The ambassador was the number 1. I used to tell my students it was like a little cabinet overseas. I wondered if you found this to be the way you operated, and how successful it was, Ambassador.

BALDWIN: I think it was successful. Those things are successful, depending on the individuals that do them. If they want them to succeed, they succeed; if they don't want them to they don't. It seems a ridiculous oversimplification, but it really isn't. My arrangements worked out very well, very harmoniously, and very comfortably.

Q: I used to have a friend who was in one of the intelligence arms of the government. He used to tell me that in one of the hotels in Singapore, he'd go there to dinner and could tell this guy was the agent of this guy etc. Did you have much of that?

BALDWIN: There was a lot of that.

Q: Did you have much problem with the expanding role given to the CIA, after the Korean period?

BALDWIN: It did spill over, but I had no problems at all; because the representative from the CIA--it was an officer of mine--and he'd been doing my intelligence work. He had one foot in the CIA, and the other . . . The one in the CIA wasn't supposed to be known. In those days that was very confidential. But he knew me very well, and I never had any trouble with him at all. I could have, because of the material in those days; there could have been a lot of very serious trouble. But I never had any trouble with this man. We worked on our problems together. If he had to do something he was a little leery about, he would come and talk to me about it. On a few occasions he went back to the CIA

and said "I won't do this." I had agreed with him, it was not the thing to do. We had that kind of working relation-ship.

I never had anything but the very closest, and most pleasant relations with the CIA.

Q: With your extensive experience with the Commerce Department--as Commercial Attaché and the like--I would imagine that you also got along very well with the other agencies of the government?

BALDWIN: I was remarkably problem free.

Q: I wonder if you ever thought that your pleasure in serving in Malaysia was a product of the fact that you had served in Singapore? This was a tremendous asset for the Department.

BALDWIN: No doubt about it. I have often wondered to what extent I was sent out there because of it--because someone had foresight enough to see this. But it was of great help to me, that I knew all these people. [Tunku] I saw a great deal of him. Tunku was really a close friend. These things were invaluable to me.

Q: You just speculated on the question in my mind--whether your appointment was based on the fact that--if you're moving toward a Malaysian Federation with Singapore, with Malaysia itself--it was the right choice. Because there was obviously going to be difficulty getting these two parts together.

BALDWIN: I always felt that's probably the reason I did get appointed, yes.

Q: What did you think was the problem of Singapore opting out of the Malaysian Federation? Was this a fear of the Chinese influence?

BALDWIN: Yes, 80%. They never could bring together the discordant elements of Malaysia, and China. I worked on that. I talked to Tunku about it. We worked on plan, after plan, after plan. I talked to Lee Kuan Yew; he was a Nationalist Chinese--as you know. He was a very able man in many ways. But it was a very difficult thing.

Q: I guess it was almost inevitable. Then you had another problem, besides Lee Kuan Yew. You had your very good neighbor--Sukarno made a lot of trouble for you while you were there. You were there from '61 to '64; this was that confrontation period. It seems to me your appointment there was clearly opportune, in terms of your background. Now the problems that arose were political.

BALDWIN: That's right, and I'm not a political expert. Maybe that helped. [Sukarno] was a very amazing man. I knew him, and when I went to Indonesia I would invariably call on him. He was always very pleasant with me. He hated Tunku and he knew that I was very close to him. He had his abilities, too.

Q: This was a very important post; you were juggling a lot of balls in the air. You had Brunei, which opted out of the Federation. I guess this was purely the Brunei sultan; he didn't want to pay the high tax being levied on the Federation?

BALDWIN: That's right--I think that had something to do with it. These things--I was involved in all of them, but in a peripheral way. My previous experience was very helpful to me.

Q: The British were feeling pressure on their extended empire.

BALDWIN: Oh yes.

Q: I don't know when they began to pull out of Singapore, but that must have been the handwriting on the wall--about the time you were there.

BALDWIN: It was, and again one of my jobs--I suppose the second. The first of my jobs, by importance, was cultivating my ties with Tunku; and after that it was developing public relations with the British. The handwriting on the wall made it very clear that they were finished there. They didn't want to be. One of the most able British that I knew was Malcolm McDonald, clearly. He saw the handwriting on the wall very clearly. And he worked at a time when it was very unpopular in London for him to do this. He worked to bring about a rapprochement and understanding. I had a great deal of respect for Malcolm. I think in many ways he was a truly great man.

Q: To what degree was your relationship with your home office either a positive, or if you were to write a prescription for any change, what would you write?

BALDWIN: I had very good relations in the Department. And I came to the conclusion that the nature of those relations depended on the nature of the people involved. If the people involved wanted the system to work properly it would; if they didn't--human nature came into it in a very important way, and would spoil the whole thing.

Q: Would you, therefore, suggest, Mr. Ambassador, that appoint-ing people at that level is where you really have to look into the chemistry involved?

BALDWIN: Absolutely.

Q: The person should never be appointed, at that level, who's going to be a frictionist, feisty, and ego tripping. Apparently you were very successful in your interpersonal relations. I'm quite impressed by the fact that you have sighted the importance of the individual coping with his job--wanting to do it right, and being accommodating.

BALDWIN: I think that is the essence of the whole thing.

Q: You came to the end of your service in Malaysia, I believe, in '64. On the basis of your experience there, did you see a developing of the Southeast Asian Association?

BALDWIN: It started, really, toward the end of my tour of duty. I thought it was a very good thing; important to the new countries--some of them antagonistic to each other. All of them had to be there because they were part of that geographic area. I thought anything that would coordinate them and bring them together, and develop better working relationships, was good; and that was the intended purpose. It worked some of the time, and some of the time it didn't--again, depending on the nature of the people.

Q: It would seem to me that the Department would be quite disposed to listen to you? Did you feel that your role, and your experience, was a factor?

BALDWIN: Yes, I think so. When I went back to the Department, after this happened, I was able to check on various incidents in which I was involved. And I found out, to my pleasure, that I had a certain impact. I didn't do everything that I wanted, but people did listen. It wasn't evident where I was, from that remote distance.

Q: Did you ever feel that you were far enough out and that you were independent--that they gave you a lot of free leash?

BALDWIN: I certainly did. I think everybody in that position--no matter what part of the world--the more free leash you had the better you like it. That, of course, caused a lot of friction. If you had somebody in the Department that decided he was going to tell these people what to do, that was the beginning of trouble.

Q: About that time, in the '60's, you had some ambassadors in Vietnam, and in Laos, Cambodia. Occasionally, there used to be regional conferences, I believe. Sometimes in the Philippines. I think there was a chap by the name of Parsons, at one time, that was ambassador up in Laos. Kennedy had a non-Foreign Service officer as ambassador in Thailand.

BALDWIN: The three of us--his wife didn't come along, she had something else to do--we were house guests. Ed and I, and my wife, went for a walk. I don't know how well you know the Japanese--they march almost in a military fashion. The minute they say Ed Reischauer, they [bow]. They had such respect for him.

Q: My last question, Mr. Ambassador, is about language. When you were in Singapore, or in Malaysia, did you find a need to acquire a language facility to communicate? Or would you have English speakers in all your contacts? In Singapore, and perhaps in Malaysia, you had the Chinese legacy of immigrants. Some people have divided the Chinese between the traditionalists and the adapters. Did you find a problem of Chinese Communist influence a pervasive, troubling factor when you were down in Singapore?

BALDWIN: Yes.

Q: After the emergency ended this was a problem in Malaysia, too, wasn't it?

BALDWIN: It was indeed. It was a major fear in that whole area. I used to talk to Malcolm McDonald by the hour about it; about what to do to build up a defense against this.

RONALD D. PALMER
Economic Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1962-1963)

Ambassador Ronald D. Palmer was born in Pennsylvania in 1932. He received a bachelor's degree from Howard University in 1955 and a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1957. Ambassador Palmer joined the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included positions in Indonesia, Malaysia, Denmark, the Philippines, Togo, and an ambassadorship to Mauritius. Ambassador Palmer was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 15, 1992.

Q: *Then you went directly to Kuala Lumpur?*

PALMER: No, I came back to Washington and spent some months here. In fact I had home leave and was almost pulled back from home leave to work during the Cuba crisis of 1962.

Q: *This was the missile crisis.*

PALMER: Yes. But, fortunately, that passed quickly. Then we went out to Malaysia. I replaced a man by the name of Paul Miller in the economic section working for Kent Goodspeed. At that time Charles Baldwin was the Ambassador, Donald McGhee was the DCM, and Frank Underhill was the chief of the political section.

My work at the time was essentially on commodities, etc. The interesting thing for me was that there was such a contrast between Malaysia and Indonesia. Frank Underhill, as you know, was a marvelous drafter. He had written a series of very beautiful despatches, as they were called in those days, contrasting Indonesia and Malaysia as Indonesia being Huck Finn and Malaysia being Tom Sawyer and UK being Aunt Polly. It was very strange. In Malaysia you could drink the water, there was security everywhere, the food was excellent, etc. And frankly I enjoyed it. My wife found it very difficult.

Q: *What was the problem?*

PALMER: Well, you know sometimes when you are living in a stressful situation you are all set for dealing with stress.

Q: *You are speaking about Indonesia.*

PALMER: Yes, that is right. And then when that stress is removed, sometimes you don't function as well. This was my first wife. She had a nervous breakdown there and we then came back to the US in about June, 1963.

We passed through the Philippines at this point, she was at Clark Hospital. Clark at that time was a sea of army tents because of the casualties coming out of Vietnam. I had no idea of what was going on in Vietnam. This was June, 1963.

Q: This was before our major troop commitment.

PALMER: That's right. But there were by 1963, I suppose, something on the order of several thousand Americans in Vietnam. We certainly were suffering significant casualties.

Q: I wonder if we could return for a little glimpse of Malaysia at the time. Having studied the language, did you use it or was English the language you used?

PALMER: Malaysia was a very English pukka society at that point. One saw a good number of whites, Europeans, primarily British. It was still in the days of the British planters when planters would be in their rubber estates during the week and come into town, Kuala Lumpur, on the weekend and proceed to try to drink up all the beer in the country and do various other types of school boy things. There was lots of playing of rugby, etc. These were the days when the Selangor Club, the so-called Spotted Dog, was the center of the expatriate life. Those were the days when Tunku Abdul Rahman and Tun Abdul Razak were leading the country. It was 1963. It was six years away from the riots of 1969 when about 600 people were killed and when Tunku was forced to resign.

With regard to the language, in those days there were very few Malays who spoke English. So if you were going to speak to a Malay you almost had to speak Malay. The Malays that were in Kuala Lumpur tended to be in a very isolated area. Most of the people that one saw tended to be expatriates and, as mentioned, primarily British.

My most realistic experience in using the language was when I was sent in May, 1963 with Bob Blackburn, who has since left the Service, to make a tour up the east coast of Malaysia, across the peninsula and then down the west coast to sample opinion about the Confrontation that was going on with Indonesia at that time. So I had a chance in the days when travel on the east coast of Malaysia was very difficult and when one had to cross about four or five fords by small boats, to see the country before it really changed.

It had already begun an evolution from the end of the British time, 1957, but Malaysian culture had not really taken hold so there was a kind of kaleidoscope. You could go from one rest house in one state to another and go from a place that still very much had a British character to a place where it was very quickly becoming Malaysian, including the food. One place would have wholly Malaysian foods, curry, etc. and another place would be strictly steak and potatoes in the British style.

All in all Malaysia was a delightful place in 1962-63. Kuala Lumpur deserved the name of Garden City as it was then called because it was very green. The British had gone to great pains to make Malaysia into a monument to their colonialism. But there was something antiseptic about Kuala Lumpur in those days. Rather like Singapore these days. It was just too clean and too good to be true, as it were. However, there was at that time a very lively night life that in its quiet way was probably akin to night life that was going on in other places in southeast Asia.

Q: How did we feel at the Embassy there about the confrontation that was going on with Indonesia?

PALMER: That period in time was an extremely interesting one. We felt that Indonesia was very much a bully and interloper. We felt the Malaysians were trying to do good things. They were trying to do everything right. They were going to school, they were trying to regularize and make life orderly in the post independence period. Indeed, the Malaysians faced some extremely difficult problems with regard to the integration of Singapore into the framework of what came to be known as Malaysia [I have been using the word Malaysia previously but it was not formed until the fall of 1963, I should have used Malaya]. We thought in the Embassy that the United States sided too much on the side of Indonesia.

Q: You had come from working under Howard Jones. Did he have horns in the eyes of the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur?

PALMER: Well, looking at it from the perspective of Kuala Lumpur, I found myself more frequently than not toward Indonesia, trying to defend American policy, indeed trying to defend the well known slant of the Embassy in Jakarta towards Sukarno. Often people would not give me very much of a hearing. Rather patronizing, then thought it was nice that I would seem to defend Embassy Jakarta.

You asked about Ambassador Jones. There was a certain amount of coolness one would feel in Malaya towards Ambassador Jones. He was known as Howard Merdeka Jones, as you probably have heard.

Q: No.

PALMER: Merdeka is the Indonesian word for independence and it was alleged at one point that Sukarno was asking ambassadors and others in his entourage to entertain. Ambassador Jones is alleged to have stood up and urged the crowd towards merdeka, the Indonesian goal.

Q: Now merdeka in the Indonesian terms not only meant independence but also meant taking part of Borneo. Is that right?

PALMER: It wasn't just Borneo. It was the whole area from the tip of Sumatra over to New Guinea. Yes, it did include the idea that the Malaysian or former British portion of

Borneo might be freed, as it were, to have Indonesian sovereignty asserted over them. It is useful to remember that the area that is now called Sabah in Malaysia was the British North Borneo Company. The area called Sarawak had been, of course, the area ruled by Rajah James Brook, the white Rajah of Borneo. Brunei was ruled by the Sultan of Brunei who chose eventually not to go into Malaysia.

So these were, so to say, colonial leftovers in Borneo. In the final analysis, however, Tunku Abdul Rahman and the leadership of Malaysia were very successful in encouraging the people in Borneo to join the Malaysian Federation. There were those who thought this was a British confection and perhaps it was in the beginning. But as Tunku became Prime Minister and got further and further into the statecraft that was necessary to bring Malaysia into existence, one thing became very basic. The Malay population of Malaya, if one is to have only Malaya and Singapore, would be approximately equal to the Chinese population of the two territories together. To actually get a Malay preponderance, it would be necessary to include Sabah and Sarawak as well. That was the premise that I think the British had suggested the idea to Tunku. But it became a self-fulfilling prophecy because the issue of maintaining Malay political control was something very, very much on the minds of the Malay leadership in the early sixties. You may recall that this was a time of great emphasis on the question of Malay becoming the national language and various other manifestations of nationalism and emphasis on the Malay question.

I said earlier that there were riots in 1969. They were ultimately about the issue of political control. The formula had been that the Malays had political control and the Chinese had economic control. In the elections of 1969, what happened was that the Chinese almost won control of the state of Selangor which at that time include Kuala Lumpur. Political leaders on the Malay side appeared to encourage or at least egged on Malay radicals who attacked Chinese and this led to the May 13 riots at that time.

The critical thing and we can come back to this later on in these conversations, is that the Malays were then and remain quite sensitive to the issue of political balance between them and the Chinese.

Q: Looking at it at that time, how did we feel at the Embassy concerning the "communist menace"?

PALMER: Communism in Malaya was a very real thing. Communism, of course, in Indonesia was real as well. This was after the emergency which ended in 1960, but the Communist Terrorists, as they were called, were still operating in remoter areas of the country. It was known that they would come across the mountainous spine of the country down from Thailand, where they had a sort of safe haven, and would infiltrate into various areas of the country.

The issue of communist menace looked at from the perspective of 1990 does not have quite the dramatic coloration that it had in the early sixties. In the early 1960s communism and the issue of Asian communism and the possibility that communism as an

organized force could extend from China down to Thailand, down to Malaya and across the Straits of Malacca to Indonesia, was a very real...I shouldn't say fear, but was regarded as something that could happen. It is easy to forget that through most of the fifties and certainly well into the sixties, the issue of whether communism or anti-communism was going to prevail in most of the third world was a very open question.

I don't want to get too far ahead of my story at this point, but I will tell you right now that if you speak in man-to-man terms to leaders of Singapore or Malaysia they will tell you that the US intervention in Vietnam gave them time to organize their societies and to protect them from becoming communist.

Q: This is a contention which I have to admit my prejudice. I think there is validity in this idea that maybe it didn't work completely in Vietnam, but certainly it allowed the whole area to solidify.

PALMER: Again, I don't wish to sharpen any historical, rhetorical swords. But I believe that if things had come out differently in Indonesia in 1965...that is to say if the pro-Communist coup of September 30, 1965 had turned out so that the left had won instead of being defeated, as it were, and the PKI and all the forces it represented had gotten control of the country, I just don't know what the impact of that would have been. It would have been a very considerable political impact in the region.

**ROBERT W. DUEMLING
Consular/Economic Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1963-1965)**

**Consul
Kuching, Sarawak (1965-1966)**

Ambassador Robert W. Duemling was born in Fort Wayne, Indiana in 1929. He received a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Yale University. Prior to becoming a Foreign Service officer, Ambassador Duemling served in U.S. Navy intelligence and was stationed in Japan. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Rome, Kuala Lumpur, Tokyo, Ottawa, Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Suriname. Ambassador Duemling was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: In 1963, you were assigned to Kuala Lumpur. How did that come about?

DUEMLING: I had been in the Navy in Japan and became tremendously interested in Japan and particularly in Japanese culture and society. So much so that when I left Japan at the end of my navy assignment, I said to myself that I had to leave Japan right away because if I didn't I would become a Japanophile who would settle down and just get

deeper and deeper into the society. I did get out of it, but when I came into the Foreign Service and was given an opportunity to study a "hard language", I decided to shy away from it and not study Japanese because it was too soon after my entrance into the Foreign Service. I wanted to get a broader view of the Foreign Service before plunging back into Japanese affairs. But I was very interested in the Far East as a result of my naval experience and my visits to a number of countries out there aboard the aircraft carrier. So I told a friend in the Personnel Office--Christian Chapman-- that I would love to go back to the Far East after my Rome tour. He agreed and since he was in charge of assignments into the Far East, he found me an assignment in Kuala Lumpur which was not a language-requirement country, having been a former British colony. Knowing Malay was therefore not essential. So I was assigned to KL to be a one-man Consular Section. At that time, before the "track" system, it was felt that a junior officer should obtain experience in different functions. Having served as a political officer in Rome and knowing that I would prefer to remain in the political area for the rest of my career, it was important that I become acquainted with the other Foreign Service facets and aspects. I was therefore very pleased to get this assignment as a one-man Consular Section. That was much better than having to go to a huge Embassy in a visa mill where you would get a much more limited experience. This way I would be performing all the functions of a Consular Section--protection and welfare, immigrant and visitors visas, passports, citizenship. So for one year, that was my job and I learned a lot, getting the consular functions "under my belt".

There was very good rotational program at our Embassy in K.L. and the DCM there, Don McCue, was very good about trying to give a variety of experience to the junior officers in the Embassy. He rotated people throughout. So after I had been there in the Consular Section for one year, he assigned me to the Economic Section and I spent about eight months there, responsible for all the basic reporting on the natural rubber industry and the tin industry which were the Malaysian principal export commodities at that time. That was very good economic experience. It got me involved with US exports and imports into Malaysia. I learned a little bit about the American business community in Malaysia. Then our Ambassador, Jim Bell, decided that I would be the right guy to become the Consul in charge of the small Consulate we had in East Malaysia, in Kuching, Sarawak. Therefore, I went to Borneo, which is divided one-third --the old British Part--consisting of Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah (Sarawak and Sabah joined Malaysia) and the other two thirds consisting of Kalimantan which is part of Indonesia. I went to run the Kuching consulate, which no longer exists. I was responsible for three areas--Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah-- reporting across the board on political and economic issues. That was very interesting. This was at the time of so-called "confrontation" between Malaysia and Indonesia. The only place where the two countries abutted was in Borneo, so that when I was there, there were Indonesian raids across the border into Sarawak. That was never much of a war. It was a low-level guerrilla activity.

Q: Was there a feeling that the incursions were not serious or could be contained?

DUEMLING: The thought was that it could be contained without too much trouble. Most people felt that it was primarily posturing on the part of the Indonesians. No one thought

that they would do much. In the meanwhile, there were these guerrilla activities. There was an attack, for example, on a police station seven miles outside of Kuching during which several people were killed. There was always the concern about infiltrators. No one thought it would lead to full scale war, but at the same time it was not anything that you could just ignore.

My territory also included Brunei. In those days it was a British protectorate. It is now independent and we have an Embassy there. I did have the fun, while Consul in Kuching, of representing the US President at the wedding of the current Sultan of Brunei, who was then about 21 years old, marrying a young lady of about 18. I doubt very much that the President knew that he was being represented at the marriage of the Sultan and in fact I don't remember any particular directions from Washington or the Embassy on what to do. I just figured that we ought to have been there. I had to give some gift; I went to Singapore and bought an American made silver cream and sugar set. That was given on behalf of the President of the United States. This was all on my own initiative. This is the sort of stuff that when you are in the Foreign Service, way out in the boondocks somewhere, you take the initiative.

Q: Did we show much concern with the fighting? Did we try to bolster the Malaysian side?

DUEMLING: Yes, we were. We didn't want to be drawn into the dispute publicly, but essentially we supported the independence of the Malaysian states against any potential Indonesian aspirations to take over Malaysia. We were supportive of the Malaysian cause. One tends to forget the facts and the mood of the situation at the time. We forget the Communist international of 1948 and their plans to foment political unrest and disorder in various places. One of those places was Malaysia. There had been the so called "emergency" which was a serious insurrection which took place in Malaysia throughout the early 1950's. It was not until it was effectively brought under control that the British granted independence to Malaya in 1957. There was still concern when I was serving in Malaysia and Borneo for the vestigial Communist party movement working out in the jungles. There was a certain amount of political agitation going on. So there was some interest and concern for what could happen.

Q: Do you have any reflections about our Embassy in Indonesia, which was then under Ambassador Howard Jones, who was viewed as being too pro-Sukarno?

DUEMLING: There was a famous episode when Jones sat on the platform at a big political rally with Sukarno. When introduced to the crowd by Sukarno, Jones raised his fist and shouted "Defeat Malaysia" in Indonesian. This was totally unauthorized and we thought that Jones had been carried away. It was totally ill-advised. We laughed about it because we thought it was slightly loony. There was a certain tension between our Embassies in Malaysia and in Indonesia and our Consul General in Singapore as well. There were three different posts involved in the Malaysia-Indonesia dispute: one was the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, one was the Consulate General in Singapore and one was the Embassy in Jakarta. It was interesting to watch the telegraphic traffic emanating from

these three posts because they were each reporting on the viewpoints of the states to which they were accredited. There was undoubtedly a certain amount of "clientitis" creeping into the reporting. There were some small, subtle digs from each post about the others. Singapore joined Malaya in 1963 to form Malaysia. I arrived in Kuala Lumpur just after that event had taken place. Therefore, one of the factors on the American side, was the Consul General in Singapore which had been an independent post, but after the formation of Malaysia, had become a subordinate post to the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. That was a hard pill to swallow for the Consul General in Singapore. That post had been independent for a long time.

That situation did not last very long because within a couple of years Singapore left Malaysia. That was a fascinating evolution. I was in a position to see that situation in considerable detail because shortly after I arrived in K.L., I met the British Ambassador-- High Commissioner-- and his wife. We became life time friends. We remained very friendly after all of us had left K.L. They invited me to their daughter's wedding at Eton College some years later. I remained in close touch with them until they died. In any case, I became good friends with Lord and Lady Head. He had a very distinguished career--he had been one of the youngest Brigadiers in the British Army. He left the British Army at the end of World War II in order to go into politics. He was the Minister of Defense in the Eden Cabinet at the time of the Suez Canal crisis in 1956. When Harold MacMillan shuffled the Cabinet, Lord Head declined to stay at Defense because the Prime Minister was planning to reduce the size of the British Army and, somewhat like Winston Churchill, Head didn't want to preside over that. He then began a diplomatic career--he was High Commissioner in Nigeria and then Malaysia. He was a breath of fresh air in Malaysia because despite the fact that he was a Viscount, he had started as a commoner. His wife was born into nobility, being the daughter of the Earl of Shaftesbury. Both were vigorous types. Lady Head was very liberal and despite her ancestry, in manner, speech and dress was a very plain woman. She wore plain dresses; she wore flat shoes, she wore a kerchief around her head. She thought that Malaysia was an extremely interesting place. She got involved in many activities--she went to political meetings. While her husband was dealing with the Prime Minister and other high level officials, she was out in the boondocks. They were quite a political couple. We played a lot of tennis together on their court.

During this very turbulent political period, one of the Heads' frequently unannounced visitors was Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister of Singapore who made Singapore independent again in 1965. I was at the British residence on the day that in effect the Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman, threw Singapore out of Malaysia. I'll never forget Lee Kuan Yew rushing to the British residence unannounced because he was in such close touch with the British government about these problems. He was in tears. He consulted with the High Commissioner and then left. I asked Lord Head what was going on and he told me confidentially that Lee just had a session with the Malaysian Prime Minister who told Lee that he thought that he (Lee) had violated a gentlemen's agreement regarding the forthcoming elections. The Prime Minister thought that Lee's party, which was based in Singapore, would not contest any elections on the mainland. But apparently Lee, after having made that agreement, went back to his own Cabinet

which over-ruled him. It decided that their party would contest in two or three constituencies on the mainland. That was obviously contrary to the agreement originally reached and the Tunku threw Singapore out of Malaysia. This anecdote is interesting in part because there are many versions of how the rupture between Malaysia and Singapore took place. One version had it that Singapore and Lee took the initiative to opt out of Malaysia. That was not the case. My sense was that Lee would have preferred to stay in Malaysia because at the time there was considerable question about the economic viability of a little city-state like Singapore. Singapore then, as contrasted to now, was not the economic major player. It was a busy little place with a certain amount of commerce and some manufacturing, but it was nothing like Hong Kong. What has of course happened is that Singapore has become the "other Hong Kong". With the political changes that will take place before the end of the century in H.K., Singapore may become the pre-eminent financial center of East Asia. None of that of course was the case back then.

Q: You went back to Washington in 1966 at the height of the Vietnam War, to become Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary for East Asia. What were your responsibilities?

DUEMLING: I was asked to return after one year in Borneo to become the economic officer for the Malaysia-Singapore desk. There wasn't too much to do in that job. I was underemployed. I worked closely with Bob Barnett, who was the Bureau's Deputy Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs. Barnett was intellectually very stimulating and therefore I enjoyed that aspect of my job. The rest was pretty boring. Fortunately, Bill Bundy, the Assistant Secretary, needed a new special assistant to run his office. He had spied me and knew that I was underemployed. He therefore asked if I would be willing to fill the job and I readily agreed.

WILLIAM ANDREAS BROWN
Principal Officer
Kuching, Sarawak (1964-1965)

William Andreas Brown was born in Massachusetts in 1930 and graduated from Harvard. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956. He served in numerous posts including Taiwan, Singapore, Sarawak, Hong Kong, India and the USSR. He became DCM and ambassador to Israel. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1998.

BROWN: No. In the history of Malaya the British had gone through the period of the "troubles," that is, from 1948 through 1960, known as "The Emergency." Actually, the Emergency was virtually over by 1957, when the Federation of Malaya was recognized as independent by the British and by the U.S. The Emergency lasted three more years until it was officially declared to have ended in 1960. There were nine states in the Federation of Malaya. Then there was a federal center at Kuala Lumpur. Of course, they

had a British Parliamentary system of government.

At the time the Federation was recognized as independent in 1957, the leader of the Federation was Tengku Abdul Rahman. He was a British trained lawyer. I think that it took him about 15 years to get his law degree. He wasn't a great student but he was a well-born member of the ruling family of the State of Kedah. He was a great figure in modern Malay history because he was a moderate and an ideal father figure.

In addition to the Federation of Malaya was Penang, which was a separate entity, originally part of the Straits Settlements, along with Malacca and Singapore. It was a free port, as Singapore was. When I arrived in Singapore in 1961, it was separate from the Federation of Malaya. It had been a British Crown Colony. In modern, historical terms, it was the first British settlement in Malaya. It was a great, commercial enterprise, sometimes known as the "Jewel" or the "Pearl" of the Orient, and sometimes as the "Big Godown" [warehouse].

What the British had in mind was how to pull out but yet hand things over to local leaders in Singapore in such a way as to ensure future stability, peace, and prosperity. They came up with what was known in code language as the Grand Design. That was, to persuade Tengku Abdul Rahman to include Singapore and fold its 85 percent Chinese ethnic population into the Federation of Malaya. Tengku Abdul Rahman, to put it mildly, was quite reluctant to do this. He didn't need another 2.5 million Chinese in the Federation. He already had enough Chinese in it.

Q: You might mention the role that the Chinese had played earlier during "The Emergency" [1948-1960].

BROWN: That amounted to a civil war. Chinese Leftist students and workers had gone against the British supported and Malay dominated political structure. They had taken to the bush [jungle] in the Federation of Malaya [in 1948]. For those long years between 1948 and the mid 1950s, they had a patron and supporter in communist China. These ethnic Chinese, some of them youths and some of them older than that, took to or were driven into the bush, where they were hunted down by British and Malay troops and police. This created great ethnic tension.

The British way of handling all of this was to move many of the Chinese living in areas in or near the jungle into camps, which were called New Villages. These villages were enclosed with barbed wire and fortified, to some extent. The villagers had a curfew imposed on them, usually from sunset to sunrise. Any Chinese found outside that New Village after the curfew went into effect at dusk, particularly if he were carrying food, let alone weapons, was subject to extreme measures, including execution by hanging. Malays and Indians were told that if they saw a suspicious character, which they knew meant a Chinese out of place after the curfew began, were encouraged to report him to the police.

A guerrilla war had been underway and this was the British answer. It took a long time

and a great deal of effort and energy, but the British pacified Malaya by this approach. So there were a lot of bitter memories left over among the ethnic Chinese after this process was completed.

Q: And you have to admit that the ethnic Chinese were a destabilizing force in Malaya.

BROWN: Many of them were. There were also many moderates among the Chinese community, but it was a very difficult situation. Now came the idea of including Singapore in this federation. Tengku Abdul Rahman was very reluctant to go along with this British proposal to incorporate Singapore into the Federation of Malaya. He felt that he did not need additional Chinese, who would essentially be led by Lee Kuan Yew who was considered by many conservative Malays as pro-communist.

The bargaining went on, back and forth. For his part, Lee Kuan Yew subscribed to this British proposal as a chance to broaden substantially his opportunities and achieve his goal of a united, Malayan federation, ultimately to be dominated by the PAP in Singapore, with its superior intellect, expertise, and so forth. Of course, he was looking well down the road.

For three years, Stu, I attended Lee Kuan Yew's political rallies and any others that I could. It was a remarkable thing. I was the junior officer in a small, Political Section. Steve Comiskey, the chief of the Section, was a Chinese language officer. He was a very sharp guy. He said in effect to me: "Look, I've been here in Singapore for three years. It's a small place. I know it up, down, and sideways. See if you can do some biographic work. By the way, the consular district of the Consulate General in Singapore also covers the three political entities on the North coast of Borneo: Sarawak, a British protectorate; North Borneo, a British Crown Colony; and the tiny Sultanate of Brunei, also a British protectorate, in between them. Go over there and visit those places. You can cover them as well."

Airgrams were much slower in reaching Washington. That experience made my day. The focus now came on the area. Indonesia became militaristic in terms of confrontation. I suggested that, as a political gesture by the United States, we open a small Consulate in Sarawak. Notwithstanding the fact that, as usual, there was no money in the State Department budget, this was done. For that I can thank Governor Averil Harriman, then Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs, who somehow focused on this. When he was told that there was no money for the establishment of such a post, he said, "Find the money!" You can guess where the money came from. In any case, the money was found, and I opened an American Consulate in Kuching, Sarawak. I arrived there in 1964. I don't know whether you can find it on the map.

Q: I was just looking at the map.

BROWN: Kuching is the capital of Sarawak, and a hot situation was in full play there. Sukarno's Army had dressed up as freedom fighters, and they were launching raids against Sarawak from Indonesian territory, some 30 miles away from Kuching.

In the middle of all of this the pro-communist Chinese Left in Sarawak was driven underground. The British moved to sweep them away. The Leftists fled to the Sarawak jungle, which was pretty formidable in places. So there was a small-scale war there. The British moved in the Royal Marines, commandos, and aircraft carriers off the shore. There was an Australian Brigade and a battalion of Gurkhas committed there. Brunei was convulsed by Azahari's attempted takeover, which was put down by the British. I still have somewhere a green, camouflage shirt, with an Azahari logo or patch on the shoulder, with a couple of bullet holes in it. The Muslim imams of the time had blessed Azahari's troops, telling them that if they wore green shirts and went through certain rituals, they would be bulletproof. I have one of the relics of this. So the situation was red hot.

I had a consular district which amounted to the area covered by France, Italy, Portugal, and Spain. It was a vast territory, with all of these things going on. Washington suddenly became interested in what was going on down there. Professionally speaking, it was a happy hunting ground. I traveled and I had access at the highest levels with people I had known when they were nobodies. Now they were cabinet ministers and power brokers. It was a very exciting time.

Q: Just to keep things in perspective, at this point Singapore was still a member of the Federation of Malaysia.

BROWN: Singapore was swept into the Federation. The Consulate General in Singapore was reduced to the status of a Class 3 post. Every nickel spent had to be approved by the embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Ambassador Peterson moved swiftly to assert his ambassadorial control over Singapore. After all, he knew Singapore. He had been there as Consul General many years before.

I was therefore reporting, not to Singapore, but to the embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Having overseen the construction of a very tiny but very modern communications room, I had excellent communications and was rather prolific in those days, grinding out all sorts of political and economic reports. I was doing some consular work as well. I had a USIS [United States Information Service] officer and another gentleman as well on my staff. These were very exciting times.

This experience put me on the map. Just before I was assigned to the American Consulate in Kuching, Sarawak, I had had an unsolicited offer to become Associate Professor in the Department of Chinese at Princeton University. When this offer was made, I was still in Singapore and I went through a terrible time making up my mind. I went to Princeton, was interviewed by the Department head, and the President, then was offered this job. It was a wrenching decision to make. After all, I had come into the Foreign Service temporarily hoping to get precisely for this kind of opportunity. And now, there it was: an offer to be an Assistant Professor at Princeton at age 32. But I turned down the offer because life in the Foreign Service in Borneo was so exciting.

Q: Did you get your Ph.D. degree?

BROWN: I had received my doctorate in absentia, as it were, from Harvard and the word had gotten around. The field of Chinese studies had exploded in the United States. Now my opportunity had come, but life had become so exciting in the Foreign Service that I turned it down.

Q: Your colleagues up in Kuala Lumpur and you, yourself, were aware of communications from the embassy in Jakarta and Ambassador Howard Jones.

BROWN: This was a delicate subject. We looked on Ambassador Jones as an apologist for the Sukarno regime. Maybe that was an injustice to him. However, later on I saw him in what was, perhaps, his first appearance after he had retired, at a major conference of Asian scholars in New York. Howard Jones was up on the podium, but I must say that he turned in a very disappointing performance. Ruth MacVeagh, an Assistant Professor at Cornell University, also appeared on this same podium. She was very critical of U.S. policy toward Indonesia.

From the reporting that we had received, it appeared to us that President Sukarno had Ambassador Jones wrapped around his little finger. I'm sure that from Ambassador Jones' viewpoint he was manfully trying to maintain American interests in Indonesia. Indonesia was a very important country and would continue to be so. Ambassador Jones pictured the Federation of Malaysia as an unfortunate development which would have unfortunate results.

The U.S. relationship with Sukarno worsened. Sukarno had been damning America in public, often with Ambassador Jones on the platform, seated near him. Economically, Indonesia was sinking lower and lower. For years people had been writing that this situation couldn't go on, but it did. It was a sad, sad spectacle.

Q: The British Army was very much committed in Malaysian Borneo. At this point the British Army was a very professional force, having gone through the Emergency in Malaya. What was their estimate of the Indonesian Army at this point?

BROWN: The average Indonesian Army unit wore uniforms like freedom fighters. Within days of its appearance on the scene elements were captured, it and their soldiers were putty in the hands of British intelligence. Young, Chinese communists, especially the Chinese women, were very difficult to break. However, within days, as I say, the Indonesians would give the British the information that they wanted. The British quickly had a pretty good readout of what the Indonesians had committed to this struggle in Borneo. While publicly the British would refrain from expressing contempt for the Indonesians, I would say that they were pretty contemptuous of the kind of Indonesian units that came their way, as far as their fighting ability was concerned. Remember, this was rough terrain, and the British had the advantages in terms of logistics and training.

For the average Indonesian soldier, especially the Javanese, this was really wild country.

He was at the end of a long, long supply line. In the middle of all of this, it was fascinating to note that my roles and relationships were changing in terms of both Kuala Lumpur, on the one hand, and Singapore, on the other. Administratively, I relied on Singapore, which was a lot closer to me than Kuala Lumpur was. However, I had to be careful to avoid being seen as a Singapore creature in the eyes of the embassy in Kuala Lumpur.

It wasn't too long before I was getting overly detailed guidance from the embassy in Kuala Lumpur. The embassy took the view that what I was reporting was all very interesting, but shouldn't I wait a while until what I was reporting could be folded into the larger picture of this new, Federation of Malaysia? I wasn't about to wait. I was firing reports on the situation off to Washington.

In the middle of all of this came an important, career decision. I think that, in terms of reputation and so forth, I was really in a hotshot atmosphere. I was reporting on interesting material. However, with my Chinese language background, I wanted to get into the big game.

So I applied for Russian language training in the hope of getting the Sino-Soviet slot in the Political Section of the embassy in Moscow. And I got it! Now begins another chapter: the descent from being the Principal Officer at a post in a fast-breaking, charged atmosphere, moving to Washington, going through Russian language training, and then going to Moscow, a major embassy at the heart of the Soviet empire. This was quite a dramatic change.

However, before I leave Borneo, let me comment on a couple of things. I wondered, at the time, whether this structure would last. The question was whether this new, Malaysian leadership, which was initially successful, under British tutelage, in administering fairly disparate peoples, would be able to survive for very long. Once it was independent, even with a significant amount of British influence and assistance, would it be able to incorporate and maintain Singapore and the Borneo territories of Sarawak and Sabah in the Federation of Malaysia?

Remember that by the time I left Kuching, the fighting wasn't over. As I said, Kuching, Sarawak, was about 30 miles from the border with Indonesia. There were firefights taking place not far from me, as Sukarno's troops, dressed as freedom fighters, pushed into Sarawak and into Sabah. This seemed to be pretty dramatic stuff at the time, and it concerned me.

We had a virulent form of the Vietnam War going on when I left Borneo in 1965. Lyndon Johnson was now President of the United States. I thought that with wisdom and moderation, such as might emanate from Tengku Abdul Rahman, the Borneo territories could be successfully incorporated into the Federation of Malaysia.

As far as Singapore was concerned, I had my doubts as to how the relationship with the Federation of Malaysia would survive over the long term. Indeed, shortly thereafter Lee

Kuan Yew was seen by the Malay leadership of the Federation of Malaysia as so rambunctious that Tengku Abdul Rahman summoned him to Kuala Lumpur and told him that Singapore was out of the Federation. Lee Kuan Yew had been preaching for a long time that Singapore's water and commerce were so intertwined with Malaysia that it could not make it alone. I had heard him make this statement on many occasions. Then, when he came back from his meeting with Tengku Abdul Rahman, he called a press conference and said, "Of course we can make it alone, and we're going to make this place really go ahead." And he did.

Now Lee made a success of Singapore as an independent entity at the expense of many other people. Anybody who got in his way, and this has always been the case, he ran over like a steamroller. I had mixed feelings concerning how long Singapore could last in this way. I still have mixed feelings on this subject. The question was whether only Lee Kuan Yew could do what was done. Did things have to work out that way, or could it not have been done in a nicer, more democratic manner? This is something for scholars to debate.

The fact is that he had many of his erstwhile comrades in the PAP thrown into jail and they did not emerge from jail until they recanted. That meant that the tougher elements among them were in prison for many years. I had a contact among Lee Kuan Yew's advisers. He was British and named Tommy Elliot. Tommy was a self-educated, self-made professor of pharmacology, a Quaker and a dedicated socialist. His name was never in the front pages because he was a white and therefore had to remain a relatively quiet member of Lee's brain trust. Since Tommy was a pacifist and a Quaker, as well as a professor at whose feet many of these socialist intellectuals had sat, he was sorely troubled by some aspects of what Lee Kuan Yew was doing.

Tommy had first hired Lee Kuan Yew on Lee's return from law studies in England and gave him his first job as a lawyer for a naval base labor union. Tommy Elliot was a British expatriate who had been on the British security black list for a long time. He told me that Lee Kuan Yew had taken him aside during the election campaign of 1959 and said, "Tommy, you're a good friend, but from now on you and I part company. I've read your file over at British security headquarters, and we have to part." Later on, although Tommy was not an economist, he was instrumental in drawing up plans for what became the Jurong Industrial Park [in West Central Singapore] and these great, industrial sites in Singapore which we now see refining oil.

In Sarawak and Sabah there were those who had gone along with the Federation of Malaysia and who held influential positions in it. However, they had doubts about it. When Lee Kuan Yew broke away from the Federation of Malaysia, or, put another way, when Singapore was expelled from the Federation, he may have had the view that he might be able to found his own Federation made up of Singapore, plus Sarawak, Brunei, and Sabah.

Indeed, when I made my farewell call on Donald Stephens, then the Chief Minister [similar to Governor] of Sabah, he said to me: "Bill, you're a friend, and I want to ask your advice. Should I stay in the Federation of Malaysia? Lee Kuan Yew is suggesting

that I get out.” I said, “Mr. Minister, let's take a walk in the garden. It is not for me to advise you.” Then, once we got into the garden, I said, “Donald, I know it's on your mind and I know that you and Lee Kuan Yew are in contact. However, you are Chief Minister of Sabah and federal minister as well. I ask you: what is going to be the Indonesian picture five or 10 years from now? Where will your real threat come from? If you go it alone, who knows what will happen?” That was the kind of thinking that I was going through at the time.

One didn't know where Sukarno would finally take things. Who would succeed him and what would be the outcome? Sukarno was the leader of a very virulent form of Indonesian nationalism. It was said that in Sukarno's office was a huge map showing the great brotherhood of brown-skinned peoples that ran all the way from Madagascar to Mindanao. The Indonesians had a manifest destiny syndrome at the time.

Well, this situation worked out differently. However, I often thought back on the various possibilities that might have occurred. Looking back now, I think that the Malaysians did the right thing, and they got a good deal. A lot more oil was discovered in Sarawak and Brunei, even though the wells in Sarawak had previously been regarded as having largely dried up. There didn't seem to be much oil off Sabah. The Sultanate of Brunei seemed to be facing declining fortunes. Suddenly, offshore oil wells were discovered by American wildcat prospectors, and money began pouring in to Brunei. It was a very interesting time, and it is interesting even now to look back on it.

Q: What was the role of the ethnic Chinese in the Borneo area? Were they smuggling up to Singapore or to the Federation of Malaysia?

BROWN: Economically and in many other ways they looked to Singapore. Singapore was the exciting place to be. That's where the dynamism was, and that's where their trade ties were. That's where the nearest Chinese university was. That's where a lot of dynamic Chinese businessmen lived, with whom they had familial or other ties.

From the security point of view, it had been the British who had been protecting these Chinese. Now the British were handing over their former responsibilities to a Malaysian security establishment, with a continuing, but diminishing British presence in the background, which would be phased out. This was a matter of concern to these Chinese businessmen. They faced the alternative that, if they went against all of this, they could be at the mercy of Sukarno or fanatical Muslim figures like Sheikh Azahari. The British promised these Chinese businessmen that they would negotiate the best, constitutional terms available. The Christian missionary community was very upset. The Dayaks and the other, non-Christian and non-Muslim plurality in the Borneo territories, who had been accustomed to the idea that the British were their great protectors, were also disturbed. However, they were paid off with positions, commercial advantages, and so forth. So it worked out for them.

However, the Chinese of Sabah were very conservative and were making large amounts of money from timber, which was rapidly being cut down. Japanese interests were buying the great forests of Sabah. Cocoa was being planted, and a whole, new form of economic

activity was emerging. The Chinese business interests were conservative politically and were making money. Everything looked pretty good. Sarawak was a much poorer economy. It had a virulent, left-wing underground component within the Chinese community. Sarawak had a different history. It went back to the time of the Rajah Brooke family dynasty. The first Rajah Brooke was a British adventurer who arrived in Sarawak from Singapore in the early 1830s. He witnessed Chinese rioters carrying a large pike with the head of the person who, they thought, was Rajah Brooke himself! He was not a popular figure with the Chinese. However, the Brookes continued to import Chinese workers. As in so many other situations and certainly in Sabah, the Chinese became the sinews of the economy.

Q: But the Chinese in Sarawak weren't soldiers.

BROWN: They weren't soldiers, although in Sarawak there were some Chinese who took to the jungle and waged a guerrilla type war against the British. These Chinese were militants. They were very disaffected, passionate and well indoctrinated. I'm speaking now of a small group.

One thing I want to mention before I forget it. When I came back to Washington, somebody on the Singapore desk took me aside and said, "You know, we've got a little bit of a problem here in that Washington is now very "ga ga" over Lee Kuan Yew and his success. We'd like you to do a sort of debriefing. Even though you have come in from Sarawak, you served in Singapore for three years." So I agreed and spoke to a small group in the State Department.

I said that I would offer this advice: Be very careful with Lee Kuan Yew. He's brilliant, he's effective, and, I used the expression, "He has a card file mentality. He keeps book on everybody, including his closest friends and associates. There are episodes in the U.S. and Singapore relationship which go back to the time I arrived in Singapore, which were very unfortunate. Although we've got a great relationship now, just be aware that, should anything go wrong, Lee Kuan Yew is quite capable of embarrassing us in his own way." Shortly thereafter, the following episode occurred. I was on leave up in New Hampshire when I heard that an unhappy Lee Kuan Yew, who was angry with the United States for various reasons, had gone on television in Singapore and said that the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] ran an operation against Singapore which had been broken up. I called Washington when I heard this and said, "What are you going to do?" I was told: "We will follow our standard practice. We will deny it." I said, "Don't do that. Don't you remember what I told you? This guy has a card file mentality. He's a great chess player. If you make a statement like that in rebuttal of something he has said, you're leaving yourselves wide open for him." They said, "Well, that's the SOP [Standard Operating Procedure]." So the State Department issued a denial, and Lee Kuan Yew went back on TV with some of the details and also displayed a letter to him, signed by Secretary of State Dean Rusk, apologizing for this incident. The State Department, with its poor, corporate recall, couldn't find a copy of this letter or had forgotten about it. It was all very embarrassing.

JULIA CHANG BLOCH
Peace Corps
Sabah (1964-1966)

Ambassador Bloch was born in China and immigrated to the United States with her family in 1951. She was raised in San Francisco and attended the University of California at Berkeley. She later joined the Peace Corps and traveled to North Borneo as an English Instructor. Between 1971 and 1976 she worked under Senator Percy in Washington and later joined AID as an assistant administrator in Africa (Sahel) Femnera, Asia, Gaza, and Israel. She was later appointed as ambassador to Nepal. Ambassador Bloch was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November 1993.

Q: So you went into the Peace Corps? And you were in there from '64 to '66, the overseas part. What was the type of training you got? In the first place, was it difficult to get into the Peace Corps in those days and what was the training.

BLOCH: It didn't strike me as being difficult because I was cheeky enough to say I wanted Asia. And at that time I spoke Spanish as well and I was afraid that they were going to send me to Latin America. And I specifically said that I did not want to go to Latin America. I wanted to go to Asia. And they gave me an Asian assignment, just like that.

Q: How was the training?

BLOCH: The training was, in those days, there was a lot of emphasis on physical training. They were afraid that middle-class American college graduates being sent out into the Third World may not survive the rigors of deprivation, shall we say. And I really found that the overemphasis on physical training, psychological examination on what did you call that? The kind of training where, I've even forgotten the term for it.

Q: Sort of like key-groups?

BLOCH: There's a term for it, maybe I'll remember. But a lot of emphasis was on psychological training. Do you know what I mean?

Q: I know exactly what you mean.

BLOCH: The kind of stuff that was in vogue in those days. I thought those were really not very useful. Because when I arrived at my site, you know, I had a perfectly fine house, better probably than what I could have gotten in America. In the sense of a young College graduate going right into the work force. I had an all electric kitchen, I had electricity obviously, I had fans. It was nothing luxurious but it was perfectly fine. I had enough to eat. I had access to all kinds of food and I was not assigned to a capital city.

Q: Where were you working in Malaysia?

BLOCH: In Sabah, Malaysia. In North Borneo. And I was assigned to a rural head town, in the middle of a jungle. The Confrontasi with Indonesia was ranging at the time.

Q: Was it a problem of being of Chinese background?

BLOCH: Not at all. It was in fact an asset. I think there's too much of this stereotypic thinking, it's a myth. People think that the Asians only respect elderly white men, right?

Q: I was thinking more in terms of Malaysia vs Singapore and the Chinese.

BLOCH: I see what you're saying, the ethnic issue. No, because when it was appropriate, I made sure they saw me as an American. When it was otherwise appropriate, I made sure they saw me as an Asian. What I mean is this. I was treated like an American, a foreigner, when it came to public meetings or official meetings where women were normally relegated to one side and men to another side, do you know what I mean? When it came to my human relations, I did a lot of activities with my students.

Q: You were teaching English?

BLOCH: Yes, and my students' families all took me in. Because they felt very comfortable with me because I could speak Chinese. They felt I could eat their food. And so I had tremendous entree, both ends.

Q: When you left this part of the Peace Corps, how effective did you think you were and how effective did you think the program was? What was your impression?

BLOCH: It was the best job I ever had. And I would say that I certainly gained, I've always said this, a lot more than I gave. Because what can, at that time I was a 21, 22, 23 year-old young woman, what can you contribute? I taught, I did a job, I taught English, But at the same time I used my teaching as a venue, a vehicle to reach out to the community at large. Impact? All Peace Corps impact stories are anecdotal. But I went back in the middle of the 1980's and students of mine just came out of the woodwork. You know, one student of mine came out to meet me at the airport, at the end we had bus loads to see me off. And we had banquets and we had all kinds of parties. And the things they said to me was really very moving. Most of them were married, the wife and the husband they were both working. They may have come from families of 7 or 8 children, they had normally 2 or 3. They told me that: "The best times of our lives, we think we spent with you." It was a question of opening of minds. I used to take them, I took some of them to their first trip outside of the country. Took them on their first airplane ride, took them on their first boat ride, and it was the whole idea of motivation, self-worth and the ability to help yourself. These are very American attributes and ideas. Obviously there was fertile ground there and to go back and see the effect is very rewarding.

ROBERT WILLIAM FARRAND
Junior Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1964-1966)

Mr. Farrand was born in Watertown, New York in 1934 and graduated from Mount Saint Mary's College. He entered the Foreign Service in 1964. He served in numerous posts including Kuala Lumpur, Moscow and Prague and was named ambassador to Papua, New Guinea in 1990. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You were there in Kuala Lumpur from when to when? How many years?

FARRAND: I was there from 1965 to 1967, no, '64 to '66.

Q: What was Malaysia at that time, was it an independent state and what did it consist of?

FARRAND: It had just received its independence from the United Kingdom in the late 1950s. Following Malaysia's independence, however, the British Army had to stay in order to help put down an insurgency of so-called communist terrorists in the jungle areas bordering on Thailand. Malaysia at independence consisted of the Malay Peninsula, Singapore, and two provinces in northern Borneo: Sabah and Sarawak. I can't remember exactly how many provinces there are in total, but I think there are ten or eleven on the Malay Peninsula – the locus of what used to be British Malaya. Singapore was located at the tip of the peninsula, across the causeway. While I was there, a young Chinese politician was part of the Singapore delegation in the Malaysian parliament controlled at that time by the Malay party of UMNO (United Malay National Organization). The young politician was Lee Kuan Yu. He was a firebrand, bright and irascible; and he was driving the Malays nuts. So, about 1965, while I was there, UMNO engineered Singapore's ejection from Malaysia. As I recall, the break had to do in some part with Lee Kuan Yu's strong personality. Surely UMNO's reasons for taking such a drastic measure were more complicated, but as a junior officer working in the consular section, not the political section, it stuck in my mind that way. They just voted to chop Singapore off and that was supposed to go a long way toward solving a major part of their problem with the Chinese minority.

Q: The territories in Borneo did that play much of a role while you were there? Was that considered very important?

FARRAND: Well, not really, no. Only insofar as the Borneo provinces could serve as listening posts for what was happening in Indonesia. At that time Indonesia's president Sukarno had declared a state of hostility - or "Konfrontasi" in the Malay/Indonesian language - with Malaysia. Thus, all direct travel between Malaysia and Indonesia was prohibited. I mean you couldn't travel directly between the capitals of Kuala Lumpur and

Jakarta or between any other cities in the two countries. To go to Jakarta from KL you had to go first to Thailand (Bangkok), change planes and then fly down. Of course, as a junior officer I'd never have an opportunity to do that. Such travel was rare and only undertaken by more senior officers as circumstances dictated.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

FARRAND: A marvelous career Foreign Service Officer by the name of James Dunbar Bell. He was a man of maturity, toughness, taciturnity - physically lean, white-maned, and large in stature. He played a good game of golf, which was the thing to do in Malaysia. Business was done on the beautiful course at the Royal Selangor Golf Club right in the heart of Kuala Lumpur. The RSGC has to rank I'm sure with one of the world's more beautiful golf courses. Expensive to join, the Royal Selangor was outside the budget of a junior officer. But, Ambassador Bell was a very good person to work under and to learn from at my first posting. For me, he set the standard for how an ambassador should carry out his mission. An excellent role model for me, just entering the Service.

Q: Let's start with your posting. What were you doing?

FARRAND: Are you ready for this?

Q: Yes.

FARRAND: Well, here is a division officer who had served aboard a naval vessel with sixty or seventy men under him responsible for radar communications, electronic navigation, and weather aerography; followed by some years as an instructor at the U.S. Naval Academy going around in this spit-and-polish kind of place at the heart of the naval establishment. Now, as a junior FSO in Kuala Lumpur, I am assigned for six months as assistant – get that? - assistant General Services Officer. Assistant General Services Officer!

Q: One usually thinks of this as making sure the plumbing works and stuff like that.

FARRAND: I did all that and I actually liked it. I tried to do it well, even though the content of my work was rather unlike anything I'd done before. Some of the junior officers upstairs were scratching their heads, "What the hell is he doing down in GSO?" (*Stopped editing here on January 30, 2005.*) But it helped that I was working for a very fine guy, Art Goodwin, and he was an excellent GSO, he really was a person who devoted himself to cutting costs, figuring out how to get things done. He was not a person that was, he was an administrative officer that saw the mission needed to be supported and he imbued me with that. It wasn't hard. It was for six months. I worked hard at it. The one thing I did that probably stood me in good stead. The ambassador's wife had been an administrative officer in the Foreign Service. They had a large residence and the kitchen was peopled with Malay and Chinese, not so many Indians, but Malay and Chinese cooks and bottle washers and people that deliver and all of this business. Well,

she asked me at one point if I would come and take a look at the inventory of her house and I did. I went into the kitchen with my little clipboard and I looked around and I know that the country was loaded with cockroaches and I thought to myself that this kitchen has to be no different. So, I opened up all the cabinets underneath, there were many. Opened them up and I looked back in and I didn't see cockroaches, but what I did see was lots of cooking ware that had been sitting back there collecting dust and there were droppings and this and that and I said to the head of them. I said, "Mr. Cole or Mr. Kim I want all of this cleaned up. I want all of it, all, everything, pulled out, every piece of crockery, I want it washed before it is put back in. I want all of that way back in there to be all washed out, I want this cleaned." That was my naval training because we would have never have permitted the galley to look like that. That established me with Mrs. Bell, that established me with the ambassador. I could do no wrong from then on because, of course, she knew some of this. She was a flunk at hard to deal with. The games that are played.

Q: How did you find working with, you say the trainees in Malay and Indians. The Indonesians are a different tribe when you're the GSO you're really need the tribal politics.

FARRAND: It was constant. (Bell goes off.)

Q: We were talking about GSO dealing with the different nationalities there.

FARRAND: In answering the question you just unlocked a little cabinet. I don't want to blow on it. I just came from working for three months in Bosnia with the Croat Serbs and Muslims and I just wonder whether my ability to interact successfully with Malays, Chinese and Indians over the years had any official effect.

Q: There's a spillover.

FARRAND: Well, but it's not necessarily a clear-cut spillover. It just kind of builds into what you understand that they, you can't take sides.

Q: No.

FARRAND: Well, you can't take sides and as came clear later, in 1969 I left, I was in Kuala Lumpur. Actually, Kuala Lumpur was '65 to '67. In 1969, just two years later there was an awful blood bath right in the city when the Malays took out after the Chinese down in their unclaimed downtown part and it was just terrible. It probably wasn't as bad as what happened in Indonesia in 1965 when the Malays went after the Chinese, I'm sorry the Indonesians, which are the same stock. It was horrific.

Q: Did you find that having some of these three groups, the Indians, the Malays and the Chinese, did this make it hard to work in this for an American in this area?

FARRAND: No. Not an American who was naive. An American who had no

predispositions who came on the whole thing fresh, no. I just went about my kind of, as I say, my open faced way working with them all. I recognized the people on my staff where all three and I had to be a little bit sensitive to that, but I let them know not by saying it, but you know we're all working together here and I'll need to support. I treated them all as well as I could.

Q: Well, then after six months doing this, what did you do?

FARRAND: There was a consular officer by the name of Samuel Hart who is in retirement now from, he went to Old Miss. He was running the consular office. It was a single consular officer. He took his wife, a lovely young woman and two Indian ladies in the backseat of his Mercedes and drove on the road from Kuala Lumpur to Singapore. He came around the bend and met a logging truck head on, driven into the rice paddy, lay there bleeding, his wife lay there dying, the Indian ladies were in terrible pain and no one, they would gather around and look at him, but they wouldn't do anything because in the I don't know what particular religious strain holds this view or whether it's just an animus strain from the villages. If you help someone and save that person's life, then you are responsible for that person for the rest of his life or her life. So, they wouldn't do anything. He hollered out.

Finally, along came a policeman and they got them all to a hospital. Mrs. Hart died on the way and Sam was left with two children and a broken leg and a broken pelvis, all kinds of other things and the ambassador said to the General Services Officer, "I'm going to have to take your assistant." I had already taken the consular course, so they put me directly in. So, for nine months I had to pick up a moving operation and I had to go into it just willy nilly and it wasn't just dealing, as you can imagine, it wasn't just dealing on a visa line with non-immigrant visas. It wasn't just dealing on the immigrant visa line. It wasn't just dealing with citizenship and welfare, nor was it dealing with only passports, nor tourist problems. It was everything in a city, a country of about ten million people that wasn't yet on the tourists maps like it is today or was, but it, there were plenty of people passing through with all kinds of problems and I, I mean you want to talk challenging. For nine or ten months I ran that and I would actually go back after dinner and sit in my office from oh, 7:00 or 8:00 in the evening until 2:00 in the morning. The air conditioning was off. The building didn't have the air conditioning on after a certain time so I would sit there, stripped, sweating and just trying to keep up with, trying to keep up with the massive amounts of, and reading the regulations and try to be sure I was doing everything right. It drove me crazy.

Q: What were the, were there many immigrants to the United States or tourists to the United States:

FARRAND: The quick answer is no. There were enough. The Vietnam War was just beginning to start across the South China Sea and that meant that U.S. immigration policy was tighter I suppose from that part of the world than it might otherwise have been. Also, what was happening, there would be a bleed off in consul work. You well know that if one post is tough people will shop for another post, which isn't so tough. It worked out

that there was a lady consular officer in Singapore. Her name escapes me, but not her approach to consular work. She was swamped with Nonyung Chinese, South Seas Chinese, Nonyung. She was swamped with them and she was hell on wheels when it came to ferreting out fraud to the point that she would have at her desk a large magnifying glass that she would take every photograph and bring it under close observation to see if it hadn't been cropped or added to. Her toughness led to an up flux of Chinese to Kuala Lumpur and then I had to be tough, but of course, I was naive. I mean I was not naive, I was new.

Q: Well, you didn't know the territory.

FARRAND: As an ex-naval officer I mean I don't want you to get the feeling that I was a child, I wasn't, but I did want to do it according to the book. I did want to do it according to the law and it took a lot out of me.

Q: What type of fraud were you running into?

FARRAND: Oh, God. People would say they were family members when they weren't. You got, you know someone what is it under the NIB that could prove that you have a residence abroad and had intention of abandoning. Well, I mean I had young women of mixed background, in other words, their father might have been Chinese and their mother might have been Malay. That didn't happen very often, but when it happened. So, they are Eurasian, Portuguese and they would do anything to get out and get to the States and that was it.

Q: Well, what about what sort of consular problems, did you have people getting arrested and things of that nature there, drugs?

FARRAND: Yes. Drugs were just beginning, but I would have people getting arrested. I would have people getting across the law. There was a large Peace Corps contingent in Malaysia and that Peace Corps contingent was in the segment of Malaysia that you were talking about. It was in Borneo, north Borneo in Saba and Sarawa and that Peace Corps contingent was as I've said already, large. We had them on the mainland, too, the main peninsula of Malaysia, but they were over there and they had a tendency to get romantically involved. I remember one fellow wanted to marry a Diack woman. Now this fellow had gone to a good university in the United States. A tall, lanky guy, nice appearing fellow who was going to get married to this Diack woman and I will admit that she was an attractive woman, but she probably had two years of education or three. I could not imagine in any way how he would bring her back to the United States and how she would ever fit in. I suspect they didn't. That sort of thing. If you ask for one specific thing, I'm not going to be able to come up with it because there was such a broad range of things and remember Malaysia had a university and did Singapore. Missionaries had been there and the local school system itself wasn't bad. We're not talking about a nation of primitives here, although that may have occurred in certain pockets, but no, no, you're talking about kind of the reasonably well-advanced country even then. Now, of course, it's percolating along with the highest buildings in the world.

Q: What about, were you getting R&R people from Vietnam? That must have caused problems?

FARRAND: Yes, yes. That was the first, we were the first, that program began in Malaysia and Singapore. I don't know if it went to Thailand as much, but young troops would be brought in by air, let's say on a Friday and the following Friday they would be picked up and taken back to the war zone. Marines, army, navy, this was one of our obligations and so we, I had something to because I was a consular officer, was trying to mobilize the embassy itself to be open to these young men. It was young men, all young men to come in and to invite them, get them, show them a good time. But that was, I remember one marine got off and we had him over for drinks and he was a husky guy, but he looked at me and he said, "I saw my best friend last week cut in half by machine gun bullets." It was surreal living in Malaysia going in the diplomatic circuit, having young men come in and say this is what happened. It happened many times.

Q: Did you have much contact with people in the political section and all, it was probably a small embassy, wasn't it, or not? Maybe it wasn't? I was wondering.

FARRAND: Yes, yes, no the embassy was probably the perfect size for a junior officer. It was not a large embassy and it was not a small embassy. I would estimate the size at something in the order of it, being in general services, I probably had thirty to forty houses I had to look after. There was a large station there. I can say that? There was a large station there. The station was a quarter of the size of the embassy itself and because it was a watching place for Vietnam. A watching place for the Chinese, a watching place for all kinds of area activity because we're just across. No, I had plenty of interaction and a very fine political consular would invite me over, a very fine political officers I became friends of them and still am, yes.

Q: What was sort of the embassy reaction when Malaysia split with Singapore? It happened on your watch there.

FARRAND: I'm going to say that James Dunbar Bell was. This was the first occasion I had to see the interaction between the CIA and the Department of State abroad and a particular thing happened before Singapore split or was cut adrift by Malaysia. A couple of, there was going to be a meeting, I think it's the Rapus Hotel, you remember that famous old hotel. It was still old now it has been upgraded, but it is still there. There was going to be a meeting between as I recall it, some Chinese politicians possibly local, possibly involving others to the north and the CIA wanted to listen in. So, they were tampering to put their bug in with some wires probably I have it in my mind in one of those fans that goes around. Well, the whole thing they shorted something or something, the lights went out, this and that and the other and looking into it. Here is this bug found and it was a major embarrassment, major embarrassment and who had to pick up the pieces was James Dunbar Bell who had to fly to Singapore because he was ambassador of that area and I remember him on in the newspapers and on the radio explaining away this incident doing what he could. He had never been brought in on it and I knew that,

too. So, it was the agency doing their cowboy thing and then it was the middle standard, oh I don't mean standard, it was your exposed diplomat who had to sweep up the glass and take care of it. I never forgot that and it informed a lot of my interaction with the agency later. Although I have a great deal of respect, enormous respect, but I am not sure that I always have great respect for operations. I think they can always stand a little outside with you. Now, put that aside.

That probably the embassy and the ambassador, they probably were officially unhappy that Malaysia and Singapore had split because we don't go around wanting everybody to split up, tighter and tighter. On the other hand, I think that the difference between the cultures of the Malaysia mainland and Singapore were such that unless you were there physically and Singapore, even though there was only two million people there, these are two million energetic, moving all the time people whereas in the compounds in the outside of the cities of Malaysia proper, life was at a far, far, far slower pace. So, that when it came to political tempo, Singapore probably had it. If you were in Singapore, you were in Kuala Lumpur and you couldn't be down there all the time and there wasn't the natural, easy going back and forth. So, from many angles, probably from many angles, it is better to have two embassies to deal with those two areas. Probably, I think so.

Q: Well, after you got up to '67 and you sort of face your...

FARRAND: I must say to you that the most meaningful experience of that time came when after nine months in consular work I was tapped to go into the economic section for ten months. In that economic section I became deeply engrossed in Malaysia's two top industries in those days. One, natural rubber from rubber trees; two, tin from the great tin deposits around there. In those days Lyndon Johnson was trying to fight the war in Vietnam and have his great society as well. To get money for the Vietnam War, he began to look very carefully he and his administration at selling off the national stock pile of strategic materials which had been built up since the second world war because we were caught flat footed in 1939, '40 and '41. So, we built up all kinds of supplies of things including massive warehouses full of natural rubber in bales and warehouses full of tins for and many other things. Any of the rare metals, any of the things which you cannot get in the United States, they were stored in Maryland, they were stored in lots of places around the country. The sensitivity of general services administration ran all of this and they were under pressure from the White House to sell, but of course, given the amounts they had, when they sold it, it would depress world prices and I was in the middle of that. That was a marvelous learning experience.

Q: Obviously the Malaysians on rubber and tin were screaming bloody murder, weren't they? How did we deal with it?

FARRAND: Yes. Very delicately. The standard line over here in Washington was that we are conducting these sales from the national stockpiles. By the way, these weren't the only two commodities; there were probably another hundred commodities. But, a lot of money from that could come to the White House or to the Congress and then it could be dispensed. (Bell rings.) I just wanted to say that it was just an enormous experience and

here is a situation where and it taught me a great lesson that I may or may not have benefited from and one is that you don't, you should take jobs that you are interested in because those jobs may become because of events they may rise in importance and it happened in Kuala Lumpur at the American Embassy that the economic section of the embassy was easily equal to in its work to what the political section was doing. Easily because we were focusing on the sensitive issues that were far more upsetting to the government. The sale of 1,000 tons of natural rubber back here in Washington was far more critical to our bilateral relations out there than was the visit of Senator Foghorn.

Q: But, what could we do about it outside of just tell them, "Here it comes boys, we're doing it"?

FARRAND: There was an ambassador in Bolivia, he was of Italian American background, Ernest Syracusa. At the very same time, what when I came back from Malaysia they brought me into the economic bureau and they had me work on tin and rubber and then later iron and steel. Syracusa was down there in Bolivia and what he did was, he told Washington at one point. Our ambassador didn't do this. "If there is one more ton, metric ton of tin sold from the national stockpile," said Syracusa, "I can no longer vouch for the safety of the members of my staff or of any American in Bolivia," and that stopped the sales of tin. Now it didn't happen while I was out there, but I can well remember putting together seriously long one or two seriously long telegrams for me. I'm not a great, I don't enjoy it that much, but I like it when I'm in it, but I don't like to contemplate it. But, I made this long argument which the ambassador had asked me to do and I cleared it with political and I cleared it with the DCM and everything and the ambassador and he looked and he made a few changes, but it was a agreed more or less telling Washington this is what you're doing to your relations with Malaysia if Malaysia matters. You see in situations like that, Malaysia may just be put aside.

Q: Pushed to one side, but

FARRAND: Yes, there were American interests there. Colgate Palmolive was there, there were other, you know.

Q: Also, too, at the time Johnson was looking for support for the war there and this must have played a, you know, I mean, you can't dump almost literally on a friendly nation and then expect them to come around and give you support on your war in their area?

FARRAND: Johnson, perhaps speaking to this, came himself to Malaysia. He spent thirty-six hours there.

Q: How did the visit go, I mean a presidential visit is usually equivalent to a major earthquake for an embassy.

FARRAND: Bob Bliss, Robert Bliss, was the admin officer and a good fellow and he told me that he was given, he gave me a number. He said they came in and they gave me a checkbook and here was the number in it, they just gave me a checkbook, the White

House, State Department. That's it, just get it done. Every limousine in town, every driver, every. Bundy was there and yes, I think through that there was a lot of being careful because sales of rubber and tin were at the top of the agenda when he spoke to the Tucu Abdul Rafman. That's how, that was it was done. It was done with smoke and mirrors and trying to say to that and oh by the way, oh by the way, the Malays' particular UMNO were scared silly about the prospects of this looming monster to the north, China coming down. So, they were not unhappy to have the United States there doing its business in Vietnam. So, they could put up with it. Who was getting hurt? On the rubber and the tin? Malay Chinese. See what I mean?

Q: What was the impression you were getting from your own experience being around there and from your fellow officers about Abdul Rafman, the prime minister?

FARRAND: Tengku?

Q: Yes.

FARRAND: I think well, like in lots of places, since he was on top sure there was criticism, but in time I'm not going to say then because I didn't focus on the Tengku all the time, but I will say this, that in time I think that Tengku Abdul Rafman who passed away here about twelve years ago. I think in time he came to be seen as as far as Malay politicians are concerned as a statesman and good, good for the country and good for the region. You see what's happened to the Mahateer now. I mean this guy is everything in many ways. Tengku would never have permitted this to happen. I don't want to lionize it because he was Malay after all.

Q: What about while you were there with your wife and all, what about social occasions? Was it easy to get to know the Malays or the Chinese or the others or not?

FARRAND: Reasonably, yes it was, it was. The only thing that would interfere with that would be their traditional approach to their own private time, their traditional approach. I don't think that there was any effort to freeze out the Americans even young or old. The embassy, as all embassies, had so much money to go for representation. My areas of expertise and responsibility. There was a board and a panel, a DCM, I don't know, our section as consular officer, when I was assistant GSO forget it, but when I was a consular officer I was the only consul so I got to know all the consuls in town. I got to know the consular division at the ministry of foreign affairs. That was my bag. I had enough. I wasn't still in the mode of you know high entertaining because you know I was a brand new junior officer, but I had enough. I could go to lunches at least and take people. When I was in the economic unit it became a little wider, a little more expansive and I participated there, but I had no trouble in getting the key people when I wanted them to come around, but remember as a third secretary who the hell's going to come to your house?

Q: Yes. How was the Vietnam War playing from your contacts who were seen in Malaysia? At that time, '65 to '67?

FARRAND: I'll divide this into two parts. There was a massive ignoring of the Vietnam War on the part of the people mostly. The local newspapers did not carry extensive accounts of it except by AP or UPI, lawyers, stuff like that, but there wasn't any original reporting in the local newspapers. It didn't appear I'm not even sure in those days if we had television. I'm trying to think if we had television. We must have but it was thirty-five years ago. So, you went about your business as though the Vietnam War wasn't going on. That was kind of the official approach to it. Way up high there was this I've already alluded to it, nervousness about the fallout of what might happen if the allies, the United States, Australia, whomever else was fighting with us, South Korea, were to fail in checking the Viet Cong and in checking Chinese influence in Southeast Asia. So that was up there at a higher level. That's what I think. Now on the more gut level as consular officer I got to see the riff raff that floated throughout Southeast Asia. I got to see those who were cast off from the war, those were trying to get in the war, trying to work for Brown and Root, not Brown and Root, there was another big one. Morris and Knuts.

Q: Knutson, Pacific Architects and Engineers.

FARRAND: But mostly Morris Knutson. Morris Knutson, I've never heard of them again. I don't know if they're in business anymore. But, anyway, Morris Knutson, you'd see these drifters, fellows that would be between thirty-five and fifty. You know, you didn't know how old they were, all you knew was they looked kind of tough and down at the edges. They would be coming in for all kinds of different consular services, but the one service they never wanted to hear about was the possibility of going back because for many of them if they landed in the United States there would be a warrant for their arrest or for back child payments, child support or something of this nature. Somebody was after them. They often would hook up with local women and then they would find their way back to Vietnam to work for any of these contractors who were having obscene amounts of money shoveled at them to keep the bases up or to do whatever. It was the very, I mean, it was the underside of the war. It made the war look like a tawdry, tawdry dog's breakfast from where I sat.

Q: But, the Malays, I mean, this just sort of, that's your thing and not our thing, sort of?

FARRAND: Yes, at the level at which, that's right, yes, yes. I come back to this. My suspicion is that when the ambassador would have conversations with the prime minister and the foreign minister, etc., then a greater grand strategic view would emerge, but it certainly didn't on a daily basis where I was.

Q: Well, during the time you were there, the Chinese guerrilla movement was completely dead, I mean, was it over there?

FARRAND: No, it was dead for all intents and purposes, but there was still a small cadre that lived on the Thai/Malaysia border way up into the heart of the jungle and they hung on, they hung on, they had a particular leader and his name was known. They hung on.

Q: Did you get any feel for how the Malays and the Thais got along or didn't get along on both the unofficial and official levels?

FARRAND: No, I don't have a feeling for that. Remember Malaysia is Islam and Thailand is what is Thailand?

Q: I thought it was more of a Buddhist type of thing.

FARRAND: Yes. That made for serious cognitive dissidence on lots of things. If you look at the Malay Peninsula it connects Malaysia with Thailand and then Burma comes down, too. It connects Thailand not for a very large part. Not. So, I, no, I did not have a strong sense of Malay Thai relations.

SAMUEL F. HART
Consular/Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1964-1966)

Ambassador Samuel F. Hart was born in Canton, Mississippi in 1933. He joined the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included posts in Uruguay, Indonesia, Malaysia, Costa Rica, Chile, Israel, and an ambassadorship to Ecuador. Ambassador Hart was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: Well, I take it this was not a happy ship.

HART: It was a terrible ship, and I couldn't wait to get out of there. God, I was going crazy. And when my transfer came through to Malaysia, my boss, who was an elderly gentleman I think on his last tour in the Foreign Service, head of the Economic Section, in my last efficiency report, which was a favorable report, said: "I think that Hart's assignment to Kuala Lumpur is a good one because his body will now be where his sympathies have been for two years."

Q: Today is February 1, 1993, and this is a continuing interview with Ambassador Samuel Hart. Sam, we got you out of Djakarta in 1964.

HART: In the nick of time.

Q: Then you didn't go very far; you went to Kuala Lumpur.

HART: As my boss said, my body moved to where my heart had been all along.

Q: You were there for two years, '64 to '66.

HART: A little less than two years, that's right.

Q: What were you doing there?

HART: Well, I was supposed to go there as a member of the Political Section. But there was a quick shuffle by some people who were already there, so when I arrived, the Political Section job had been filled by somebody who was already present at the post. And I was given the choice of being the American consul in Kuala Lumpur or going to the Economic Section. And since I had figured I'd just as soon get my consulate tour out of the way, and because the Economic Section was not a very attractive place to work at that time, I did a year of consular work. And after that, I shifted over to the Political Section, where the Political Section chief was Bob Moore. I don't know whether you know Bob Moore or not.

Q: Yes.

HART: A very, very fine officer.

Q: What was the sort of political/economic/social situation in Malaysia at that time? Or was it Malaysia at that time?

HART: It was Malaysia. It had become Malaysia, of course, about a year before I got there, in '63. And that was the signal for Sukarno to declare a confrontation against Malaysia (which he considered a British colonialist plot against him and Indonesia), which of course ended up in a war between the British Commonwealth forces and Indonesia, fought mainly in Borneo, but not entirely, because you did, during the period '63-'64, have two or three Indonesian landings on the peninsula, platoon-size landings that didn't get anywhere; they were wiped out. The main battle lines were in godforsaken jungle over in Sabah and Sarawak. You know, that is the end of the world. But there were a couple of landings by Indonesian troops on the peninsula, which were picked up and snuffed out.

Notwithstanding that external tiff, Malaysia was off to a good start, having been, I would say, the crown jewel, in terms of colonial experiences, for the British. I think they had learned enough by their mistakes elsewhere that by the time they came, very late to the game, to colonial status in Malaya-Singapore, they realized that one day independence was going to come and it paid to get the people who were going to be the leaders of the new country educated enough in all forms of activities--whether it be medical or administrative or legal or whatever--so that they could be reasonably self-sufficient in governing themselves when they became independent. And they invested a lot in the infrastructure--both human and physical infrastructure--of Malaya prior to independence. So when independence came, it was not as rough a road as in most places. You didn't have a dearth of educated people, for example.

But you did have something there that was troublesome then and is still troublesome now, which is, of course, a multiracial society. With the population approximately 50 percent Malay, 30 percent Chinese, and 20 percent Indian, Eurasian, European, and what

have you, a lot of Tamils, then you get all kinds of racial conflicts and strife, because the Malays, under the constitution of Malaysia, were given the political power, and everybody knew that the Chinese had the economic power. So you have a built-in tension, which occasionally erupts in racial violence.

But Malaysia is a lovely little country, and it was a pleasure to live in Kuala Lumpur, although for me personally it was one of the most difficult moments of my life. Because not long after I arrived there, my wife and I were going down to Singapore, and we had an automobile accident and she was killed. I never held that against Malaysia, but still, my time there is one that always will be looked at through that personal experience.

While I was in Malaysia, Indonesian confrontation was ended, in part because of the overthrow of Sukarno. I left Indonesia in, I think, July, went on home leave, got to Malaysia in October, and Sukarno was overthrown, I think, around November or something like that. I can't remember exactly, but it was shortly after I arrived in Malaysia that Sukarno was overthrown.

Q: I think it straddled a month. I think it was September, October. [EB says the coup was September 30, 1965, but Suharto did not become president until March 1968.]

HART: There was one big political event while I was there, Stu, although it ended up not being as big a deal as everybody feared it would be. Lee Kuan Yew, "the George Washington of Singapore," had brought Singapore into the federation on September 16, 1963. But on the morning of August 9, 1965, we woke up and Singapore was no longer in the federation. Tunku Abdul Rahman, the prime minister of Malaysia, had decided he'd had enough of Lee Kuan Yew's Chinese lip, and one night he said, "That's it, baby, you're out of here," and Singapore was out of the federation--a unilateral act on the part of the prime minister, who had a solid majority in the parliament and he didn't have to worry about where the votes were coming from. And that was it.

Q: What was the embassy reaction to this? I'm sure everything at that point was predicated on what we considered the fragility of Southeast Asia. The Vietnam War was going and we were just getting cranked-up into it. I'm sure we saw everything in terms of what does this mean to the Communists and all that, so how did that hit us?

HART: Well, I'm not sure that it was looked at quite this way. Kuan Yew was a known quantity to us.

You may recall that Kuan Yew, in '65, I guess it was, caused the United States a great amount of discomfort. He was staunchly anti-Communist. The intelligence function in Malaysia and Singapore was a British MI-5 function. There were some limits on what we were supposed to get into there. Supposedly MI-5 took the lead, and the CIA was just more or less a bit player in the whole thing.

Well, of course, as it happens in most intelligence things, we were cheating. And in other instances, they were cheating. And we had a bandit down in Singapore, a cabinet minister

who was on the CIA payroll. One night they had him wired to a polygraph in a safe house in Singapore. This happened in the early Sixties. The Singapore MI-5 burst in on the safe house and there's this cabinet minister wired to the polygraph. Kuan Yew was really pissed off, but he didn't go public on us.

But after Singapore became independent and Kuan Yew got to a point where he was asking the United States for aid, he wasn't getting the answers from Secretary of State Dean Rusk that he wanted to get. And his response was, "If you keep saying things like you're saying right now about me, I'm going to go public about this thing." He didn't get the money, and he did go public.

And the immediate response of the ambassador in Kuala Lumpur, as well as Dean Rusk in Washington, was: "This is all a lie. CIA didn't have one of his cabinet members wired." Everybody in the embassy knew that they did. And in the end, he proved that they did. And it made a big fool out of the American ambassador in Kuala Lumpur, and out of Dean Rusk.

But we weren't big players. And I don't think there was a general feeling that the breakup of Malaysia was a big setback in the anti-Communist movement, in part because it was just about that time that the end to the emergency in Malaysia took place, which had been going on for about 15 years. The Malaysian Communist rebellion along the Thailand-Malaysia border had been reduced to nothing more than a little irritant, a couple of hundred people, something like that. Of course, it never amounted to more than about 5,000, and it tied down 100,000 troops. But it was gone. So we didn't look at it as a big geopolitical crisis, I don't think. And even to the extent that it was a crisis, it wasn't ours. It was British.

Q: What was the feeling that you were picking up, although it had ended about the time you got there, about this confrontation with Indonesia? The Malays, I mean, this was in Borneo, did they feel anything akin to their... or was this just...

HART: No, no, they didn't. There really was not. I think the Indonesians counted on that. When they landed these forces by rubber boat, or something like that, on the shores of southern Malaya, down around Johore and that area, I think what the Indonesians counted on was that there would be Malay villagers who would flock out and welcome the Indonesians with open arms as liberators from the oppression of the British and the Chinese. Well, the first thing the Malays did was run to the head man and report it to the district officer. And the Indonesians were in custody in 48 hours. There wasn't that feeling at all, no.

Q: Back to your work as consul. Was there much work? This was the beginning of sort of the drug culture, young American kids going abroad and all that. Did you get involved in that at all?

HART: Well, it was a big time of the Peace Corps. We had a very large Peace Corps contingent in Malaysia, and that was the biggest number of American young people that

we had around. I think we had, at that time, two or three hundred, which was a pretty good-sized Peace Corps effort.

I did consular work under the ideal circumstances. If you ever wanted to do consular work and avoid the usual downside of it, Kuala Lumpur was the place. It was a one-man consular office, with a very good local employee, an under subscribed quota...

Q: This was a visa quota, which means you didn't have much demand for immigrant visas.

HART: An under subscribed immigrant visa quota. And you weren't on the tourist track, so you weren't going down and getting people out of jail. Occasionally a drunk sailor would miss ship in Port Swettenham, or something like that. Singapore had much more of the hassle of consular work. But I had a very pleasant time. I was just in there for a year. I got a lot of satisfaction from the job, because, unlike political work or economic work, you could go home at the end of the day and you could say, "I did something today which either reduced somebody's suffering or made them happy." There was a beginning, a middle, and an end on most of these things, and you could see how your handiwork had affected things, unlike reporting. So, although I didn't want to stay beyond the year that I had on the job, I came away from that with kind of a rosy glow. It was just a nice little mix of welfare and protection work. Occasionally a Peace Corps volunteer would come in and say, "Gee, I've met this super guy up in this village. I'm teaching English up in this little Malay village, and I've got this boyfriend who's the greatest thing ever, and we're going to get married. What do you think about it? Somebody told me I ought to come talk to you." And I would sit there and I'd tell her about all the dangers of intercultural marriages, particularly if she was marrying into a Muslim Malay family, and what the role of the woman was, and this, that, and the other thing. But in the end, they always did it.

Q: Yes, I did the same in Saudi Arabia. It really doesn't work very well, because it sounds like we're being race conscious. It wasn't that, it's just that the...

HART: It's a cultural problem.

Q: It's a cultural problem, because at a certain point, particularly American women can't take it any more and want to go home, and they can't get their babies out. And then, from our point of view, it becomes a consular problem, because we have to say, "We can't sneak your babies out, lady."

HART: Well, I probably was not the run-of-the-mill consular officer. I arrogated to myself certain judgments which were not provided for in the manual. Since we had an under subscribed quota, I looked at each non-immigrant-visa applicant as if he or she were an immigrant-visa applicant, because we did have a fair number of change-of-status cases. When somebody would come in and say, "I've got this reason to go to the States for a visit for business or pleasure," I didn't look at them as NIVs, I looked at them as immigrant-visa cases. And if I thought they'd make good American citizens, I gave them

a visa. And if I didn't think they'd make good American citizens, I didn't give them a visa. I just didn't do it.

I'll tell you a story. I was out of the Consular Section. We had a junior officer in there, who's still at the State Department. His name is Bill Farrand. Do you know Bill Farrand?

Q: No, I don't, no.

HART: Well Bill was a first-tour FSO-8. He had gone in to be the vice consul when I had moved to the Political Section, but I still kind of went down there two or three times a day to see if anything was going on that I needed to advise Bill on. One day, as I was going down to the office, the off-duty Marines were all standing there, the elevators doors opened and out walks this real babe. I mean, this is a Chinese babe what was. And she's headed into the consular office. I went in there, and Bill was in the office, and I said, "Man, you've got a live one outside."

He said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Well, see this babe outside. She's something. I don't know what she is, but she's something."

Her name was like Lily Chong, and she was a big strip artist in one of the nightclubs down in the Chinese section of town. And she wanted to come to the States on a visitor's visa. I said to Bill, "You better bring her in here and interview her." And so he did. I stood over to the side while he interviewed her. And the story was that she was going to make an around-the-world tour in the company of an Australian veterinarian who worked for the race tracks. He was one of the primary veterinarians for race horses. He was a gentleman of about our years, and she was a hot young ticket.

"Well, what funds do you have?"

"Why, I don't have any funds, but here's my ticket, and he's guaranteed me all my expenses."

So she left, and Bill said, "Well, I don't see any reason why we can't give her a visa."

I said, "You give her a visa, and your efficiency report just went through the bottom. You've got no future in the Foreign Service."

And he said, "Why?"

And I said, "Because she and Charlie whoever his name is, the Australian, get over to the States and have a fight, and he'll drop her, take the tickets and everything else and leave her after that. She'll be there without a job, without money, or anything. But she won't be unemployed for long. And technically speaking, by the regulations, they're going to the States for immoral purposes. They're going there to fornicate in as many places as they

can find. But I'm not worried about that; I'm worried about her becoming a public charge if he ditches her. So you can't give her a visa."

"What grounds am I going to give for not giving her a visa?"

She's outside. I said, "Tell her to bring the guy in."

So an appointment was set up, and in due course she came in with the guy. And I was there. Bill was really feeling very uncomfortable about this. The guy and I, according to him, had met at some party up in one of the other towns in Malaysia when I was up there playing in a golf tournament. I didn't remember it, but anyway...

When it came down to brass tacks, I said to him, "Look, you're a big boy and I'm a big boy. Now we can sit here and we can be cute with each other, and if you really try to pin me down, I'm going to say some things you don't want to hear. But my suggestion to you is as follows: Have your around-the-world trip, but don't go through the States. Go through Mexico. It's nice in Mexico, you'll enjoy it. If you push me on this, I'm going to deny a visa, so don't do it."

And he said, "Okay." And that was the end of the case, I thought.

But then the ambassador started getting phone calls from all the high-ranking Malaysian ministers in the government, who had been sleeping with this babe. To the credit of the ambassador and DCM, they never put the screws to me, and those people never got visas. It was that kind of thing. It was a lighthearted thing.

Q: The ambassador during your time was James D. Bell.

HART: You just know everything, don't you.

Q: Well, I have a book; I look it up.

HART: That's right, Jim Bell.

Q: What was he like? How did he operate his embassy?

HART: Oh, I liked Jim Bell. He delegated a lot of the donkey work to his DCM, a guy named Don McHugh, who was DCM during most of my time there. Later on, Bob Moore, who was Political Section chief, moved up to be DCM. But that was mainly after I left. That's an unusual thing when it happens, too, to move somebody up from section chief to DCM.

But Jim Bell was a big, bluff, hearty, red-faced, hard-drinking Irishman (I don't think he had an alcohol problem, but he liked to drink), who was a smart guy, political type (not a political appointee, but a political officer), who loved to play golf. I was an FSO-5, I guess, at the time, and shortly after I got there, since I was the low handicap in the

embassy, Jim Bell asked me if I wanted to go out and play golf with him on Wednesday afternoon at the Royal Selangor Golf Course. And of course, I was always ready to do that. He would have a few dollars bet, and he and I would play partners. The first time or two we won. And then the third time, I had about a five-foot putt on the last hole that if I made it, we won, and if I didn't, we lost. I missed it, and I don't think I ever got asked back again. Jim didn't like to lose.

In Kuala Lumpur, as part of the British tradition, probably *the* "in" activity for males was golf. The king played golf; he had his own little separate dressing room out at the Royal Selangor Golf Club. The prime minister was an avid golfer; the deputy prime minister was an avid golfer. There were very few golfers in the embassy. Over my lifetime in the Foreign Service, there always were very few golfers in the embassy, and in some cases I was the only one. But it opened up enormous possibilities sometimes. I mean, if Tun Abdul Razak, who was the deputy prime minister and became prime minister of Malaysia for so many years, was standing in the shower stall with you, naked, after a golf game, that put you on a different basis with him than if you met him at a cocktail party. And that's the way it was; everybody who was anybody in the political and economic hierarchy in Malaysia played golf. But Foreign Service people missed it, because they didn't.

Q: Well, I know golf was extremely important in Korea when I was there, and had been. In Asia, golf is an important thing. Certainly it was the only contact I think we ever had during most of the time, from the Sixties and Seventies and into the Eighties, in Burma.

HART: Well, over the years, I've found that the people with whom I had the lasting personal relationships were not the business contacts. They were the golfing contacts. Now sometimes they overlapped, a business contact was a golfing contact. I always tried to tell junior officers and what have you: "have an interest and participate actively in it when you're overseas, because it gets you into the culture in a way that you need to be if you're going to understand what's going on." It gives you sources of information who will talk to you in a way, because they don't feel like it's a business deal, that you can't get simply by normal cocktail-circuit-type stuff. You can make real friends. After all, we are intelligence officers. And when people talk to a political officer, or whoever, from the American Embassy, I think the fact that you are a political officer and an intelligence officer shapes to some degree what they say to you.

Q: Well, it should.

HART: It should. It should. When you're no longer that, when you are a fellow birdwatcher, you get different kinds of information and different answers to the same questions. And I think that Foreign Service people, particularly in the modern time, miss a lot of that.

Q: Let's talk a bit, sort of for the uninitiated, about what you did as a political officer at this post. How does one write reports?

HART: Well, I had been a political officer in my first post, in Montevideo, then I switched to economic officer, then I went to Djakarta and I was an economic officer there. And at that time, there was a lot more cachet to being a political officer than to being anything else, although I chose not to be a political officer. Consciously I decided that I wanted to be essentially an economic officer. But I didn't want to serve in the Economic Section in Kuala Lumpur, and I did this other political thing. I did not come to that, saying what does a political officer do, since I'd already done it and I'd been in the Foreign Service long enough to know.

You have certain areas of responsibility. One area of responsibility (as I'm trying to remember) involved covering the parliament, so I would go up lots of mornings to the Malaysian parliament and listen to the debates if something was scheduled that I thought we had an interest in. Let's see what else I had on my plate. I think I was covering relationships between Kuala Lumpur and Sabah and Sarawak, as I recall, so I tried to get to know at least the parliamentary representatives from those areas. You could tell *them* because they were the ones who had exotic feathers coming out of their headdresses--birds of something.

There were parliamentary elections coming up during this not-quite-year that I was in the Political Section there, and I did a fair amount of traveling around. I would go to some town, Alor Star (isn't that a wonderful name?) or someplace like that, and would go call on the district officer and various political people around and discuss politics with them.

I was the protocol officer, so I got to accompany the ambassador on some of his trips around the country, which were kind of fun.

How you write the reports...I think most political officers start the day off doing the same thing, and that is, they read the newspaper, and the newspaper tells you what's going on and gives you the clues about where to start asking questions. I had some Foreign Ministry contacts, if it was a foreign-affairs thing; I had some parliamentary contacts, if it was an internal matter. Go ask the questions and come back and write the report. I'm not sure what else there was to it.

Q: Was our feeling at that time that for really main influence and all, we left things more to the British?

HART: Right.

Q: So we worked at being secondary players?

HART: Right. When the Tunku threw Kuan Yew out of the federation, he called the British high commissioner first. He called the British high commissioner about ten minutes to midnight, and he threw Kuan Yew out at midnight. That's how much notice he had. The American ambassador, I think, got a call from the British high commissioner sometime after that, saying this is coming down. Those were the lines, as they should be.

Q: Yes, yes.

HART: The only person who didn't like it was the CIA station chief, a guy named Art Jacobs. Art Jacobs was barely over five feet, a little bitty guy. They used to say, "There's MI-5, and Art Jacobs is MI-4½."

Q: Did you have a feeling the CIA was any more knowledgeable than anyone else?

HART: No, no, not at all. It wasn't a bad bunch of people, but I didn't feel they were doing anything to advance the national interests of the United States, if you really want to know the truth. I must say, if you really want a gratuitous comment, in my 27 years in the Foreign Service I can't ever say that anything I saw the CIA do ever seriously advanced the foreign policy interests of the United States. Now that's a really sweeping statement, isn't it?

Q: I would probably go along. In fact, I would say maybe even a little more. I can think of cases where the CIA...

HART: It was a net minus.

Q: It was a net minus.

HART: Well, I would say that, too, but I was being generous. A net minus. And they caused a lot of mischief, a lot of mischief.

Q: Well, this was the problem. I think so much of it was a carry-over from the spirit of World War II, when everything was to do something right away and be mischievous. And in the long run, it didn't have real...

HART: Well, in the end, the CIA only looked at the world through anti-Communist lenses. And it happened that, in the places where I served, the Communist versus non-Communist Cold War battles were not that important. Now you could say, "How can that be? You were in Indonesia." Yeah, but ideology was never the thing in Indonesia; nor was it, in Malaysia; nor was it, even in Uruguay. Sure, Castro was active and what have you, but in the end, there was never any real danger that the Uruguayans were going to embrace the Soviet Union as their savior. It wasn't going to happen.

So you're screwing around the edges of the thing, but in the process of doing that and throwing so many resources and so many people into it, you miss the really important things that are going on.

In our entire post-war period, up until practically the collapse of the Soviet Union, the right wing in this country was saying, "The other guys are winning. The other guys are winning." My feeling always was, "We're winning. And without the military might of the Soviet Union, they don't have a very saleable product."

Now you can find special cases where somehow or other the economic and political and historical forces came together, such as in Cuba and Nicaragua, so that countries not contiguous to the Soviet Union or another Communist country embraced the Marxist ideology and became Communist themselves. But Cuba and Nicaragua are the only cases of which I'm aware that the Communists were able to take power where it was not essentially out of the barrel of a gun, by being contiguous to a Communist state where military pressure was used, either through support for an internal rebellion or simply by putting the muscle across the border.

Q: You were mentioning about how the political right wing in the United States was saying the Communists are winning, but they were also saying that time was on the side of the Communists.

HART: That's right.

Q: I think, to many of us looking at this thing...not that we saw the collapse that was going to come as it came...

HART: Nobody saw that, left or right.

Q: But the point being that, gee, the system really doesn't work very well, and who the hell's going to buy that?

HART: Well, you know, the reason I came to this conclusion, that we weren't losing the Cold War and that we weren't going to lose the Cold War, was because everywhere that I served where there was any kind of debate going on about the relative merits of a democratic system versus the centrally guided, totalitarian, authoritarian regimes of the Communist world, overwhelmingly, overwhelmingly everybody came out in favor of personal freedom. And I just got the impression that there may be something more or less in the spirit of man that, if you have a choice toward one political system or another, tends to lead them to choose one more like ours than like the Soviets'.

Now that's not to say that in special cases, if you don't have a choice, say, in Nicaragua, which spun out as a part of a long, long historical tragedy, if you want to call it that, you can't get a Communist regime in an unusual place. You can.

But I don't believe this is the kind of choice that free people make consciously. And I never thought that the Soviets were popular enough or smart enough or powerful enough or rich enough to beat us in place after place around the world in terms of what the model for the world's future was going to look like. I guess I had more faith in human nature than some of our brethren in the Agency did. And not just the brethren; after all, most American political leaders, and particularly those in the White House, bought this view of the world.

PARKER W. BORG
Rotation Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1965-1967)

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: When did you get to Malaysia?

BORG: Summer of '65, August or September. My course began at FSI on June 30th. It would have been six weeks, and then there was the consular course for two weeks, and then I went right out. I was on the first plane out of here, because I already had language.

Q: Were you there in Malaysia when the Night of Long Knives happened in Indonesia?

BORG: No.

Q: That had already happened?

BORG: That had already happened.

Q: Did that seem to be making the change?

BORG: In Indonesia?

Q: In Malaysia.

BORG: Malaysia is sufficiently insular. Malaysia is an extremely interesting country in a Southeast Asian context because it is more like the United States in its relationship to Europe than it is like the other Southeast Asian countries. Other Southeast Asian places all have long histories and culture. In 1857 the first Chinese moved their tin-smelting boats up the Salanga River and found these mud flats where they couldn't go any further in their search for tin, so they put a little trading center there. This trading center became known as Kuala Lumpur, place of muddy estuary, and so they had gone further upriver then overland from there to make their tin mines and so forth. The British had their series of relationships with various sultans who lived along the coast. It wasn't until some years later that this central location between the northern sultans and the southern sultan would be the capital, that this was a neutral city. But Kuala Lumpur is a newer city than Minneapolis, where I grew up, and Malaysia was settled in the 1800's when people came across from Java, from Sumatra, came down from China, came across from India. It was

all jungle that the British were opening up for rubber plantations and tin mines. So it was this magnet for workers from around the region, and so Malaysia is very much a new society, unlike the neighboring countries, and it has always been very much focused on itself and its own racial problems. What was happening in Indonesia, when it affected Malaysia, when they were attacking Malaysia, it was something that people were concerned about, but otherwise Indonesia might as well be Brazil.

Q: What were you doing when you were there?

BORG: I was a rotational officer, as many people were, but the consular work was considered too important to give to first-tour officers, because there was only one consular officer, and so I was assigned first to general services. Since I had a degree in public administration, I was put in the admin cone and told that in the admin cone I'd be managing our foreign policy. So I was in the general services section with an absolutely awful general services officer who delighted in berating the locals for no reason at all because he felt that was the only way to keep them in line. I remember he called me into the office one day, and said, "I'm going to bring Yusof in today and read him the riot act." I said, "What did Yusof do?" He said, "Nothing, but this will prevent him from doing bad things in the future." I sat there sort of overwhelmed by this experience, this little Malay guy sitting there cowering in the corner, and the GSO (General Services Officer) shouted at him and screamed at him and told him what an awful person he was. He did this regularly to other people. I sent a letter back to my personnel counselor and I said, "I don't think I'm long for this world. If I'm going to be an admin officer, I don't think I'm going to take another tour with the State Department. This is pretty awful." Anyway, I lasted there through the rotation, which was nine months or something like that, and then they sent me to USIA (United States Information Agency). USIA had an incredibly weak cultural affairs program and they had two officers who for two years hadn't done any exchange programs, and so the head of USIA said, "We'd like you to go down and figure out who we can send to the United States. We've got all this money from the last fiscal year and we've got all this money from the next fiscal year, and we need to have a program. Our people are too busy with other things to do cultural exchanges. Figure it out. We should be sending some young people." So I decided that would be fun. I went out to the university and I started hanging around at the university and hanging around at the various bars where journalists met and tried to get a handle on what was happening in the country so I could figure out who would be good people to send to the United States on these exchange programs. While there was a committee, it was essentially whoever I chose that were going to be the ones that went for the different programs. I had all these categories and put somebody in this category and somebody in that category. That was great fun for, you know, somebody who thought they knew something about the country but really didn't. But through that I met the student leader community out at the university, and when the protests began about Vietnam, as they did eventually, I already knew all of the student protesters. When they came down to storm the embassy, I looked out and I saw my friends in the forefront. Everybody in the embassy was sort of behind a glass door, and I went out and talked with them all because I knew them all by first name and they knew that I worked at the embassy. They were convinced I worked for the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), because why would

anybody else come out and talk to students at the university. I sent a number of them to the United States on exchange programs and then was able to write some reports. My first political reporting was about what these people are protesting about and why are they angry with the United States.

Q: Why were they?

BORG: The war in Vietnam.

Q: But...

BORG: Vietnam didn't affect them at all.

Q: Why...?

BORG: In 1968 what happened around the world almost everywhere - no, this was 1967 - whenever there was an incident in Vietnam, there was a reaction in Malaysia as there was in a number of other countries in the region. Periodically the windows at USIS would be broken and there would be a group protesting something or other. I forget the details of what the different incidents were, but there was always something that had happened in Vietnam that triggered a reaction in many third world countries and countries in Europe too.

Q: Was the war in Vietnam protest against us sort of youth protesting against their own government and all that?

BORG: Maybe in some places, but the student community in Malaysia had it pretty soft back then. There was only one university in this entire country, and if you got into the university, you had it made. They didn't have the same racial quotas that they developed in subsequent years, so it was very much on merit and something like 60 percent of the students then were Chinese and another 20 percent were Indian and another 20 percent were Malays. So the idea that these groups that would likely go into business were going to be protesting political issues or showing frustration over the local political scene was marginal at that point.

Q: These were basically the already anointed leadership anyway.

BORG: That's right. I never had the sense that they were angry at their own country. If there was anger, they were starting some technical schools for some of the Malays who were less advantaged, and this would break out in riots in 1969, but in '67 it was all quiet.

Q: Were we looking at the Chinese-Malay-Indian relationship?

BORG: This has underscored the way everybody looks at Malaysia, just exactly who is doing what and how is the relationship working. At that time, I think, most Americans would say that the Malaysians seem to have found a solution for a multiracial society, a

more successful solution than we seem to be finding in the United States. This is not the case any longer.

Q: We were going through our civil rights period.

BORG: We were going through the civil rights period. For the Malaysians this was not an issue, because each racial group had its place in the society, and as long as the society prospered, they all prospered. Malays ran the government; the Chinese ran the economy; the Indians were, on the one hand, the laborers and, at the other hand, they were the intellectuals, the newspaper writers, the doctors, the professional class.

Q: Was it Abdul Rahman?

BORG: The prime minister at the time was Tunku Abdul Rahman. Tunku was a prince and he was of the royal family, I think, of Kedah, but he was not the king; he was a politician. He had been a playboy in London for 10 years or something like that while he tried to get through school. He came back and was anointed the leader and was a very accommodating leader who got along with people of all races.

Q: Was he sort of seen as a positive...?

BORG: Very positive.

Q: After the USIA thing...?

BORG: Then I switched into the economic section, so I spent the last nine months or so working on economic affairs. There were three of us in the economic section and I was the junior-most person, so I got all of the other things. Let's see. I looked at hydroelectric power, I looked at the fishing industry, I looked at agricultural production. Anything in which there was an airgram due that nobody wanted to do was what I was assigned to. We set up a regional Southeast Asia development program in about 1967, and there were aspects of the project in each one of the countries, so I was the AID liaison officer. We had no AID mission, so I did sort of what economic assistance there was.

The Malaysians had had a successful experience against communists, so we had many military missions that would come down and meet with the Malaysian leaders. I always got involved in hosting them. I'm not sure why it was that I was designated to go around with these various military groups when they met with the Malaysians.

President Johnson came out for a visit and was there. I was a control officer at one particular site. I remember that I was overwhelmed by this proximity with the power of the White House and the stories about the preparations that had taken place for this visit. We had an advance officer from the State Department who came out three months beforehand to help orchestrate this 24-hour visit. I remember we were told that ships were lined up. The Pacific Fleet had strategically located itself at intervals across the Pacific on the route that the President would be following. We had to have three

alternatives for each activity that the President was going to participate in so that, if there was a change in plans, we could shift from one site to the other site, and there had to be a case of Jim Beam at each one of these sites in case...

Q: Whiskey.

BORG: ...the President wanted to stop and have a little party with whoever wanted to drink the Jim Beam or Jack Daniels or whatever it was. Did you see any Johnson visits?

Q: No, I never did.

BORG: But we were also overwhelmed by Johnson's size. He was a big person, tall. I remember they were going to give him a ceremonial shirt, and they wanted to know his waist size and he had 53-inch waist. When we told the Malaysians this, they said we must be mistaken, nobody has a 53-inch waist. He did have a 53-inch waist, I understand, but he did not look fat because he was just a very big person.

Q: At that time one of the things that was being put out was the domino theory - if Vietnam fell, so would other countries - and Malaysia, of course, is in the line. It sounds like this didn't seem like much of a probability over there.

BORG: It did not seem like a real issue there, and I had never thought that it was a real issue. I think it was much more the sort of issue that people who don't know anything about a region decide, the politicians back sitting on the National Security Council would decide, is a possibility, none of whom have any direct experience with that part of the world.

Q: Was there any concern about the Vietnam trouble spilling over?

BORG: I think there was concern in Thailand that the Vietnam problem was going to spill over, and there was concern in Laos and Cambodia, but we were pretty far away.

Q: Did Thailand play any role? Although it has a border, it's really not exactly a main...

BORG: I think the domino theory was based, first and foremost, on Thailand, which during the Second World War had switched sides in terms of Japanese as soon as the Japanese declared war, and the sense was that, if it appeared that the Communists were taking over in Vietnam, the Thais would be very tempted to declare themselves Communist - this was the government - because the Thais were so accommodating in this sense. I don't think anybody thought about the domino theory much beyond Thailand, but I think there was great concern, and possibly the general concern - I don't know Thai issues that well - that Thailand might be next. I remember the USIA people in Thailand had a very big program at this point in which they would go around the countryside in the north showing movies and trying to do nation building and make Thais sensitive to a king and less sensitive to the Communist propaganda threat. The people who ran this program came down to Malaysia and they tried to recruit me to take a tour with USIA for my next

tour and go up to Thailand to be a rural public affairs office. I thought that sounded like great fun, and I signed up and I told them I'd like to do that. People in the embassy thought I was crazy, but I essentially told these people that, sure, I'd like to do that, and I think I told the Personnel people that I would be very interested in a tour with USIA as my next assignment.

Q: While you were in Malaysia, what was your view of Singapore? It had recently become independent. Was this considered a real problem or not?

BORG: Singapore had become part of Malaysia as a way for the British to terminate their colonial empire in that part of the world. The Malaysians were induced to include Singapore, which was still a crown colony at the time, within Malaysia, and to sweeten the pot, the Malaysians were told, "We're going to throw in Sabah and Sarawak." This would have been 1961 and '62, and so the Malaysians had gone along with this with the idea that Singapore, with its large Chinese population, would not tilt the balance excessively toward the Chinese. Because of the "Malay" population in North Borneo, the Malays would still be the dominant number. Lee Kuan Yew and his People's Action Party was very aggressive in making Chinese in Malaysia think about their political rights; making Chinese aware of what their political possibilities might be. So once Malaysia was formed, the Malays on the mainland recognized that this minority population in Borneo was largely Christian and, while they might have had brown skin, they were not Muslims and had no interest in really siding automatically with the Malays on any issue. They were much more concerned with their local issues. There was a very heavy Chinese presence, and the Chinese seemed to be in a position that they were going to expand their political action onto the mainland of Malaya. One of the understandings at the beginning was that People's Action Party stays south, but there were sympathizers in the north and so it became apparent that this was a threat to Malaysia. Singapore was ousted a couple of months, I think, before I got there, so this was already history and we didn't think too much about it. Singapore at the same time had a very serious question and that was how to develop a Chinese city-state in the middle of the Malay world, and that was Lee's genius, to figure this out and implement it.

ROBERT B. PETERSEN
Branch Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Kuching (1967-1970)

Mr. Petersen was born and raised in Ohio and educated at Oberlin College. He entered the USIA Foreign Service in 1965 and served as Public and Cultural Affairs Office in Embassies or Consulates in Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, Mauritius, Israel, Morocco and Cote d'Ivoire. He also served in several senior USIA positions in Washington, D.C. Mr. Peterson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: Today is July 2, 2001. Bob, how did your assignment to Malaysia come about?

PETERSEN: At some point in '67, while I was in Vietnam, I wrote an evaluation of how I had seen my first year with the Agency in Vietnam. As part of that, I said what I would like to do after Vietnam. I recall specifically saying I was interested in studying Chinese or Thai and that I'd love to serve in Taiwan or Thailand or Malaysia and that I couldn't imagine a better job than becoming a BPAO somewhere in Southeast Asia. You've got to be careful what you wish for. Late in '67, I was notified that my next assignment would be BPAO in Kuching, Malaysia. I can't remember the exact dates, but I do recall – I didn't think it was funny at the time; I just thought it was an absurd bureaucratic foul-up – learning about my next assignment in a letter that arrived in Da Nang notifying me of my new assignment and telling me that I should prepare to leave Vietnam and take home leave and report. I was supposed to report the same month that I finally received the letter, which had been written several months before. I was already late by the time I learned about it.

Q: You were in Malaysia from '68 to when?

PETERSEN: I left in early '70. I was there two years.

Q: What happened during the Tet offensive in Da Nang? Did you hear from your colleagues?

PETERSEN: Hue was what really was hit and badly damaged. Da Nang, in a relative sense compared to Hue, did not suffer nearly as much. But, no, I did not hear directly from my former colleagues, Sherwin Helms, Phalen Peters, or Clyde Hanna. Once I left, I left. I think maybe I bumped into those people, but it was later on, seeing them in a hallway somewhere. I remember Sherwin Helms when he retired took a job down near Williamsburg, I think in Jamestown. I saw him down there once. But I didn't maintain contact with my former colleagues in Da Nang.

Q: When you got to Malaysia, what was the state of Malaysia, in '68?

PETERSEN: Malaysia was a young country at the time. It had been formed just a few years earlier. The Malay states on the peninsula together with Singapore and with two states in Borneo, Sarawak and Sabah, were brought together in the Federation of Malaysia. It was an uneasy federation. Singapore left after a brief association. But what remained were the states of the peninsula and the two states in Borneo. While I was there, I thought often and compared in my mind Malaysia to the early United States. In particular, I was struck by a couple of the leaders of Malaysia. One was Tunku Abdul Rahman, the first prime minister, the father of his country. I used to compare him to George Washington and say how fortunate we were to have George Washington available when we were forming our nation. I always felt while I was there and in the years after I left that that country was fortunate to have Tunku available as a leader. His deputy, the next prime minister, the man in waiting, was Tun Abdul Razak, another very talented political leader, but it was not just talent on their part. They had a commitment to the nation. They represented a moral high ground in the way that Washington does in our folklore. That

was very important for Malaysia because it was divided into communities and that was its Achilles heel, the fact that the Bumiputra, the people of the land, the Malays, represented about half of the total population. A large part of the population were Chinese. The ties between what became Malaysia and China were millennia old, but when the British had the Malay peninsula colony, Sarawak and Saba were ruled by either British companies or British raja or by the Crown itself, and they brought in Chinese. It was a policy to bring people in for economic development. As a result, there was a large Chinese population. There were also for the same reason a fair number – not nearly as many – of people of Indian descent. Then in Borneo, there were the aboriginals, the Sarawaks, the land Dayaks, the Ibans. There were five or six major Malayan groups of aborigines in Borneo. You had that mixture, an uneasy relationship among all of them. The Malays were Muslim. The Chinese to a great extent were Christian or Buddhists, and the Indians were Hindus. Although different languages were spoken, that wasn't as divisive because English was widely used as a national language by the elite, by the government. But these different communities had an uneasy alliance as they tried to form the country.

Q: When the British had it, at one point it was called the Federated Malay States. Did that mean that within the Malay peninsula, it was chopped up? Or did that have much meaning?

PETERSEN: At the time I was there, it didn't have a lot of meaning. The legacy of it was that the states in peninsular Malaysia provided from the ruling families of each state the pool from which the king was chosen. I believe it was on a revolving five-year basis. So, a sultan of one state would serve for five years as the king. Then it would go over to a sultan from another state and so forth. It was primogenitor within the sultan's family as to who was going to be the next king. An interesting idea of sharing power that way. The king was symbolic of the nation. It meant the king was always going to be a Malay, always be a Muslim, and always be from peninsula Malaysia, never from Sarawak or Saba.

Q: When you were there in '68, was it called the "troubles" or the "confrontation?"

PETERSEN: There were troubles when I was there. In '69, there were riots. That was communal tension. But prior to that, the confrontation was between Malaysia and Indonesia. Indonesia confronted the new nation of Malaysia, challenged in not a direct military fashion, but with animosity. That was the confrontation. Then it was exacerbated along the border between peninsular Malaysia and Thailand and along the border with Indonesia in Borneo by guerrilla movements. Our U.S. concern had to do with mainland China's support for some of the guerrilla activity along the border. We depicted it as Chinese communist instigated.

Q: There was a major war that had gone on in the '50s.

PETERSEN: Yes. But that was history by '68.

Q: Who was our ambassador?

PETERSEN: James Bell was the ambassador when I got there and when I left. Robert Moore was DCM when I arrived. Another person took over the following year.

Q: Could you describe Kuching?

PETERSEN: I had a small USIS branch post. USIS in Malaysia, the main office was in the AIA (American International Assurance Company) building in Kuala Lumpur. It was a 15 story building. That was where the embassy was and USIS was located there. I'm pretty sure it was 15 stories because the week I arrived in early February of '68 was the tail end of the celebration of Chinese New Year. The first day I was there, to commemorate that, they set off a 15 story high string of firecrackers outside the AIA building. That was rather impressive. I enjoyed that. USIS had two branch posts, one in Penang, where there was a BPAO, Phil Thomas. I had known him in Vietnam. He was one of our USIS province reps. in Vietnam. I was the BPAO in Kuching. I styled myself as director of USIS for East Malaysia. The country PAO, Earl Wilson, said, "Oh, that's fine." He didn't really care. So, I said, "Okay, that's the title I'll use." I was very fortunate in Kuching. I had a tremendous staff headed by Alfred Lee. The staff was all FSNs. They had no other Americans on the USIS staff. Our principal officer in Kuching was John Heimann. His tour ended about six months after my tour began. John was our consul. We had a couple of other Americans in the consulate. Then I handled the USIS program. Alfred Lee, who was born in Sarawak was the senior FSN. I had a lady named Elizabeth Murphy, who ran the library. Then I had a general factotum guy who could run the film projectors and so forth. And I had a secretary. I was so fortunate. Amy Hung was her name and she had been trained to be a secretary. She had gone to the UK for a couple of years of secretarial school. I had the benefit of being able to dictate, something I hadn't done since prior to going into government. So, for my reports and letters and cables, I would just dictate and she would come back shortly thereafter with everything written up. As you know, in the Foreign Service, most officers end up typing their own drafts of things, so that was something I really appreciated. That was the little staff.

We had a library, so we had a lending operation. We did quite a bit with donated books, film showings, circulated films, and we went out and showed films directly.

The issues had to do with our presence in Southeast Asia, especially Vietnam. Within two weeks of arriving in Kuching, a fellow named Kennedy, who was the head of the British High Commission office in Kuching, through him, I was over speaking to the Rotary Club on why the U.S. presence in Vietnam was necessary and why we were contributing to nation-building. I did a lot of public speaking about Vietnam. Other issues had to do with nation-building. In particular, there was a film called "The True Story of an Election," a USIS film. I must have worn that thing out, I either invited to my house or to the USIS office the senior members of different political parties in Sarawak to show them that particular film and to discuss democracy, how it worked in America, how volunteerism was so important and so valuable for American democracy. That was a major issue, the idea of political development.

Q: You said you were for eastern Malaysia?

PETERSEN: Yes.

Q: How would you depict eastern Malaysia, the population there, and how it fit into Malaysia?

PETERSEN: It was distinct. If you permit me a very brief tangent, there were two states in East Malaysia. Sarawak came about in the following way. In 1842, James Brooke, the White Raja, outfitted a little sloop and sailed on behalf of the Royal Geographic Society. He was sailing around Southeast Asia and he sailed up the river to the little town of Kuching and there happened to be a rebellion underway. Some local rebels were rebelling against the Sultan of Brunei. About 300-400 years ago, the Sultan of Brunei ruled a wide area of Southeast Asia, but 150 years ago it was reduced in size mainly to the area of North Borneo. There was a rebellion underway and James Brooke fired off one of the cannons, maybe the only cannon, aboard his little sloop, on behalf of the Sultan and helped put down this rebellion. In return, the Sultan ceded to him a little parcel of land. Over the next 20 years, that parcel expanded. Brooke got additional concessions from the Sultan. Sometime in the 1860s, James Brooke died and his nephew took over as the second Raja of Sarawak and continued the expansion of the lands of Sarawak. Then sometime in the 19-teens around World War I, that person's son took over and was the third White Raja ruling Sarawak and ruled it up until the Japanese invasion World War II. So, for 100 years, this land had been the land of the White Rajas, these three men in succession, these three British subjects. In World War II, it was a Japanese possession. Following World War II, the third and final raja concluded he could not rebuild the country following the wartime devastation and he arranged for the Crown to take it over as a Crown colony. It was a Crown colony until the formation of Malaysia.

Saba, the other state in East Malaysia, started out as a patent to the North Borneo Company, much like the East India Company. It was governed by a company. I forget whether that went through a period as a Crown colony. It must have. It became the Crown Colony of North Borneo and then it became part of Malaysia.

Sarawak, because of the 100-year-rule of the Brooke family, had a real sense of identity as a state, as its own state. It had had its own health and educational system, its own postal system, its own set of postage stamps. It had its own sense of history, its own constabulary, etc. So, when it joined Malaysia, it had this legacy of an independent being and it caused friction within Malaysia. Saba less so. Saba had also been an independent state, but it had also been this colony. As a result, it fitted into Malaysia a little more easily than Sarawak did. Sarawak was in some ways a burr under the saddle for the Malaysian government in Kuala Lumpur. But in Sarawak, unlike peninsular Malaysia, the majority community group there consisted of the aborigines, the Iban, the Dayak people, the Kadayans, and the other groups. Similarly, in Saba, the native communities were in the majority. Then came the Chinese. Then came the Malays. The Malays were a distinct minority in East Malaysia. The Malay population was scattered throughout Sarawak and Saba, of course, but it was perhaps more concentrated up near Brunei.

Q: Looking at the map, I take it that a big hunk of Borneo that belonged to Indonesia at the time was relatively inhospitable to government.

PETERSEN: Yes, it was. Sarawak and Saba were distinct from West Malaysia. They had different resources. They had huge amounts of timber. I've heard now that much of that area has been devastated by timbering. There were mineral deposits and fishing to some extent. I remember factories to process and can fish, prawns and so forth. Timbering seemed to be the big thing. Not to be too cavalier in describing this, but part of the tension in Sarawak was between the Malays, who said, "We're here to be good people on Earth," compared to the Chinese, who said, "Let us roll up our sleeves and get in there and really exploit this land and make the land useful." The Malays would say, "The land is just there. We're just using it. Economic development isn't our priority. There are other concerns." That was partly one of the real tensions.

Q: Was there concern about Indonesian agents trying to do things?

PETERSEN: Not really. A lot of my work was with the police. There was a Sarawak counter-insurgency training school for the jungle forces. A fellow named Nathan (his surname) was in charge of the school and I spent quite a bit of time over there. Working with him, one of the films that we got through USIS – and I practically wore it out showing it to police and military units and working with them – was about how to fight a guerrilla war. The purpose of it was to understand how guerrillas fought so you could counter what they were doing out there. At times, I would become very frustrated in dealing with Nathan and some of the other people. I remember one time saying to them, "If you really want to be successful in defeating the people you describe as 'communist guerrillas' in the border area, you should follow what Mao Zedong said. Consider the people a pool of water and the guerrillas the fish. Stop mistreating the water because you're making the water hospitable for those fish out there." But these guys, I would get reports through the Chinese community of the mistreatment of Chinese civilians who were suspect, Chinese farmers and others. The military and police forces felt they must be supporting the guerrillas because they were of the same community. Part of what I would do with the police and the military was talk about experiences in other countries -- how you had to determine what the real situation was, and that it was foolhardy to go trampling around over the civilians in the area. Certainly, they were going to resent the government, which would make them more open to possibly supporting the guerrillas in that area. I used sports, particularly basketball, as a vehicle to get in and communicate with a lot of people. We had quite a number of basketball films in our USIS inventory. I had a particularly good one that featured the role of Bill Russell of the Boston Celtics. On one level, it was just a straightforward basketball film showing this man's great skills and how the team worked together. But a subliminal message was, you had an African-American who was this key part of this team that featured important white players. So, there was a subtle message about how communities can work together as a team. I used to use that film a lot as an introduction. I would go out to a Hammer village or to a detention center and show the film, and then follow on, talk about the situation people were facing. In Hammer villages, people would be allowed out to till the field during the

day and then they'd come into an enclosure at night so they would have no contact with the guerrillas. I forget whether the premise was to protect them or to keep them from supporting the guerrillas. In the detention centers, it was different. These were people who had been locked up for infractions of one sort or another. In any event, I used these basketball films and it gave me an opportunity to show some other type of film having to do with political development or government and have a conversation and whatnot. I made great use of the old film projector there.

Q: How did you find government officials at your level? How did they respond?

PETERSEN: I was very young, very inexperienced. I was still 25 when I arrived. The government officials I was dealing with were a generation older than I. This was a challenge, how to be seen as someone of a certain gravity. But I found the politicians, the officials, quite accessible, quite open. I'm talking about Sarawak and Saba, not Brunei. It was a little bit different there. The U.S. and Malaysia had very friendly relations. We had a little tiff over our policy on tin and on rubber at one point. But that was really a problem in KL (Kuala Lumpur) at the national level, not at the state level where I was working. People were interested in the United States. The following year, 1969, was the year of Apollo and people were fascinated by that.

Q: This was the landing on the Moon.

PETERSEN: That's right. We got films on Apollo and showed those quite a bit. I don't recall particular difficulties in dealing with government officials. Sarawak was divided into five residences. This was a legacy of the Raja Brooke's regime. Each of the residences was then further broken down into districts. There was a district officer in charge of every district. Then above the district officers were the residents. There were five of them under the governor who ruled the state. At one point, I was looking for information about what was going on up in Third Division and a Third Division resident said, "Look, come with me and we'll go up there and look around." It became a little adventure for me. I was meeting with him in Sibul, the capital of the Third Division, the major city on the Rajang River. This happened in '69. I worked out the details with him in the course of a few minutes that we would meet a week later upriver at a landing zone. But I took off from Sibul early one morning in the Kapit Express, a river launch. A half day later, I landed at Kapit upriver. I had been there before. On this particular trip, before setting out to go further upriver, I visited a hospital. There was a huge hospital in Kapit, 90-100 beds. I was impressed because they sterilized things using wood-burning stoves. They cooked their food with chopped timber in the stoves. They had their own chickens to produce eggs for the hospital. The guy in charge was a tremendous entrepreneur to run that place. After a day in Kapit, I made arrangements and got a longboat, a super canoe, a dugout. Where we were going, through some very heavy rapids further up the river, we equipped that thing – and I did this through the district officer in Kapit – with two outboard motors and set off with two Ibans, Dayaks.

I remember in the morning going down to the wharf at the river and getting in that boat and sitting down at water level. I had a guy in the back running the engine. Then I had a

guy up front who had a shoulder weapon. That was just in case as we got up where the water was not running as swiftly up in some of the smaller areas we ever had a crocodile get too close. Supposedly, he was going to keep the croc away. That day, I was filled with terror because above Kapit there was some tremendous rapids. I did not want to get out and try to walk around, although there was a trail, but I think the leeches had more terror for me than the water. At one point midway through those rapids, we took shelter in the middle of the river behind a huge boulder that must have risen a good 20 feet out of the water and there was a still pool right on the leeside with the running water on both sides and huge waves crashing over rocks, waves that were three to four times the height of our little dugout canoe. These guys maneuvered around all that and got us safely through. But I remember sitting there thinking, "I'm not going to survive. I'm not a swimmer." Of course, there was no such thing as a lifejacket or anything like that. But we did make it. Obviously, these guys had done it before. I was terror stricken. But they were older than I was. They had lived longer. We're up above the rapids and I remember that first night staying at a little place on the river that had a wooden floor. There was no electricity, no water. We had a bucket where we caught rainwater off the roof and that was my source of water. Then I went further up. Later in the week, I reached the rendezvous point and a little plane came by in a clearing and swooped down and out the resident – the guy I had met in Sibuh, hopped with a police officer who was going to make the trip with him. We hooked up and ended up with two or three longboats for the rest of that trip that we got from some Iban longhouses. That was quite a trip, going up different tributaries. We carried with us rice and some live chickens. At midday, we would nose the longboat onto a gravelly sandbar and we'd make a fire and chickens would be killed, plucked, and cleaned, and we'd have chicken and boiled rice for lunch. Plus, we had canned goods with us, stewed tomatoes or whatever. At night, we stayed in different longhouses on the river with the resident, who was a VIP. We'd gather at the longhouse, generally go down to the river with a bar of soap, stand immersed waist deep, and then crouch down in the running water to neck height and wash. The longhouses were long structures up on bamboo stilts with room after room in a row with a thatched roof. In longhouses, the population was counted by doors. You didn't count the number of men or elders. You certainly didn't count women. You counted the number of doors. I guess it was a standard number assumed to live behind each door. Each door represented a partitioned room. Everything was communal except sleeping in that room. There were some huge longhouses. I don't remember the number of doors, but some of them were pretty big. At night, we'd gather, have a meal (rice and whatever, maybe something in the pot). Then we would sit and drink either tuak or burak. I guess it was the same thing but tuak might have been the Iban word for "rice wine" or "fermented rice liquid" and burak might have been the Kadayan word. On this particular trip, the resident would always get up and give a speech. Then the policeman would give a speech. I had to get up and give a speech, too. Here I was, speaking extemporaneously in my halting Malay. I don't know if anybody ever understood me, but there I was. I would talk about what the United States was, where it was. It was a pretty simple. I was showing the flag. Then we'd sit and talk. I would listen and try to determine as much as possible. People talked about their interest. They wanted schooling for their kids; they talked about the need for a school. They talked about the desire to have better water, better support for crops, all the things that were on their mind. I don't ever recall direct conversations about guerrillas. To talk about

communism would have been ridiculous. People were talking about things that mattered to them and their families. It was an opportunity for me to really see for myself what the government was doing. I visited the development projects on some of the longhouses. I heard directly from people. It was a good opportunity.

This was all in response to your question about dealing with the government officials. I never really had any great difficulty. The officials were open. Certainly they were courteous, open, receptive to our efforts, and our informational and cultural programs. They were very cooperative. It was delightful.

I'd like to finish by telling you one thing about this particular trip. The resident and the policeman had been dropped off by this tiny plane but they couldn't go back that way. They were going to go downriver all the way by boat. When we headed downriver and got to those rapids that had terrorized me so much a few days prior, we all got out and took the trail around the rapids, walking downriver. Sure enough, we all stripped down to our undershorts to walk on that trail so we could see those leeches and pick them off. They just seemed to be everywhere. It was a responsibility of each guy behind the other one to flick off the leeches of the guy in front. The last guy in the trail... Who looked after him? As you can see, leeches left a real impression on me.

Q: What about Brunei? Did you have any responsibility for that?

PETERSEN: In between Vietnam and Malaysia, I had taken the consular course. I had had a consular exequatur from the king, Negara, from Malaysia. And I had a very nice one from Queen Elizabeth. And I had both of them up on the wall in my office. But the one from Queen Elizabeth was to permit me to operate in Brunei, a British protectorate. Of the different posts I served, except for Okinawa when I was there with an international exposition, I never traveled nearly as much as I did when I was assigned to Kuching. I would regularly go traveling around Sarawak and to Brunei and up to Saba. In general, I would call on newspaper people. There must have been about 20 important Chinese newspapers in that area. I would always go in and have tea or lunch or dinner with the editor or the publisher and talk about what was going on, provide materials that could be published in the paper, deliver some books, and go back to Kuching and write up what I'd learned.

Brunei was a little different. Maybe there was only one newspaper in Brunei. I don't remember anymore. But the Daily Star was one. Dennis Law was the editor. He was an Australian fellow. I used to meet with him all the time with the head of the rehabilitation center (for political rehabilitation) where they kept detainees. It was a prison. I met with the minister for education and the minister for information. It was interesting. In Brunei, the ministers were Brunei Malays. I would have a courtesy call on them and then I would spend the bulk of my time meeting with their deputies who were always Brits and would work with them. Except for the ministry of religious affairs, all the ministries had Brits as the deputies. I remember one time in Brunei being dismayed in talking to the director for rehabilitation about prisoners and rehabilitation efforts. I described what we had been doing when I was in Vietnam and what we continued to do in Vietnam - the Chu Hoi

program, for example – and what had gone on in other areas of the world to rehabilitate political prisoners. This guy said, “Save your breath. These guys raised their hand against the Sultan. That’s the same as raising their hand against God. There is no forgiveness. They’ll never be let out.” I remember thinking, “My gosh, what an atmosphere.”

By the way, I never met the Sultan of Brunei. I saw him once. He was out speeding down the road in his Mercedes. That was the new Sultan. The old Sultan, the father, abdicated in 1968 in favor of his son, who was in his early 20s, so that Brunei could have a political system. He became the head of the only political party. He ran that and the son became the new Sultan. There is not much I should say about that. The Sultan of Brunei is renowned for his riches and his huge palace. My interests there were primarily in the issue of political rehabilitation and working with the education department and the information system. But compared to Sarawak and Saba, we were not nearly as active in Brunei.

Q: Were there universities in the area? This often is a target of what we’re after.

PETERSEN: There was a teacher training college in Kuching. There were nursing schools. But for genuine degree-level university education, people left, went to West Malaysia or elsewhere for their university training. I worked a lot with secondary schools, government secondary schools, Methodist, and some catholic secondary schools. I remember one time visiting a Chinese secondary school to check on how the books we had donated were being used. The principal proudly showed me that all the books were in perfect condition and they were all locked up on his shelf in his office and he had the key. He opened the glass front and showed me the books in pristine condition. I said, “Gosh, you’ve missed the point.” I think sixth form was the highest level in the secondary school system, equivalent to a high-school senior. The donated book program, film program, our library program at our lending library in Kuching was an important part. That was an audience, but I seemed to put most of my effort into working with the different political parties directly and with the police and the military while I was there, and with the Malaysian information service and its branch offices everywhere. The schools broadcasting service, which existed in Sarawak, used to broadcast lessons or information for the school systems. So, we would try to get material place there.

Q: What about American exploration for petroleum minerals and also missionaries?

PETERSEN: I don’t recall American exploration for minerals. Timber was an important export, but I think it was going up to Japan. One particular thing that was exported to the U.S. were broom handles. There was a broom handle factory near Kuching. From our regional service center in Manila, we brought down a freelance writer who was writing for one of our worldwide magazines. I remember taking him out and showing him the broom factory and getting interviews there. I think he published an article about making the link between Malaysia and the United States, the economic link, and there was an article about the broom factory and broom handles and how America couldn’t sweep up dust if it wasn’t for those broom handles coming from Kuching.

I remember exploration for minerals, but I always seem to recall bumping into Japanese businessmen in that connection up in Saba. As for the timber and the oil, Royal Dutch Shell was big. Off of Brunei in their oil fields, it had to have been British companies. I don't really recall the details of that.

Q: Did the communal riots spill into where you were?

PETERSEN: No. The communal riots began in May of '68. They were horrendous in West Malaysia. We went for about three days - I was in Kuching at the time - with absolutely nothing happening and everyone very nervous and hoping something like that wouldn't occur, but knowing that this was an ideal opportunity for somebody to try to exploit the situation. About the third day of all the rioting in West Malaysia, the government rest house in Kuching burned down. It might have been the governor who got on the radio and said it was due to faulty wiring, an electrical fire. It might have been, I don't know. There were a few incidents but it was relatively minor in Sarawak. In part, that was because, unlike West Malaysia, where there was close to parity in numbers between the two major communities, in Sarawak, the Malays were a distinct minority. The military was a national force. The senior officers were Malays. In Sarawak, John Ritchie was police commissioner. John was of a mixed community background. His deputy, Ramsy Gitan, was an Iban, the highest ranking Iban in the police. There were lots and lots of natives, lots of Ibans, in the police force. It goes back to that point that Sarawak had a different sense of identity from West Malaysia.

Q: What were you getting from the people you were talking to? Being in Southeast Asia, our involvement in Vietnam was a major topic. What was the basic reaction to what we were doing there?

PETERSEN: I'll give you an answer now and hope that upon reflection I don't conclude that I gave you a completely wrong answer. There was a mixture of bafflement as to why we were involved and fear. The fear was whether we were really there for the long-term? Could we be relied upon or not? Malaysians were searching for their own identity as a new nation. They were part of, along with the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia, the economic/political pact of the area, ASEAN. There were tensions among the states. We have already talked about the confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia. But shortly after my arrival in Malaysia - in fact, the story broke while I was on a trip in Saba and I remember reporting to our consul in Kuching and then simultaneously to the embassy how the people in Saba had reacted with a great deal more concern than the government in KL was reacting to the revelation that there was a guerrilla training camp in the southern Philippines. The alleged purpose of that was to instigate an effort to take back from Malaysia some lands that belonged to the Philippines because they had once been part of the Sultan of Sumu's area of control and the Philippines was going to exercise its rights to these lands. This excited the people in Saba a great deal because they would have been on the frontlines of this and it would have been their territory that would have been taken back by the Philippines. I saw it as just a pretext by the Philippine government - whatever it was going through in early '68, I can't remember - to just divert attention to some other issue away from some problems in Manila. I remember alerting people in KL

from where I was up in Saba, meeting with people, about how they were really very concerned. There was a series of these tensions among the different Southeast Asian states. People wondered what interest did the United States have and what kind of a partner would we be? While I was in Malaysia, there were complaints, criticisms, and so forth levied against us about our tin policy and our rubber policy. We had released some of our strategic reserve of those materials and this upset the Malaysians mightily because these were their earning raw materials. Trying to improve people's understandings of how the U.S. reached economic and political decisions was a constant challenge.

Q: You had a consul in Kuching, too?

PETERSEN: Yes.

Q: How did you get along with him or her?

PETERSEN: John P. Heimann. John and I got along very, very well. I was very fortunate. I had tremendous American colleagues there. John and Judy were delightful. They were replaced by John J. Taylor, John and Betsy Taylor and their youngsters. Both the Heimanns and the Taylors had very young children, five, six, seven, eight years old. I had good relationships with them. I used to write a monthly report for USIS in Kuala Lumpur. It was an important document for me. I'd spend a day dictating that thing and then having it typed. I would spend a couple of days or a couple of evenings thinking about it before putting it together. It was a huge document. It ran 10-12 pages, probably nine or 10 pages more than anybody ever wanted to read. At one point there was some negotiation and agreement that I would henceforth, after I had been there for seven or eight months, share my monthly report with the consul and another American at the consulate, so they would be informed. I developed quite an extensive network of contacts, mainly journalists and people in the ministry of information and ministry of education. My second year in that assignment, the real emphasis was on what the embassy referred to as PSYOP work (psychological operations). I was working a lot with the police and the military. I had information that provided a different perspective on some of the information that was given to us through official channels.

When I left Malaysia, one of the things that bothered me was a long conversation, probably the final conversation I had with the guy who published the major Chinese newspaper up in Sibü. I remember telling him how I saw things. I remember him saying to me, "Well, you've got it wrong. After two years, you drew the wrong conclusions." I think at that point I was enamored of some of the good things that the Malaysian military was doing, or that I thought they were doing. I remember him saying, "No, you draw the wrong conclusions. Those guys in the military never leave the road. They're always on the road. Robert, you missed what's happening off the road in the jungle." He may have been right. I may have been too sanguine about future prospects. That was 30-plus years ago and things have turned out all right.

EARL WILSON
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Kuala Lumpur (1967-1970)

Earl Wilson was born in 1917 and raised in Washington, DC. He attended the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service and George Washington University. Mr. Wilson joined the IICA (USIS) in 1947 and spent his career in China, the Philippines, France, Thailand, Mexico, Hong Kong, Spain, Malaysia, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1988.

WILSON: We were transferred to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, next. There was a very nice big colonial house there for the PAO. The ambassador, Jim Bell, was an old friend of ours. The house had terraces going down from a veranda in front of the place. Someone had built kind a wooden deck to watch tennis players. The ambassador told me, as soon as we got there, a jazz group was coming. He wanted us to give them a reception. It would be a means of meeting a lot of local people. I suggested we turn that platform deck into a stage, which we did. Behind it we had big palm trees, rain trees, and shrubs. We got lighting, loudspeakers, and it really worked very well. We could seat people in folding chairs along the terraces, and we could have it dark so we could see the stars, and then the lights would come up. Really a nice outdoor theater. We had lots of plays and poetry readings there, one thing and the other.

Q: You may not remember, but Peg and I were in that house of yours because at New Year's time, 1967-68, we drove from Bangkok to Singapore, and had Julie Abrams, the wife of General Abrams, with us, and we stopped over with you for a couple of days.

WILSON: My wife and I do a weekly cooking column for the Potomac Gazette here. I write for her these Foreign Service anecdotes. I just so happen to have an anecdote about that very thing you were just mentioning, but I don't use your name or their name.

Very soon after I arrived in Kuala Lumpur, the Agency asked me to go represent the Far East with an orientation group to Vietnam. They had just started this program for PAO's to spend a couple of weeks in Vietnam, getting indoctrinations, briefings, and traveling around the country in order to help explain the situation back in their country. Also, maybe help our program in Saigon do a better job with material they were sending out. They had a PAO from Germany, Italy, one from Latin America. Also, Sig Larmon, of the USIS Advisory Board. He was a big shot advertising man in New York. And myself. We got a briefing from Ambassador Bunker, the Commanding General Westmoreland and various other ranking people. Then we split up and went individually to different parts of the country.

One of the conclusions I had at the end was that it's easy to be critical in such a turmoil, but you could certainly say that impatience with the Vietnamese and with little understanding of their language or culture, the American military basically, it seemed to

me, to be saying, more or less, "Stand aside. We'll do the job." Also, that too much reliance was being put on muscle and hardware.

But be that as it may, I came away proud of the job the United States was doing and trying to do in that war-torn country. From my days in China, I had seen the spread of Communism, the strategy and tactics, and what happened when they won. I also saw that the foreign correspondents, for the most part, seemed to be turning up the rugs to look for dirt, adding fuel to the fire of those against our involvement at home and abroad. Traveling about the country for two weeks, I could honestly say I found morale high among American military and the Vietnamese. The same seemed to be true with the civilian officials of both sides.

There were plenty of problems, of course. The Vietnamese people, if they had their way, would like nothing more than to be left alone by both sides. I couldn't then, nor can I now understand the Jane Fonda crowd, strangely quiet when the Communists later killed and imprisoned millions of innocent people and drove others into the sea, and quiet about the degrading treatment and torture given the American prisoners of war.

So I came back to Kuala Lumpur. The main thing in Kuala Lumpur, I guess, one of the things that intrigued me over the years was distribution of our materials, our products. I noticed in post after post that a lot of attention was paid to producing something, but then when the distribution came about, you'd find some back-room, low-level local, as a rule, who was worrying about the mechanics of it back there. I called it the last ten feet. I had been needling Washington for years to give more attention to this.

Aside from that, I also had the feeling we didn't know enough about our target audiences. We talked about mutual interests. What exactly were their interests? Of course, American studies had become something the Agency was very much interested in. So I was trying to look at this. The Agency had three broad objectives for the less developed countries: one was understanding the U.S.; two, U.S. foreign policy; three, what they called modernization. I thought the Agency had little trouble with the reporting of our foreign policy. But when it came to understanding the U.S. or modernization, just what part of our vast and complex society was of interest and relevancy to various members of our target audience?

Of course, the main concern in these so-called Third World countries was national development. They needed technical information. But here the Agency had said AID had that responsibility, but it seemed to me we were going to inevitably get into that field one way or the other.

Then the Agency had come up with this thing called PPBS, planning, programming, and budgeting system, which was demanding a basic worldwide list of target groups, and each country was to use this list, adding their special local categories. So in Malaysia--this might be of interest--our target groups were political and government leaders, academic community, communications, media leaders, labor, military and paramilitary, professionals, creative intellectuals, entrepreneurs, businessmen, managers, rural

development leaders, and traditional leaders. Then we had more detailed breakdowns under that.

Then another thing began to bother me. When I looked into it, every section of the embassy had its own list of names and contacts, all more or less unrelated to one another. The political section had a responsibility for the biographic list, but those lists broke down often for the simple lack of a typist to keep some of this data. The other lists, outside of USIS, most of them were kept in a shoe box in some office, the military had theirs, the labor attache, agricultural attache, social secretary, economic section, etc. It didn't make sense to me to not have some kind of coordination. Then how to motivate the various sections to cooperate in this central effort?

One thing that had a relation to this, during the 12-year emergency in Malaya, when the British, who were fighting the Communist insurgents there, came increasingly to rely on what they called local military operations rooms. These were set up around the country, organized in a certain way, and they fed their data up to a central countrywide ops room. They kept detailed information, including the progress towards goals, and identifying local problems and what was causing the hangups and so on.

When they gained their independence and Malaysia was founded, these operations rooms were turned toward following the same idea in implementing plans for national development. I went to the central one for a briefing. So I decided that what we needed at USIS was our own operations room next to my office, where I could keep an eye on it. It fitted in with the Malaysia ambiance.

I got Harry Britton, an energetic Chinese-speaking information officer, to be responsible for what I called our TAU, target analysis unit. To the mystification, I think, of some, I assigned our senior Malay local, and under him, our senior Chinese local and a local typist, with another typist on contract, to be responsible for this thing. We equipped the place with bookshelves and static displays, all the paraphernalia, typewriters and chairs and all, and we had our small staff meetings there. I called it the "poor man's computer." This was before the computers were much in use.

You are probably familiar with the Royal McBee key sort cards. It's a very old information retrieval system, five-by-eight cards with 131 numbers around the edges, when coded, could be retrieved with a needle-like spindle that would go through these holes. So in setting up that part of it, it cost me \$150 out of my budget. We coded the numbers of the holes around the cards for target groups, geographic areas, languages, fields of interest. I won't go into it either, but we set up, with a good deal of study, and it went back to the Library of Congress listings and so on, fields of interest from A (administration) to Z (zoology).

Our first job, we transferred USIS mailing lists and personal contact cards and all the rest to these cards. As we progressed, I found that my American officer, my Malay and Chinese became increasingly enthusiastic, and they went to the different embassy offices, taking what they had and encouraging input. So out of the Malay population of 10

million, we had 3,000 on our target audience list. That began to make an impact as we incorporated this into our planning.

One of the things, the Agency had, was a donated book program. We were receiving books by the thousands. Through this little unit, among other things, we could rapidly identify the book, its subject matter, and people that were interested, because we sent out letters and asked people to check off what they were interested in. We got about a 90% response. It was amazing. We worked more efficiently with the libraries around the country. The air attache loaned us his plane from time to time. Esso tank ships helped take our books to East Malaysia. The Minister of Education began to provide storage space at no cost. Soon we were dealing in the hundreds of thousands. The Agency called our book operation the most outstanding in the Far East or in the world.

Ben Posner--you know him, Lew--was the USIA Assistant Director for Administration, he visited us and later said that, "This system should be definitive in its field, it's impressive, logical, tightly organized, comprehensive." He said he was going to have his officer in charge of distribution explain it to posts in his visits around the world.

Then the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific came through. He told our ambassador our ops room was the most efficient thing of this sort he'd ever seen in USIS work. So he wrote this praise to Fitzhugh Green, who was USIA Deputy Director for East Asia. Fitz wrote back to him, sending me a copy. I'll read his reply: He said, "The man in charge of our operation in K.L. is Earl Wilson. I'm not surprised. He's probably the greatest idea man that ever headed any organization, plus being a talented and successful painter. So it's not surprising that you saw some fancy operating methods at his post."

I did later prepare film strips and other materials for Ben Posner at the Agency, which were incorporated for a while into the training program. I do know that here and there young JOTs became interested. This was sort of at the leading edge as computers were beginning to come in. But the interesting thing is that Joann Lewinsohn, who was assigned to take over from me as PAO, the only woman PAO in East Asia, very rapidly dismantled the whole goddamn thing when she came in. So that's life.

One other thing out there, on the family side. An Indian doctor, Dharmalingen, had the best cancer hospital, the most modern in Southeast Asia. He was a golf partner, companion, and physician for the prime minister. He was a good friend of our ambassador, Jim Bell. The ambassador liked my paintings. He told Dharma. Dharma, as soon as I met him, said, "I want you to paint a mural in my hospital out-patient room."

I said, "Man, I haven't got time to do that. Besides, you should have one of your fine Malaysian artists." Well, he kept after me, and finally Lorane and I, we went over there. This was a beautiful hospital. It was new. These big waiting rooms for out-patients had plain cement walls, very depressing. So I drew life-size animals. The first was an elephant drinking from the water fountain. Lorane would help paint them in. Finally, I even got the ambassador, his wife, Dharma and his wife, who was a doctor, to help paint

them in. Dharma was here recently and stayed with us a few days. He told me the mural still exists.

One other thing about our ops room. I found out many people would say the most important thing we did was our exchange of persons program, but when you really looked into this, it was amazing to me how many of these people, once they came back home and resumed their life, were forgotten by us. No contact. So I found that by using our ops room system, if someone were going on a trip, for example, we could furnish them with a little list of the people in that area and make it his business to contact them. In this way we recovered contact with lots of people.

Another thing in Malaysia. The drug scene was developing in the U.S. and, as I learned later, in Laos and Bangkok. American kids were getting involved, also in Malaysia. The Agency was not doing anything about this. I found one of my own kids with marijuana, and like the average American, I was shocked. I looked into it. So I wrote to another friend at home and got a whole stack of materials on what was happening in the U.S. I wrote a special report on that which we sent out. I wanted to have it sent out to all the target lists on the health, police, education, etc. My young press officer came over and said, "You can't put this out."

I said, "Like hell I can't. You put it out, and I'm responsible." Well, very soon thereafter, the PAO in Manila and the one in Bangkok somehow heard about it on the grapevine, and they wanted my materials. They put it out. Of course, today in the Agency, that's one of its big, big activities, doing the drug thing.

The moon flight. We had an exhibit in the K.L. museum and it was the best exhibit they'd ever had in that museum. People came from all over the place.

That does remind me of one thing, Lew. Quickly, I'll go back to it. In Spain there were space stations, one outside of Madrid. When they said, in the Orbiter program, that they were going to get the first photograph of the moon to come into the station out there--it shows you how little we knew about these things--the ambassador and I jumped in a car and ran out there. But all they were getting were dots and dashes that were being sent to the Jet Propulsion Lab in California to be put together. So a bit later, we went out there this time for a briefing in advance. They were going to get the first shot of the earth from the vicinity of the moon, and they wanted to have that photograph distributed in Western Europe by us.

So we went out there. They said the camera would make strips of negatives, and these strips would be put together and then you print your photograph. The only trouble was, they didn't have a dark room in this very expensive lab. I said, "What the hell? I've got a dark room." So back behind the Casa Americana, in what used to be the stables, we had a little dark room. Arrangements were made. They would, by motorcycle, rush in these negatives with the scientists in the side car, and with my two little Spanish technicians, they would put it all together, we would print it and release it through the Spaniards to the press.

Everybody got so excited that half the NASA staff came, following the motorcycle, and they got there about midnight. They disappeared, the scientists and two kids, into the place. They came out with this wet photograph of that first thrilling shot of the earth with the rim of the moon on one side. That was turned over to the Spanish, and I went home. By now it was dawn. I got a phone call right away. They said, "My God, they made a mistake. They flopped that photograph, printed it in reverse." (Laughs) Well, somehow we managed to get it stopped, and we went back and printed it right, and it went out to the millions of people in Western Europe. That's some of the behind-the-scenes stuff we are always hearing about.

One other thing I'll tell you, a highlight of our tour in Kuala Lumpur. My wife and I gave a cocktail party because they were having a parliamentary election, and we invited editors and some media people, to try to learn from them more of what was going on. Also there was a USIS TV team down from Korea that could photograph some of this stuff down there. Well, while we were having this party, all of a sudden rioting broke out, because the Chinese Party gained more seats and the Malays lost face. The Malays began attacking the Chinese. This thing spread rapidly. One of the guests, an Indian editor, tried to get to his home. He called us a bit later. His car had been stopped, windows broken. He had been punched in the face, but he somehow got home, though his car was ruined. The Koreans managed to get over to their hotel. They were Vietnamese veterans, and they got up on the rooftop to observe what was happening.

Our telephones were working, so in our little dining area I set up a command post. I had our gardener outside. I gave him a walkie-talkie in case anybody came, because the word was getting around that they were going to burn down houses of some of the Americans. This was a wooden house. I had my American secretary, she was assigned to keep a log, I had all the languages and dialects, because I had my senior locals there. I had Malay and Tamil, Chinese, and different dialects. We had the radio on, tuned in to the police radio, and these guys could listen and then telephone to the area where the trouble was going on and pick up information, which then we were putting into a report and periodically called in to the embassy, because the embassy was more or less cut off from its contacts. We had a big map of the city, putting tacks to follow the action. Then the prime minister came on the air, a state of emergency, and I got hold of the Voice of America on my telephone, and I gave them an update on the thing.

When it was over, my wife and some others volunteered to help, including our children. The Chinese refugees had been sent to the stadium in the city, thousands of them. It was a mess. My wife, Lorane, got ringworm from wading around in this mess. Just terrible. She was giving out milk for the babies and different things.

When it was all over, I sent this very careful report on our USIS contribution to our Agency. Dan Oleksiw was the East Asia Director. I didn't even get a "thank you" from him or word one.

Q: That's normal from Dan.

WILSON: Yes. It looked important from where we were, but really, that was rather annoying, to say the least.

I was doing batik painting on the side in Kuala Lumpur, and I got a skin eruption on my hands and feet. As they investigated this, they thought I might have a case of diabetes. So I asked to be relieved to go back home. I went back to Washington, and thank God it turned out to be a borderline case.

While there, I was given a Superior Honor Award by USIA Director Shakespeare. The citation said, "For exceptionally imaginative ideas and concepts over a sustained period which have significantly advanced U.S. Government objectives in the field of public affairs and psychological operations in many parts of the world."

Ambassador Jim Bell had put that in for me. Jim was a very effusive man. I'm going to read for the record a paragraph of what he said in sending in his nomination, because it doesn't pay to be bashful all the time. He said, "In 25 years in the Foreign Service, I've never encountered a USIS officer who had a more imaginative, dynamic approach to the job. I believe he has made a greater contribution to the USIS effort in Asia over the past 20 years than any other single individual in the U.S. Government."

Also while I was in Washington, kind of thrashing around, Mary Painter, editor of the USIA World, the Agency's house organ, wrote a profile on me which was headlined "Idea Man for the Agency."

JOHN J. HELBLE
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1969-1973)

John J. Helble was born in Appleton, Wisconsin in 1934. He received a bachelor's degree in international relations from the University of Wisconsin. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956. Ambassador Helble's career included positions in Puerto La Cruz, Saigon, Hue, Kuala Lumpur, Dacca and Honolulu. This interview was conducted by Thomas F. Conlon on April 5, 1996.

Q: *What year was that?*

HELBLE: 1969. I arrived in Kuala Lumpur, where I was assigned as chief of the Political Section in the Embassy there. There were three officers and two secretaries in the section, beside myself.

Q: *Who was the Ambassador?*

HELBLE: The Ambassador was James Bell, who was coming to the end of five years as Ambassador to Malaysia. He was replaced several months later by Jack Lydman. I'll talk about both of them in a few minutes.

Q: John, you were saying that you wanted to touch on a number of additional points regarding Malaysia. Why don't you go ahead, then?

HELBLE: On May 11, 1969, if I recall correctly, a few weeks after my arrival in Kuala Lumpur, very important national elections were scheduled to be held. There was no question as to who would win the elections and retain control of the government. That was the a multiracial coalition led by Tunku Abdul Rahman. This included Malay, Chinese, and Indian parties.

Q: I think that the coalition was called the "Barisan Nasional" [National Front]. I still have some familiarity with this because from time to time I do translations of articles from the Malay press into English for FBIS [Foreign Broadcast Information Service].

HELBLE: Well, the issue was whether the ruling coalition government could obtain a two-thirds majority of the seats in Parliament, which was their objective. This would then permit them to amend the constitution in any way they wanted. The Opposition, primarily the Chinese parties, was determined to prevent them from achieving that objective.

There was an ultranationalist, Malay party that was running against the coalition. There were strong, Chinese-dominated parties in the Opposition which, in particular, included the Democratic Action Party, the DAP, which was a spin-off from Lee Kuan Yew's PAP [People's Action Party] in Singapore.

During the first five weeks that I was in the country, in my job as chief of the Political Section, I was focused primarily on this upcoming election, as was my entire staff. One of my officers was a Malay speaker. Another member of the Political Section was a Chinese speaker. They worked their respective clientele. I got to know people from the various factions in those groups. Phil Gill was the Malay speaker, and Joe Moyle was the Chinese language officer.

As I said earlier, Ambassador Bell had been there about five years and was approaching the end of his tour of duty.

The election occurred, but the governing coalition fell short of a two-thirds majority in Parliament, although they got about 60 percent of the seats. Nevertheless, the Opposition -- primarily the Chinese parties -- claimed "victory." The day following the elections, May 12, 1969, they paraded in a large caravan through the streets of Kuala Lumpur, going past a couple of downtown, Malay *kampongs*, or residential areas. *Kampongs* were little villages within the city proper which were entirely populated by Malays. The parade was very loud and noisy. Those taking part were tooting horns. They were essentially youths, waving their party flags, and so on.

From this demonstration came rumors, which were widely accepted and which spread like wildfire through the Malay community, that some of the Chinese youths had not only made racial or religious insults at the Malays but had thrown pieces of pork on the front porches of Malay homes. Eating pork is prohibited to Muslims, although many Malays eat some from time to time, though they don't admit it. This display was very offensive to the Malays, who even believed that some of the Chinese youths had exposed their private parts to Malay girls living in these kampongs. These rumors were not believed by all Malays, but they gained a great deal of currency and aroused an emotional furor in the Malay community during the next 24 hours.

We then had a first class example of that old Malay word, *amok* and its meaning. In point of fact amok loosely means "to go crazy" or "to see red." Someone who is "amok" no longer uses any logic. You just run around in an uninhibited fashion, wreaking mayhem, which is frequently associated with amok. However, as I say, that didn't happen immediately. It developed during the following 24 hours.

On the afternoon of May 13, 1969, the day after the Chinese victory celebrations, the Country Team at the Embassy met with Ambassador Bell to discuss the situation and to get abreast of what other people in the Embassy knew, including the intelligence community and so on. It was concluded that the Malaysian Government was well aware of the sensitivities of the situation, knew enough about it, and would be able to maintain control. It was felt that nothing serious was going to happen, at least in the very near future.

Of course, I had only been in Kuala Lumpur for five weeks and didn't have any profound insights to offer. However, I suspected that, indeed, there might be more to this situation than we had anticipated. After the Country Team meeting I went back to my office and asked one of our two secretaries who lived close to the Embassy if she was going to be home that evening. She said, "Yes." I said, "Well, I'd appreciate it if you'd stay at home in case I have to call you to come into the Embassy." Then I discussed the situation with a communicator who also lived near the Embassy. He said that he'd be at home but would be on call. Then I talked to Phil Gill and a junior officer, Barbara Schrage. They were free, so I suggested that we go out for dinner at a nearby hotel. I phoned home and told Joan that I was not going to come home for the time being, as I suspected that there might be trouble of some sort.

So the three of us went to dinner at the Federal Hotel, which was, perhaps, six or eight blocks from the Embassy. There was a revolving restaurant on the roof of the hotel. We had ordered a drink and placed our orders for dinner. As the restaurant, with its magnificent view of that section of Kuala Lumpur, rotated on the top, we could see down in the alleys of the neighborhood a number of Police Federal Reserve trucks which were characteristically fire engine red, with blue uniformed, Federal Reserve troops aboard. They were essentially riot control elements. So we speculated that somebody else thought that there might be trouble that night, because this was not the normal pattern.

At about 7:20 PM, before we had been served our dinners, the loudspeaker on the hotel circuit announced that a curfew had just been imposed by the government, which would go into effect at 7:30 PM, and that any non-residents of the hotel should leave immediately. We dashed downstairs, caught the last cab that we could see in front of the hotel, and returned to the Embassy.

As we approached the Embassy, we noticed that the road was blocked by a very large group of people, who were non Malays and who seemed to be in something of an agitated state. We got out of the cab and walked the last half block to the Embassy. At that point we realized that, almost directly in front of the Embassy was another large group, separated perhaps 50-75 yards from the first group we had seen. The second group was composed of Malays. We were able to get into the Embassy building without any trouble and went up to the 12th floor, where our offices were. Shortly thereafter, the two mobs in front of the Embassy appeared to collide in hand to hand combat, beating each other a bit and throwing rocks. From our vantage point on the 12th floor of the building in which the Embassy was located we could look down and see this. Then we began to notice fires starting in various areas of the city in the view from our rooftop offices.

We began receiving phone calls from Embassy people, reporting that there was trouble here and there around the city. Then the city seemed to explode with violence in all sorts of areas over the next two hours, as word spread that there was rioting going on. Other people became involved in it. It seemed fairly clear that the violence was started by Malays in most instances. As I stated before, it was really an "amok" situation, as they just lashed out blindly at any non-Malays around them. We were concerned that anybody who was not a Malay by definition a potential target, whether they were white, yellow, or black. So we were concerned for the safety of the American community.

From the Federal Hotel, before I left there, I had called the secretary and the communicator and asked them to go to the Embassy, which they immediately did, arriving a couple of minutes before we did. One CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] officer and another communicator were able to get to the Embassy, making a total of seven in the Embassy. Civil authority had broken down almost totally; the riots spread very quickly in a couple of hours throughout the city. The DCM couldn't get in from his house. Curiously enough, Ambassador Bell was in an interesting position. He was playing poker with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister, at the Tunku's residence, which was on a hillside overlooking the valley in which the bulk of the city was located. The Ambassador called the Embassy, found that I was there, and said that he couldn't get out of the Tunku's residence. So we were operational but on a very limited, staffing basis.

Q: Did the phone system work during throughout this time?

HELBLE: The phone system worked throughout this time. We had a radio on which we could tune in on police bands, so we were able to gain a fair amount of information about where the police were going next and the situation as reported by various police field units back to Police Headquarters and so on. We started calling a number of people in the Embassy who lived in various sections of the city to see what was going on in those

areas. In some areas things were quiet. In other areas there were fires and a lot of commotion. Some people reported that they had been caught outside of their houses, driving home or something like that, and went through a very scary situation.

There was an AP [Associated Press] stringer in Kuala Lumpur whom we knew. Of course, in the best of journalistic traditions, he was out in the streets. Within hours he knew enough, for example, to check several of the local hospitals and find out something about casualties. The casualty figures came in slowly. The government casualty figures were never honest. We knew that from the diverse reports we were receiving. This is not uncommon in situations where governments don't want to admit the degree of disorder that has occurred and their inability to handle the situation. It was clear that the government had lost control. The police were totally outnumbered and didn't have the resources to deal with the situation.

These incidents started early in the evening of May 13. Within six hours or so one or more elements of the Malay regiments were deployed into the streets to restore order. They were not fully successful for at least 24 hours. On the morning of May 15, some 36 hours after the incidents began, the Ambassador and the DCM were finally able to reach the Embassy. The Malay regiments had not been trained in restoring order in the streets. There were several reports, none of which could really be confirmed but which were so numerous that there was obviously some truth to them, that the Malay forces were shooting indiscriminately at Chinese houses. If anybody poked their heads out, the Malay forces would fire at them. I believe that there were enough incidents like that to aggravate the situation.

Meanwhile, moving groups of Chinese and Malays continued to encounter each other and fight. The AP reporter would report that he found 13 persons dead at such and such a hospital and an undetermined number of wounded, and so forth. The numbers of casualties grew, hour by hour. Ultimately, to round off that particular element of the situation, in its final report the government reported about 200 killed. Other sources claimed that the figure of persons killed was in excess of 2,000. From our review of the evidence, I would say that a good, round number of persons killed would be in the order of 1,300-1,500. So there was chaos for a time, widespread torching and extensive loss of life.

Q: Was there any breakdown of persons killed by racial community?

HELBLE: The government was very careful to avoid publishing that. However, the weight of the evidence was that there were far more non-Malays than Malays killed. Of course, in that respect, there was a companion allegation that that was in part because the Malay police and soldiers were backing up the Malays in the street gangs, rather than trying to suppress disorderly conduct by either side. So there were charges, which were widely believed in the non-Malay community, of gross favoritism, if you will, on the part of the authorities and that, in fact, some of the Malay police and soldiers contributed to the ratio of persons killed, who were largely non-Malays.

To give you an example, and we all know how difficult it sometimes is to assess the validity of reports under these circumstances, late on the second day of rioting say, Phil Gill, Joe Moyle, and I were standing at my office window, looking down on the street and the small river Sungei Klang that winds through Kuala Lumpur. One of them said, "Look, there's a body floating down the river." So we looked, and, yes, indeed, there was a body floating down there. Gill, a Malay language officer, said, "It's a Malay body." Joe Moyle, a Chinese language officer, looked at the same body and said, "No, it's a Chinese body." I said, "How can you guys tell?" They both said, "By the way it's dressed." I said, "But that body is naked. There are no clothes on it at all." So there were three, presumably reputable eyewitnesses, all seeing three different things. To this day I don't know whether that body was that of a Malay or a Chinese. It certainly didn't make any difference, but this was just a side commentary on how difficult it is, under circumstances like this, to determine exactly what happened in a given situation, even if there are eyewitness reports available.

Well, those riots really changed the power equations in Malaysia. The curfew, proclaimed on the evening of May 13, lasted for five months. During the first week it was lifted for an hour or two, in staggered sections of the city, so that people could get out to market and buy food.

Q: This was a 24-hour curfew?

HELBLE: It was a 24-hour curfew. For two days it was a total curfew, and nobody at all was allowed out on the streets. By the third day the authorities had to do something about the food situation, so they tried to open a market for two hours in this section and two hours over there, so that the police forces could concentrate on whatever market was open. There were several, major incidents the first day the curfew was slightly eased, and it went back to a full, 24-hour curfew. Again, the authorities couldn't starve the population totally, so they opened up this or that market for one hour at a time, with a much heavier presence of police.

Emotions were extremely inflamed on both sides. The government security forces were very hard pressed. They had never seen anything like this. I should say that outside of Kuala Lumpur there were some incidents--in Penang and Ipoh--and some unrest, when people started to hear what had gone on in Kuala Lumpur. The rest of the country did not become as inflamed and did not have the explosive events that had taken place in Kuala Lumpur. Gradually, although incidents continued to occur, the curfew was relaxed for several hours--five hours for the whole city--as confidence began to be restored. And as people had time to reflect that maybe this kind of street violence wasn't quite the thing to engage in, and they were getting tired of it, over the next five months an atmosphere of quiet was reestablished.

Of course, some people were arrested who were thought to have played some sort of leading role. However, there were very few in that respect, and there were no mass roundups.

I said that the situation in Kuala Lumpur changed on an apparently permanent basis, because it became evident, as the political process developed, that it was difficult to know how to cope with all of this. Of course, there was never any official acknowledgment that the Malays had initiated the disturbances, so to speak, but it was clear that this was true. At the same time, there was plenty of evidence that the Chinese had taunted the Malays into the violence by their "victory" parade of May 12.

From a political point of view the long and short of the government's response was, "We've got to do more for the Malay community." For its political survival, the government needed to do that. Government leaders were convinced that the Malay community would not continue to accept a situation in which the Chinese community heavily dominated the economic life of the country and held most of its wealth. There had to be some greater share of the economic wealth of the country directed toward the Malays. So a number of economic programs and initiatives were undertaken, as well as the establishment of *bumiputra* (indigenous) Malay banks, manufacturing plants, and promises of greater educational opportunity. There was a movement toward the use of only Malay as the language of instruction in the school system. All of this was deemed essential if there were to be any degree of racial or communal harmony restored.

Of course, the Chinese community basically fought all of this, inch by inch. However, in the final analysis, they had little alternative to accepting it, at least in part. In the last analysis it really didn't hurt the Chinese that much, because they had always been successful in paying off Malay politicians to get breaks and favors where they needed them. Of course, Chinese financial influence led to a lot of corruption at the higher levels of the Malay community, including the leadership and the bureaucratic elements within it. That system had worked. Now, however, there was a question whether the Chinese could continue to do this on the same scale and whether Malay politicians and leaders could continue to be influenced by this process of corruption. Obviously, they would be risking their political necks if they didn't deliver some goods to the Malay community.

As time went by after the May 13 riots and the various sequels thereto, there were still eruptions going on five or six weeks after the outset of these disturbances. Some nasty incidents would erupt. The key point seemed to be that what the country needed to survive with some element of communal harmony or, at least, an absence of violent communal conflict, was that the economic wealth of that country had to expand. In other words, you wouldn't cut too much into the Chinese community, and there still had to be opportunities for them. They were the engine of the economy. You couldn't pour water into their gasoline tanks without creating severe consequences for everybody. Yet it would be necessary to expand greatly the opportunities and percentages of wealth held by the Malay community.

The good news is that, looking back at the situation from the perspective of some 25 years, this has essentially happened. The country, which had considerable natural resources, has now made major additions to its natural gas and oil wealth, in addition to what existed in terms of timber, tin, and rubber. It has now expanded its industrial framework to include more than light industrial production. Medium sized and more

sophisticated manufacturing activity is now widespread. Over the past 20 years Malaysia has had a more rapid rate of economic growth than the vast majority of other, developing nations in the world, even in East Asia.

All things considered, Malaysia has had a stable, political leadership which has been relatively moderate but more Malay oriented, as they made the profound decision that they had to after the 1969 disturbances. Malaysia has been blessed with a fairly high quality bureaucracy and a relatively good judicial system, compared to much of Southeast Asia. In short, they have made a success of it.

However, as you said earlier, Tom, racial tensions have not disappeared, but they have been moderated and wrapped in the blanket of economic success. This has allowed all of the various racial communities to derive some benefit and to have some hope for the future. But the hostilities are too deep, as we know from our own experience, to dismiss the possibility of a resumption of the threat of open hostility and a breakdown of government, should economic conditions deteriorate.

Q: Have national elections regularly been held since the time of the riots of 1969?

HELBLE: They have always been held on schedule. This is a Parliamentary system, so the timing of the elections varies within the context of the constitution. The Malays continue to dominate the political process. After the May 13 riots Tunku Abdul Rahman regarded one of the ultra Malay nationalists as a threat to communal unity and harmony. This was Dr. Mahathir Mohamed. He was ostracized and forced to leave the country for about six months. When he returned to Malaysia, he was regarded as a real pariah. I invited him to my house for a small dinner not too long after he came back to Malaysia. It was the first time that a Western diplomat had invited him to a social affair since the May 13 riots. He was just considered a pariah by the government, and you didn't touch this fellow. He subsequently became Prime Minister and has continued as Prime Minister for about the past 10 years or so. He represented the Malays' demands for more opportunity for the Malays, to balance out the advantages which the Chinese had by dint of their own effort. They had the advantages which, the Malays felt they had been deprived of, despite the fact that they had the political power and, if you will, the power of the gun to obtain a change in that equation.

It's been 12 years or so since I was last there in Malaysia. I don't follow the situation as closely as I did. I think that, basically, Malaysia is a very functional country. However, it will never be secure from communal problems.

Q: I last visited there in 1991 during a cruise through Southeast Asia. I was supposed to deliver lectures on the different countries we were visiting. The impression I had was that, on the whole, KL [Kuala Lumpur] hadn't changed that much. There were some new buildings, but the atmosphere was about the same. I think that you're absolutely right. Communal tension is a continuing problem, and it won't be resolved very soon. The Malays will barely remain in political control of the country, and it remains to be seen whether the Chinese will accept this arrangement, in exchange for the dominant

economic position which they enjoy. Is there anything else you want to say about Malaysia?

HELBLE: Yes, there are several things. There are some specific highlights that I'd like to mention.

What I've just covered basically is what consumed my attention for the first year that I was in Kuala Lumpur [1969-1970]. Of course, it was the backdrop against which almost everything else that happened was measured, during my four-year tour there. There were a couple of incidents of at least entertainment value to myself.

In 1970--I don't recall the month--the Vice President of the United States, Spiro Agnew, visited Kuala Lumpur. We, as an Embassy, experienced what most Foreign Service Officers have experienced in one place or another. We went through the horrors attendant...

Q: This was Spiro Agnew.

HELBLE: Yes. I was effectively the Control Officer for the visit. There was an awful advance man who came and went and also visited Bali and Canberra. Vice President Agnew was going on to Australia, so this advance man bounced back and forth between Kuala Lumpur, Bali, and Canberra. Bali was a stop for the Vice President and his party, and the advance man seemed to need to visit Bali frequently. I won't bore you with all of the details of the pain created by the advance man but I'll give you one or two examples.

It had been decided that Vice President Agnew would play golf with Tunku Abdul Rahman, the Prime Minister. The Tunku only played the old course at the Royal Selangor Golf Club, which is the premier club in Kuala Lumpur. He did not play the New Course. The Old Course was a men's only course. Since about 1965, on one day a year women had been allowed to play the Old Course, but just for that one day. The golf event on the Vice President's program was so short, from the point of view of time, that it was agreed that they would play just nine holes. If the Tunku played only nine holes, it was his custom to play only the second nine. Agnew's advance man said that he didn't like the back nine course. He said that there were too many trees and that it was too much of a security threat to the Vice President. They would have to play somewhere else. Well, the long and short of it was that they ended up playing the back nine, but it was not an easy process to arrange. Then the Vice President's advance party found out that the Tunku always walked, and, in fact, there were only two golf carts in Malaysia. The Tunku himself had a golf cart but he never used it. The King of Malaysia had a cart. Well, Agnew's people said, "No, no, Agnew's got to ride. You can't make him walk." We made every effort to explain why the Malaysians wouldn't use carts and that the Tunku always walked--never used a cart. Yes, somebody gave him a cart many years before, but he never used it. So, it was going to be a walking event and was going to be on the back nine of the Old Course.

The advance people had their own set of requirements. At one point they said, "It's perfectly clear that what they want us to do is to bring in a couple of carts and then donate them to the Tunku at the end of the visit," which, of course, was a lot of baloney. The Malaysians didn't use carts. Nobody wanted carts. In fact, I saw the King playing golf a number of times. I won't say that he never used the cart, but I never saw him using the cart. I saw him walking the course. In any event, there was that sort of nastiness going on.

Vice President Agnew was scheduled to lay a wreath at the National Cenotaph in memory of those killed during the war against the Communists, 1948-1960. The advance person inspecting the cemetery found that the base of the Cenotaph was surrounded by gravel. He said, "This will never do, because the Vice President could step forward the two steps to lay down the wreath. He could slip, twist his ankle, and he'd be wiped out for the rest of his trip." He said, "They'll have to pave over the base of the Cenotaph." [Laughter] I said, "You can't do that. This is their National Monument." He said, "Well, it's got to be done. We can't take the chance."

Well, I finally sent him a telegram when he was in Bali or Canberra, reporting on the progress in arranging for the various events. I reported, "The base of the Cenotaph will be 'stabilized.'" He took that to mean that we were doing what he had told us to do. It was a euphemism for me. I got the caretakers to rake the area a little bit. [Laughter] When the advance man saw that it was still gravel on the morning before the arrival of Vice President Agnew, he went ballistic. I said, "It's too late now. It's all in the program."

Q: It was all printed. [Laughter]

HELBLE: Well, the Agnew visit to Kuala Lumpur was another one of these "smashing diplomatic successes." When Agnew got off the plane, another issue had been how many hands he would shake. The Malaysians said, "Well, the Chief of Protocol will meet him on the plane and shake hands with him. The Foreign Minister and the Prime Minister will meet him at the foot of the steps coming down from the plane, so there are those three people to shake hands with him. Then the Cabinet will be lined up to shake his hand." As I recall, there were about 20 members of the Cabinet. Then there were the Chiefs of Mission of the Diplomatic Corps. The advance man said, "No, no. The Vice President will shake the hands of the Chief of Protocol, the Prime Minister, and the Foreign Minister, and that's that."

Well, there was a big battle over this. The Malaysians were very offended. They said, "No, every Chief of State who comes here and all of the VIP's who come here must shake the hands of the members of the Cabinet." The long and short of it was that Agnew got off the plane. We didn't know how this issue was going to work out. Of course, our Ambassador was present at the foot of the steps. Vice President Agnew was introduced around and shook hands. The Prime Minister took him down the Cabinet line and introduced this minister and that. Agnew went down the line and shook hands. At this point the Chief of the Advance Party, J. Goodearl, got extremely upset, grabbed the Foreign Minister, and said, "This has got to stop! He's not supposed to be shaking these

hands. This has got to be stopped!" He was making a very audible scene. Tan Sri Ghazali was the Foreign Minister, and he was a very independent and outspoken person. He was very quick and very bright. He wheeled on Goodearl and the advance man, and said, "You want him to get back on the plane? We'll put him back on the plane. Right now. He can go. We've had enough of a visit." Poor Jack Lydman, our Ambassador, was witnessing this. He physically stepped between the advance man and Ghazali and said, "Of course, the Vice President doesn't mind shaking all these hands. There's no problem." Meanwhile, Ambassador Lydman was pushing Goodearl away from Ghazali. We almost had a diplomatic breakdown. If anybody could do it, Ghazali would have done it. He might just have said, "Mr. Vice President, you're not welcome here any more! Get back on that plane!"

Q: Was there ever any indication that Agnew really objected to shaking hands?

HELBLE: No.

Q: This was a staff-manufactured incident entirely. Sad to say, it happens all the time.

HELBLE: It happens all the time. Imagine this incident. In preparing for the dinner which the Prime Minister was going to host at his residence for Vice President Agnew, the Secret Service told us that they would have to inspect the Prime Minister's residence and do a security check prior to the dinner. They would do an early check and then, an hour before the dinner, they would do it again. Well, they insisted that the security check would involve the entire residence, including the bedrooms of the Prime Minister and his wife. You can imagine the response from the Malaysian security officials, who were not incompetent. They were competent and efficient people, as police and security officials go in the developing world. Malaysia is not really the Third World. It is much better than that. Of course, there was a big to do about this "inspection."

Finally, the matter came to Prime Minister Abdul Rahman's attention. The Prime Minister said, "You can go anywhere you want in this house, but NOT in my bedroom." [Laughter] In any event, these were these types of demands. The whole point of the story, of course, is that nothing useful ever eventuated from the visit. It was just like the Honolulu Conference episode involving the Vietnamese and President Johnson, though not on as grand a scale. It just involved the formalities of a high level visit, which was for show -- nothing else.

I have to finish off this episode with what, to me, was one of my great coups in the Foreign Service. I may have told you this story, Tom, but at the golf event Phil Gill, one of my Political Officers whom I mentioned before, was the event officer because he was a golfer. Actually, he got to use the Prime Minister's golf cart. Phil was there, in the golf cart, in the event that some urgent requirement for Vice President Agnew would come up. Agnew was walking the course but might have to get back to the club house in a hurry--for a "national security crisis" or something, said his staff. The Vice President would have a cart available there, under Phil's control. However, Phil's responsibility was to stay well behind the party as they walked down the fairway--and not get near the action.

After the golf event J. Roy Goodearl, Agnew's chief staffer, came to me and complained that Gill had followed the party too closely. Gill had allegedly refused to obey a Secret Service agent's orders for him to fall farther back. Phil said, "I have to stay within shouting distance." Anyway, Goodearl made this oral complaint to me. He was very upset.

That evening, after the dinner at the Prime Minister's residence, the party came back to the Merlin Hotel, where we had them quartered and where we had a Control Office. Some of them went to the dance show at the hotel which featured two Australian strip teasers. By about 11:45 PM several cars in the Motor Pool under my control had been dispatched on various missions or were checked out by various members of the vice presidential party, with our Malay drivers. I was down to three vehicles. I received a call from the lobby from Yusof, my Malay Motor Pool Coordinator, who said, "Mr. Goodearl would like to take a car."

I'm trying to think of the name of the Secret Service guy involved in this episode. You may know him. He's the guy who jumped onto the back of President Kennedy's car at the time of the assassination in Dallas in 1963. He was seen in a great picture, being pulled into the car by Jackie Kennedy. Yes, his name was Hill--Clint Hill. He was the chief of the Secret Service detail assigned to Vice President Agnew. Anyway, his name will come up in a minute.

So Yusof said, "Mr. Goodearl would like a car to go to the Federal Hotel." I said, "Yusof, how many cars do you have?" He said, "I have three." I said, "OK, you can release one." I wanted to keep one car at all times for the ultimate emergency, whatever that would be. About five minutes later Yusof called again from the lobby and said, "Mr. Clint Hill would like a car to go to the Federal Hotel." I said, "You have two cars left. Is that correct, Yusof?" He said, "Yes." I said, "OK, Mr. Hill can have one." But I said, "Don't let the last car go under any circumstances."

About 45 minutes later I had a call from Yusof, who said, "Mr. Helble, could you please come down to the lobby immediately?" Both of the drivers had returned from their missions, supposedly to take Goodearl and Hill to the Federal Hotel. Actually, both Goodearl and Hill had separately taken one of the Australian strippers in their respective government cars. In both cases the Malay drivers were absolutely livid and were threatening to walk off the job and get all of the other Malay drivers to walk off the job. Yusof was about ready to walk off the job himself. Yusof was a very dedicated employee of the Embassy. Both Malay drivers reported to Yusof, and then to me directly, that Goodearl and Hill had used the back seat of the government vehicles operated by Malay drivers for what one might call a rather intimate, social experience. The Malay drivers, good Muslims that they were, as well as good Embassy employees, were deeply, deeply offended by this behavior. As I said, they wanted to leave the job.

I told them, in no uncertain terms, that I would see to it that this would not happen again. I asked them, as a favor to me and in view of their responsibility to the Embassy, to stay

on the job. Certainly, if anything like this happened again, I wanted to hear about it immediately.

The next morning, at about 6:00 AM, I received a call from Mr. Goodearl, who wanted to see me in his hotel room. When I got there, Mr. Hill was also present. They now indicated that they were going to file an official complaint about Phil Gill's alleged violations of the understanding about the arrangements out on the golf course involving the golf cart in which Phil was following the Vice President's party. They intended to make very clear that this complaint should have an adverse affect on Gill's career.

I said, "Well, you'll probably have to file that cable at the next post, because it's not getting out of here through our communications facilities. But you can file it. That's within your rights." I said, "By the way, the behavior of you two gentlemen in the back seats of your respective cars last night with your Australian female companions has been fully reported to me by the Embassy drivers, who were very upset about your behavior." I said, "You know, it's amazing how stories of this kind get around. We don't have a lot of American journalists coming through here, but we fairly regularly have the 'New York Times' and the 'Washington Post' representatives visit here. Then we have the American wire services represented here, and other journalists coming through here. The kind of behavior of you two gentlemen, particularly last night, is the sort of thing that just makes a lovely story if it somehow happens to slip out and is presented at the appropriate time and to the appropriate people. It's the sort of thing that really would look 'nasty.'"

They sat there for, I would say, 30 seconds. It seemed like 10 minutes, but it was probably 30 seconds. They just looked and glared at me without saying anything. I said, "Do we have an understanding now about Mr. Gill versus the other side of this thing?" Well, they were defeated. They could see that. They said, "All right, all right. Now get the hell out of here." [Laughter] So no complaint was filed against Gill, and I had no particular reason to see that the story was leaked to the American press. However, I fully intended to get it into somebody's hands if anything was done about Gill. As I say, that was probably my greatest coup.

Q: Well, I think that one thing about prominent personalities is that some of them are very impressive and very good people. But some of them are really terrible. Our country is no different from any other country in this respect. It's just appalling that this sort of thing happens, that you have to put up with this sort of business and that these people are in a position to cause serious harm and serious damage to someone else.

HELBLE: One good thing came out of the Agnew visit. It took place about nine months after Ambassador Jack Lydman and his wife, Jody, arrived in Kuala Lumpur. In the Lydman's first week in Kuala Lumpur and after consultation with the Ambassador, I had angered Jody by inviting the Ambassador to a stag bridge game. We had the Japanese Ambassador playing, as well as the Thai DCM [Deputy Chief of Mission], the Canadian DCM, and so forth. I thought that it would be a nice, informal, casual setting for our Ambassador to get to know some of these people. He had exhibited an interest in playing bridge. Mrs. Lydman was absolutely furious and would not shake my hand at a reception

given for them by our Military Attachés at a hotel. On the spot she stopped the reception line, glared at me, and wanted to know why I had invited the Ambassador to a stag bridge game. She asked if I understood that she and her husband did everything together. She said, "By the way, it's important for you to understand that my husband brings home the Evaluation Reports on all of his officers before he finalizes them." He would show them to her and ask for her comments. This was a bare threat which, of course, totally turned me off.

So, in effect, for nine months, although I went to the Ambassador's residence repeatedly for official functions, Mrs. Lydman never said more than a perfunctory hello and never shook my hand. I never offered it again after the first time, when she refused to shake it. We had a very hostile relationship, which worried my wife, Joan, considerably but didn't worry me at all because the Ambassador's attitude toward me didn't change a bit. I thought that he was too decent a man to let this be a factor.

Q: This was a gross violation of privacy. In today's Foreign Service this would have been a basis for a grievance case.

HELBLE: Right, but this was before 1972...

Q: When the edict was issued by the Department clearly restricting Ambassadors' wives from interfering in Embassy business.

HELBLE: Right. But in any event the Ambassador had had so many "crises" come up during the preparations for the visit of Vice President Agnew, which I was trying to manage.

Q: Well, he had to know about them.

HELBLE: He did to know about them. The bottom line of this episode of conflict with Mrs. Lydman and its relationship to the visit of Vice President Agnew was that Mrs. Lydman had become very much aware of the nasty problems that I had to wrestle with and, she concluded, I had rendered her husband good service in that connection. After the Agnew visit, she immediately expressed these sentiments. She did not express her forgiveness over the stag bridge episode in so many words. However, it was clear that our previous confrontation was over, and there were no further problems from that point on.

Q: Did you shake hands with her after that?

HELBLE: I certainly did. We went back to hand shaking.

In 1971 there was a massive flood in downtown Kuala Lumpur, a major disaster. I was very much involved in running the disaster relief program and organizing the C-130 aircraft flights which the U. S. Air Force brought in, laden with boats, blankets, food, medicines, etc. It was a good experience in crisis management. I had never handled anything like that previously. Fortunately, this was a relatively short term problem. After

four or five days the problems eased off. This was one thing that certainly gave me another set of experiences during my tour in Kuala Lumpur.

I did a lot of travel out of Kuala Lumpur--to Sarawak, Brunei, and other parts of North Borneo. In the Malay Peninsula itself I traveled to Penang, Ipoh, and to the East Coast, including Kota Bharu, as well as to Johore, and Melaka. This came naturally to me after the experiences I had in Hue, where travel outside the city was just another aspect of the job. I looked forward to the opportunity to get out and spend three, four, or five days seeing different parts of the country, meeting different political leaders and local officials, and so forth. I enjoyed that, with one exception. I ended up in a jungle north of Kota Bharu State of Kelantan with a Malaysian politician who was a doctor. He had an urgent call to make out in the jungle late one night. He took his Volkswagen down what was literally a jungle path. I waited for him outside the little hut while he treated his patient. I was bombarded by mosquitoes. I came home and in a few days had malaria, which passed fairly quickly and never recurred. However, one experience with malaria in a lifetime was quite enough. It was not a lot of fun.

Of course, political attitudes outside of the capital city, just as was the case in South Vietnam were quite different from the attitudes that you heard expressed in the capital city. People tended to be, of course, more parochial in their concerns. However, in some cases their views were more vividly expressed. If you went to the upper East Coast in the State of Kelantan, for example, where Kota Bharu was, strong Malay nationalist sentiments were very acute there. There was a very small and insignificant non-Malay community in that area. If you wanted to get close to the heartbeat of the Malay soul, it was very useful to talk to a number of Malays in that particular, geographical area. Indeed, they had very considerable influence on long-term Malay political development and on the Malay orientation of government policy over a period of years.

It was worthwhile getting out and meeting people like that. I would go up to the American Consulate in Songkhla Thailand, where my good friend, John Kelly, was Consul for two of the years that I was in Kuala Lumpur. Kelly, of course, later went on to be Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs, Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, and Ambassador to Finland and Lebanon. We would discuss a number of border issues, including the small, Communist-led insurgencies that existed on both sides of the Thai-Malaysian border. These insurgencies were differently based and involved different political and ethnic groupings. Some Malay irredentist activity proliferated at various times along the border. Of course, there was considerable smuggling and gangsterism in southern Thailand, in particular, which had some impact on the border area.

At least once every six months I would go to Songkhla, and once every six months Consul Kelly would come to Kuala Lumpur. I would take my family to Songkhla, and he would bring his family down to Kuala Lumpur. On one occasion our mutual good friend, Jim Montgomery, came down from his post as Consul in Chiang Mai [Thailand]. This had nothing whatsoever to do with official business. He and his family came down and joined us. The Kelly's, the Helble's, and, subsequently, the Montgomery's were able to get

together and develop close friendships. So it was entertaining for all of us, as well as politically useful from our respective points of view.

Q: Is there anything else that you want to go into in terms of your four years in KL ?

HELBLE: I did want to say that during the first five months of our time in Kuala Lumpur we had lived on the western side of the city. Then we moved to the lowlands near the golf course, where there were 45 holes of golf to play, 18 grass tennis courts, a big swimming pool, and so on. This afforded the whole family good recreational opportunities. My opportunity for recreation was probably more extensive in Kuala Lumpur than it was at any other post in the Foreign Service, with both golf and tennis available, which I enjoyed very much.

One bad part of this, however, was that we had moved with a pair of what were known as Black and White Chinese servants. That is, they habitually wore old style white jackets and black trousers. They were really professional servants--women who, in effect, had almost taken an oath to serve. You might almost consider them as nuns. They were very dedicated people. One of them was the cook. She was an absolutely great, Western-style cook, and a great Chinese-style cook as well. The issue every night was, "What are we going to eat now?" We got into a routine of one night Western-style cooking and the next night, Chinese-style. We loved both of them so much. In any event, they moved with us.

The week after we moved into the new house the cook got sick. It seemed to be a bronchial complaint, with a little fever and so on. Ultimately, she decided that when she cleaned her room after we arrived in the new house, she had touched a little, glass bowl that had some ashes in it. She concluded that those ashes were a talisman burned by a Malay servant of the previous residents of the house. The Malay servant had lived in the same room that our cook now lived in. The Malay servant had not wanted to leave the house. When obliged to leave because the family she was serving was leaving, she had sought the assistance of a Malay *bomoh* --someone who might crudely have been described as a witch doctor.

So the Malay servant of the previous residents of the house sought the assistance of the *bomoh* to ensure that she could, in fact, stay at the house. He allegedly gave her this talisman to burn, telling her that this would help her to stay in the house. Of course, this didn't have the desired effect, from her point of view. However, our Chinese cook felt that she had been contaminated by this, and it was causing her to be ill.

This situation went on for several weeks. I thought that it was all a joke. However, one day I came home, and Joan said, "They've left and they'll never come back, because this is a 'bad' place now." I really bemoaned the loss of two extremely capable members of the household staff--and particularly that marvelous cook. However, it seemed that there was nothing to be done about it. We offered them more money, but they said that that had nothing to do with it. So we hired a replacement cook, and that cook also became sick within a week or so. We then had the water checked, we had various inspections made, but the second cook left us. A third cook was hired, lasted for three days or so, and left.

Then we ran into what was really a dry hole. We couldn't find anybody who would work for us.

Q: *The word had gone out.*

HELBLE: The word had gone out on the bamboo telegraph that this was a bad house. We had many potential servants come in for an interview. Joan would sit down with them and start to talk to them. They hadn't discussed wages or anything of that sort. Joan would notice that the person being interviewed would become flushed and start to perspire on her forehead. On several occasions she just got up, said, "I can't work here!"--and then dashed off. By this time it was clear that we had a problem.

Meanwhile, I had fairly heavy representational responsibilities, with dinners, parties, and so on. We had to suspend all of that activity. Therefore, the issue became a matter of concern for the Country Team, and it was discussed on more than one occasion at Country Team meetings. The Ambassador would say, "We've got to do something--we'll have to move you to another house." I, of course, regarded this with derision. What nonsense! I felt that this was just silly. I thought that we would get through this. I said, "Don't worry, I'll do my job. I'll do the entertaining I have to do in some way," and so forth. Well, they said, you're having trouble, and so on. I said, "It's an Embassy-owned house. Somebody's got to live there. I'm going to live there. That's what it was intended for," when it was acquired years before. It had been a rubber plantation manager's house.

In any event, we couldn't hire anybody. Joan was doing the cooking. Then Joan came down with some mysterious ailment. She got weaker and weaker. The doctors couldn't figure it out. We had a U. S. military research team doing research on tropical diseases in Kuala Lumpur. The head doctor there looked at Joan. Our own British doctor looked at her, as did an Indian doctor and so on. Finally, she got so weak that she couldn't get out of bed for more than an hour and ultimately couldn't get out of bed at all. She had no stamina. We took her to the British doctor again. He did a blood test and then told her, "You have a spirochete." Well, I didn't know what a spirochete was, but it apparently gets into the blood system and the vital organs and, in short order, you're dead! In fact, this British doctor said to her, "It is my judgment that you have three to five days to live!" Joan didn't call me at the office and tell me this. I came home and said, "Well, what did the doctor say?" She sort of straight-facedly said to me, "He says that I have three to five days to live." Obviously, I was horrified. She seemed to be taking it pretty well but she was just probably numb.

So I said, "We're going to have to get you out of here," and immediately made arrangements for the U. S. Army Fifth Field Hospital outside of Bangkok to take her. It was the judgment of the doctors that she was too weak to fly all the way to Manila, because there were no direct flights. So we put her on a stretcher, loaded her on a commercial flight, and flew her up to Bangkok. She was greeted there by the Embassy in Bangkok. They checked her into the U.S. Army Fifth Field Hospital. They kept her for a week and did various tests. They thought that it was a liver-type disease but could never confirm anything. After a week in the hospital under strict, dietary control she seemed to

regain some strength but not very much. They released her because they said that there was nothing more that they could do.

They sent her back to Kuala Lumpur. We put her back in bed and kept her diet under control. We did not yet have any domestic staff. We hadn't been able to hire anybody for months, at this point.

In any event it took several more months, but gradually she regained her strength. There were never any after effects once she was fully operational again. The whole episode lasted for five or six months. It was all very scary. We never did know what the cause of this was. It certainly wasn't a spirochete, but something else. We just didn't know.

Meanwhile, we had to hire some staff. Eventually, a couple came along. The husband was the cook, and he said, "Oh, I know all about that story. That's targeted against female cooks only. It won't affect me." Well, he was a lousy cook. His wife was a very harsh taskmaster, keeping the house clean but sharply correcting our kids and so on. But this husband and wife team were there, and so we lived with it. We kept them because we couldn't hire anybody else. They were there until we left Kuala Lumpur, except that, about five months before we left, the cook got off a bus at the Central Market, stepped on a banana peel, fell, and broke his hip.

However, the other thing that I haven't mentioned is that we had an exorcism done by C. C. Too. He was the Director of Psychological Warfare Planning in the Ministry of Home Affairs. He had been trained by the British in the war against the Communist guerrillas. He was a very clever fellow and was considered by most people to have extraordinary powers. When he heard the story of our problems at a dinner at the Ambassador's, he said, "I have to come over and do a 'job' on your house."

Well, I thought that it was a joke, but my wife said, "We're going to try it." So, on the next day, he visited our house and explained to Joan what he was going to do. Joan called me at the Embassy and said, "He's going to come over at 7:00 PM tonight. He said, 'Invite any friends that you want, and they can witness this.'" So we lined up a dozen friends, all on the spur of the moment, all of whom knew about the problem.

They came over. C. C. Too explained to the group that he was convinced that this involved an evil force --not a ghost, but an "evil force." The question was whether C. C. Too's powers were greater than the powers of the bomoh, the Malay witch doctor who had brought the evil force into the house. So he went into what I can only describe as a period of deep concentration --not quite a trance. He told us that we could keep talking, so we sat there on our verandah. After about 45 minutes he said, "I have made contact with the 'evil force,' and there is no question that it is a 'force.' It is not a ghost. Now I have to demonstrate to the 'force' that I have greater powers than he who controls the 'force.' I have to repel him." So he went on in this way.

A little after 9:00 PM he said that he had succeeded in repelling the 'force' from the house. It was no longer there. He could not be certain how long it would stay away. It

could return. It might be in three days, three months, or maybe it would never return. He said that he couldn't tell that. However, if it returned, we should contact him, and he would come right back.

At this point we had two young women who had just started working for us as domestic servants two days before. They were going to leave us that day, when Joan convinced them that we have a very strong man coming to take care of this problem. They decided to wait. They watched the whole ceremony from a distance, a few feet away from the kitchen door. After it was over, he went over to them and explained to them what he had done and said that everything was all right. Then he went next door to the companion house, where another American officer lived, got their servants out of their quarters, explained to them what had happened, and said that this house was now free of the evil force. Here was the psychological warfare expert, getting the word out on the bamboo telegraph as to what had happened.

In any event after about two weeks the two girls decided to leave. A little while after that we hired this elderly couple I referred to earlier--the poor gentleman who slipped on a banana peel in the Central Market. We had them as domestic employees for the next two years. It was quite an episode and quite the talk of the town. Everybody said, "Well, C. C. Too did it again." It was an interesting experience. I had never seen an exorcism, but that's what it was.

All in all, Kuala Lumpur was a very enjoyable and comfortable posting. We had more facilities in Kuala Lumpur than we had at any other post, except, perhaps, Honolulu. We made a lot of life-long friends, including the current Japanese Ambassador in Washington. He has been a good friend of ours ever since we shared many experiences in Kuala Lumpur. The Deputy Japanese Foreign Minister is a good friend. Whenever he comes to Washington, I see him. We exchange Christmas cards. The Australian Ambassador to Rome was also a very good friend in Kuala Lumpur. You may have known him--Duncan Campbell. We still stay in touch with them. He was the First Secretary in the Australian High Commission when I arrived there. He had an American wife, Barbara. We had a lot of good friends, both Americans and non-Americans, including many Malaysians.

However, if you are lucky in the Foreign Service and make some effort to sustain relationships, you can make two, three, or four close friends in each posting. They carry on. At the end of a career you have a list of valued friends, if you stayed in touch. Some of them you'll never see again. But just staying in touch with them via the Christmas card routine is rewarding. If we hadn't stayed in touch, we wouldn't have encountered some of these people in subsequent years. They've come to stay in our house, or we've stayed with them during our travels. It's one of the real benefits in the Foreign Service, but you have to work a little bit at it or you just lose them. You leave a post and never see them again. You don't pursue the relationship.

Kuala Lumpur was a good assignment. Our children went to the International School, a small school with about 120 students, covering kindergarten through 12th grade. Our son

Stuart did his 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th grades there. He became very involved in sports and other activities. Our daughter Mona made a number of friends, several of whom she is still in contact with. We had delightful vacations at Fraser's Hill up in the cooler, mountains of central, West Malaysia or at the beaches in Penang. It was a wonderful posting, marred only by that disaster of May 13, 1969, the riots in Kuala Lumpur, which did, in fact, take a lot of the comfort out of our life.

Q: It reminded you that you were on the edge of disaster at any given time and you had no possibility of preventing it. It could happen.

HELBLE: That wraps up the Kuala Lumpur assignment, even though I had six months left.

JACK LYDMAN
Ambassador
Malaysia (1969-1973)

Ambassador Jack Lydman was born in New York in 1914. He received a bachelor's degree from Bard College in 1936 and joined the U.S. Army Intelligence Corps in 1940. He joined the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included positions in Indonesia, Australia, and Malaysia. Ambassador Lydman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 27, 1988.

Q: You're finding yourself having dealt with really the principal players in this particular area, Indonesia, Australia, and now we move to Malaysia. You were appointed Ambassador there in 1969.

LYDMAN: Yes.

Q: That would be under President Nixon.

LYDMAN: That was under President Nixon, indeed.

Q: And how did that come about?

LYDMAN: I don't know why they fixed on me to be the candidate for Malaysia except that I do know I was the leading candidate of our own bureau in Washington, but appointments to Ambassadorship seldom follow the suggestions of the Department of State, as you know. But this one happened to. And I was very grateful for it because I had come from the experience with Marshall Green in Indonesia and with the previous experience in Australia, the experience in Thailand, the experience with the SEATO organization, with all of these things which provided a good background for what was

now going to be I thought a rather challenging job because it was the Vietnam war and how did an American Ambassador do his job with this thing right next door to him?

Q: We're talking about, Nixon was just coming in.

LYDMAN: That's right.

Q: Beginning to look for a way to get out of the war.

LYDMAN: Absolutely. The problem was keeping the Malaysian government informed as to what was going on in Vietnam, what we were up to, what we were doing, what everybody else was doing, with an effort to try and keep their attention on all of the facts as they were developing. The Malaysians were understandably nervous, as you can imagine, about everything that was going on in Vietnam. They were terribly nervous about the strength of the Indo-Chinese Communist Party under Ho Chi Minh. They were nervous about the alignment of the Ho forces with China and with the Soviet Union. They had been fighting their own Communist guerrilla warfare for many, many years. Now this is '69, they had been fighting that warfare ever since 1948. So they were up to their eyeballs in Communism.

Q: So you didn't have to sell them on it?

LYDMAN: You didn't have to sell them on anti-Communism at all. But on the other side of this coin, they were anti-colonialists. And they were uncomfortable by the presence of the United States in a Southeast Asian country pulling the kind of muscle that we were pulling. It was difficult for them to not to have a rather strong suspicion that our effort was not only to protect the non-Communist forces of Vietnam against Communist forces, but it was in fact to consolidate an American influence in that country.

You know, these are the underlying traumas that you will find all through Southeast Asia. I suppose you find it through all former colonial areas. No matter what the facts seem to be, there's a underlying suspicion about the bona fides of ex-colonialist powers, always will be.

Fortunately, again, terribly lucky in the kind of leadership that I fell into in these assignments. The George Washington of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman was still Prime Minister. He had been Prime Minister since the very beginning, since '57; this was '69. He was an old established institution, absolutely confident of his role in his own country, very relaxed, marvelous kind of Edwardian figure. Delightful in every way, not really your picture of the average Southeast Asian leader. He was a prince of the royal family of Kedah in the North. He had been accepted to the bar in London. It took him many years to do that because he had such a good time in London he wasn't forcing his exams. But he finally got through, was pushed through. Came back, was a political animal from the very beginning, got along famously with the British, loved a lot of the things that the British

loved, like racing horses, beautiful women, good Scotch whiskey, roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and all of the nice things that an Edwardian gentleman should appreciate.

He was an agile manipulator of the political scene. He knew instinctively that his principal job was to allay the fears and suspicions of ethnic minorities of which of course Malaysia is composed a great deal. Less than 50 percent of the country are Malays, some 35 percent are Chinese, and 15 percent Indian.

Q: There had been some serious anti-Chinese riots just before you arrived.

LYDMAN: It was just before I arrived, that's right. The Tunku thought he had pulled all of the races together. The deal he had made with the Chinese leaders, for example, at the very beginning of 1957, was that in return for political hegemony for the Malays, the Chinese were to get economic laissez faire and that was a deal that the Chinese just bought, enjoyed and they all got richer, at least the in-group. And the Malay in-group also did pretty well.

But the riots in '69 brought another element into this. They were important because they reflected a generational change in attitudes. There are three kinds of changes that take place in any political system. One is secular change, which happens all the time, routinely. Another is generational change that only happens when generations change. And the third is revolutionary change, which is quite violent, or can be violent.

Well the racial riots in '69 were a result of a generational change. Young Malays were dissatisfied that they were not getting their share of economic benefits or even of political benefits, because the political benefits had been pretty much reserved for an in-group of political elites. Economic benefits were concentrated in the Chinese community, for the most part. At the same time, younger Chinese were also dissatisfied; not because they were deprived of economic access but because they were deprived of educational and political access. They were denied in their estimation participation at meaningful level in the government, in the bureaucracy, in the Parliament, and denied equal access in schools and universities. They also felt deprived that the Chinese language was being increasingly corseted and made more and more just a kind of ethnic language not to be used either officially or in educational institutions.

Q: I want to return a little more to your role when you were there as Ambassador. What did we do except to sit and look at the situation and say this may mean trouble? What did we want from Malaysia?

LYDMAN: We wanted a lot of things from them. First of all, there wasn't much you could do about the internal political turmoil, that was definitely their problem.

Q: USIA didn't get involved in that?

LYDMAN: Absolutely not. I made sure that they didn't.

Q: Did we have a Chinese program and a Malaysian program?

LYDMAN: We had a Malaysian program and we made very, very certain that we were not having communal programs. We didn't have Malay programs, we didn't have Chinese programs. We had English programs.

Q: So you got around that particular booby-trap.

LYDMAN: Absolutely. I made sure that we weren't, and I made sure that we never expressed opinions one way or another about who was on top, why, or anything like it. And I was extremely careful never to give any impression that we sympathized with one communal group or another.

Q: Did you meet everybody sort of equally?

LYDMAN: Yes. And I made sure all through these troubled times that in my house I had a balanced representation of the ethnic groups. I had Chinese and Indians and Malays and Arabs. And I had them together so they could see that the house was an all-Malaysian house and no favoritism whatsoever.

Q: What were our goals, your goals?

LYDMAN: We wanted the support, the psychological support, if not active support, of the Malaysian government for our role in Southeast Asia, particularly in Vietnam. Also, we wanted Malaysia as much as possible to be part of a free world shadow defense system regionally which would include Indonesia and probably the Philippines and Thailand. We encouraged, for example, joint exercises against Communist guerrillas on the Thai-Malay border, and on the Indonesian-Malay border. We also encouraged standardization of weapons and equipment in their armed forces. We obviously were eager to sell our stuff to them, to all of them, but even more than that we tried to carry the message that standardization was in their interest.

There was a tendency in Malaysia to throw over the traces of the Five Power Alliance which had been barely limping along. Still the New Zealanders had an engineer battalion in Singapore. The Australians had a wing of fighter planes in Butterworth, across from Penang, Malaysia. The Australians had a colony of about 3,000 people in Penang. There was a feeling among Malaysians that this was an extraterritorial intrusion by Australia and it really wasn't doing Malaysia any good. And there was a lot of talk in Parliament that they ought to get rid of this. We quietly supported their keeping it there because it was clearly in their own interest to keep that screen, particularly in light of the events going on in Indochina. And that was the course of action that they bought. Interestingly, the Australians are still in Butterworth.

Q: Did we see ourselves, and you as an Ambassador, see, okay, no matter what happens in Vietnam, the scab around the wound of Indochina is beginning to harden? Because it certainly looked like the domino theory had validity at a certain point.

LYDMAN: Yes. And we believed that.

Q: But you saw that you were developing another line of defense? I mean, was this something you were looking towards that, say, if Indochina did not turn out the way we hoped it would you would at least have countries that were feeling confident that they could contain it?

LYDMAN: We never for one minute thought--we never gave any alternatives about what might happen in Vietnam. You had to more or less single-handedly focus on the fact that Vietnam and Indochina generally was in the process of a very determined Communist takeover. You had to remind the Malaysians the reason we were there was to try to prevent that. But in any case, so long as that kind of a strong and determined Communist movement existed in Southeast Asia, they ought to take precautions against what might happen in the future. That was the message. We weren't making any predictions what was going to happen in Vietnam, not in 1969 and '70. We didn't know what was going to happen in South Vietnam at that point. We didn't know what was going to happen in Vietnam until almost the day I left, which was in '74.

We also I think had made quite a point to the Malaysians with our support effort for the Indonesians in 1966. That I think very much impressed the Malaysians. The way we supported Suharto and the rehabilitation of that country and the restoration to political stability. We were important there, there's no doubt about it. And they knew it. We had both their respect and a certain degree of confidence in what we were up to because of that experience.

Q: We were not playing sort of second fiddle to the United Kingdom or to Australia?

LYDMAN: Not at all. But we deliberately kept our head down. We did not want to become the new image of the Raj, absolutely not.

Q: Did you have any problems with your staff in this regard?

LYDMAN: No.

Q: Good staff?

LYDMAN: Good staff. Yes.

Q: How about instructions from Washington?

LYDMAN: I wouldn't exactly say that Malaysia was in the forefront of the seventh floor at any time.

Q: Seventh floor being the--

LYDMAN: That's the Secretary..

Q: The Secretary dwells.

LYDMAN: The only time I could get the seventh floor involved was because I was bullish about the possibility of joint ventures. We were responsible for bringing in the American electronic industry there. And supported and encouraged the entry of some 23 different American electronics companies into Malaysia during the time I was there. By the time I left they were employing something like 18,000 people which was quite an impact on that country. I am proud of that. And it was a good deal, it still is. We still I think have the biggest employment group in Penang, which is the main center of the electronics business. I wanted us to get involved with all of the Southeast Asian countries. Because I felt that they were on the threshold of very substantial development, all of them. Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia. Sure enough, right after the Vietnam war was over they had the most incredible growth that any region has ever had. So I felt more than compensated for what I had urged and supported.

Q: How did they feel about two things when you were there that you had to deal with? One was our opening to China, which was quite a shock of course to Japan. And the other was the situation, although it was not the end in Vietnam, the fact that we were pulling out. But, anyway, China first.

LYDMAN: Before I get to China, let me tell you, there are other somewhat sensitive points and it is something that ought to be mentioned. For example, when they started the regional group, ASEAN, in 1967, we were very iffy about it. We thought it was going to be a facade for a neutralism group and we were dead against anything that smacked of neutrality or neutralism, just as much as we were against anything that was anti-nuclear. Well, you know, there was a certain kind of what I call subcutaneous bombast about American policy in those days. And it was not easy to reconcile that kind of firm position with what I felt was really the future. From the very beginning I felt we should endorse ASEAN. I saw no contradiction whatsoever in what they called their zone of peace and neutrality which wasn't going to happen overnight anyway with our basic objectives. But you know, we were in a war in Vietnam and Henry Kissinger had the flexibility of a Bismarck on this issue. It was frustrating for me not to be able to reconcile the direction in which they wanted to go with where we were and where we were going. It wasn't until about '77 or so when we began to support ASEAN.

Q: Was there anyone in Washington that you tried to talk to on this?

LYDMAN: Oh, yes. Many people. Henry for one.

Q: Henry Kissinger.

LYDMAN: I knew Henry from the Rockefeller days.

Q: But you got no real response?

LYDMAN: No encouragement. Well, I can understand that. People were preoccupied with other things.

The next thing you had in mind was the opening to China. Yes. When that happened there was a mixed reaction of expectations and apprehensions. The Malaysian decided to play it cool, don't get involved, just watch it and see what happens.

Q: *For them?*

LYDMAN: For them.

Q: *They had no relations with China?*

LYDMAN: Not at that point. They soon thereafter established diplomatic relations. But this was all very tentative. They weren't going to get involved. They were not going to follow the lead of Indonesia but they were responsive to Indonesia's position, which was hands off, no relations with China.

Q: *So Malaysia is always looking over its shoulder--*

LYDMAN: At Indonesia, there's no question about that. And they're following Djakarta's lead most of the time. There were a lot of visits to China, but there's pitifully small trade and I don't think there are many other contacts. And that's also a reflection of the fact that the Malays don't like the Chinese in their own country. So you've got this problem there.

I think they were pleased that we had restored our relations with China because this removed much of the thrust of the victorious Communist Vietnam. Once you got China on an adversarial border, then you sort of took the heat off Thailand and Malaysia. They were happy about that.

Q: *You were the person who had to explain to the Malaysians all our dealings as you got instructions.*

LYDMAN: Of course.

Q: *Whom did you talk to, by the way?*

LYDMAN: You had the Foreign Minister, of course, for the most part. They changed while I was there, but I had good relations with them. And the Permanent Secretary, the head of the foreign service, was also a political animal and a good conduit. And I saw the Prime Minister almost every week.

Q: *So he was not aloof?*

LYDMAN: Oh, no. I used to have tea with the Prime Minister on Thursdays, usually, alone. I would come at the end of his day, which was about 4:30 or 5:00 and we would have a cup of tea, very relaxed. They all called me Jack. You know, that doesn't necessarily mean familiarity, but the first name is the name that you call people by in Muslim countries. Some people think that this is familiarity. It isn't all that much. But I must tell you one little anecdote which explains in a way what Southeast Asians are about. I got to know Tun Abdul Razak, who was the next Prime Minister after Tunku Abdul Rahman, fairly well. Razak was a great guy and a good administrator. I had tea with him one day when he said, "Jack, you won't believe what's happened this week?" And I said, "Well, what was it Tun?" He said, "You know, we're going to have a summit meeting of ASEAN in Djakarta next week." I said, "Yes, I know that." And he said, "Well, you won't believe it, but my Ambassador in Canberra let me know that Mr. Whitlam--who was the Prime Minister in Australia at that time--had a press conference and told the press that he was attending the ASEAN summit meeting in Djakarta." Razak said, "I hadn't heard about this." And he said, "I thought that was rather strange so I got on the telephone to Suharto who was going to be the host for this meeting and I said Suharto, I've just had this report. And Suharto hadn't heard it and said, I'll look into it right away. And he looked into it and got back on the telephone in less than an hour. Ah, he said, we have told Mr. Whitlam that he is not invited. And he said, don't worry, he won't be there." And so Razak looked at me and said, "Can you imagine? Whitlam at our little meeting? You know all of us people," he said, "we're all little fellows, none of us more than 5'6 and, we all have gentle voices and are gentle people. And, he said, "you know Whitlam?" I said, "Yes, sir, I do." He said, "How tall is he?" I said, "I think he's 6'5". He said, "Can you imagine this giant, you've heard Whitlam?" I said, "Yes, sir. Everybody has heard Whitlam. He's got a voice like a fog horn, you know, from the back benches of Parliament. He says, can you imagine this giant with that voice with us little fellows in a room? And he laughed. I've always remembered that.

Q: I would like to just ask one further question. What would you say was sort of your greatest personal achievement that you feel while you were in the Foreign Service?

LYDMAN: You know, that's an almost impossible question. I think that maybe the greatest personal achievement in all the assignments and from the very beginning--in addition to survival, of course, which is an achievement. I think the fact that I really feel I did a little bit to increase the understanding of people who are quite different culturally in Southeast Asia with Americans. And, you know, this, when the roll is called up yonder, may not amount to a hill of beans, but I thought it was a real achievement. That's it.

EDWIN CRONK
Ambassador
Singapore (1972-1975)

Ambassador Edwin Cronk attended Deep Springs College in California and Cornell University before serving at the end of World War II in

Japan. His Foreign Service career included positions in Seoul, Korea; Bonn, Germany; Canberra, Australia; and an ambassadorship to Singapore, Malaysia. Ambassador Cronk was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1988.

Q: ASEAN is?

CRONK: Organization of Southeast Asian States--Association of Southeast Asia Nations. It was a very tentative organization, at that time. They had meetings a couple of times a year, at the foreign minister level. Singaporeans were never terribly active in it.

For one thing, they weren't getting along with the Malaysians terribly well, in those days. Lee Kuan Yew made a play for an important political role. There was a unification effort, way back before my time, between the two. Lee made a tactical mistake by making it apparent he was going to run--or have some Chinese Nationals run for political office--on the Malaysian side. And the Malaysians thought if they let this fellow run lose, he's going to take over Malaysia before we know it. So they dissolved the partnership. And there was a little bad blood, or lack of effective cooperation, at that time between the two.

And the Singaporeans kind of looked down their noses at the Indonesians, because they're all corrupt. You know, they were saying kind of naughty things about their neighbors; and it was quite apparent that they weren't in there trying to do a whole lot with the organization. It's evolved, I think positively, since; it's more of a political pressure group--discussion group.

But we had an interest in seeing it evolve, and to make sure we knew what they were up to, more or less. And the Singaporeans were somewhat forthcoming; they didn't give us minutes of the meetings, and that sort of thing, but we kind of kept track of it. And of course, all the other ambassadors were doing the same thing in their countries. So we could kind of piece together what ASEAN was trying to do.

But in the early stages it did very little; in part because they were trying to mix apples and oranges. There wasn't the great common interests, that say the common market had. Some of them were competitive, and just did things that weren't of common interest to the parties. But we watched that; that was a fairly important part of our role. That essentially was it, I guess.

Vietnam was going on; the Singaporeans did not, in any way, want to be involved in it. But certainly were hoping we would beat the hell out of the North, and carry the day.

We had a fairly big refining industry in Singapore--American and British controlled, essentially. Mobil, for example, had a huge refinery there. And we were interested in making sure that it was viable and well-considered by the Singaporeans.

One, not exactly amusing, crisis we had was during the oil embargo. Since Singapore was kind of an important petroleum distribution center--it didn't produce any petroleum, but

was a major refining and distribution point--they wanted to stay on the side of the angels, which meant the Egyptians and the others in OPEC. So they told us--told me--that hence forth, until the crisis was over, (they essentially told the Egyptian ambassador this, and he informed me) they would cooperate with the Egyptian embargo, which meant no fueling of American military aircraft, or naval vessels.

RALPH J. KATROSH
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1972-1975)

Ralph J. Katrosh was born in 1927 and raised in Kingston, Pennsylvania. He attended Virginia Military Institute. From there, he joined the military and became a part of the Third Army Palace Guard. It was here in Europe that he developed a desire to join the foreign service. Upon returning to the States, he entered the Foreign Service School at Georgetown University. He then went to the State Department to work with China in Taiwan. He has also served in Burma, the Philippines, Malaysia, Israel and Vietnam. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 28, 1992.

KATROSH: . So in 1972 I went to Kuala Lumpur and lived in probably the most famous house there, Jalan Murchu, located on top of the highest point in Kenny Hill, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur.

Q: What was the situation in Malaysia then?

KATROSH: I was there for a three year tour. The big thing in Malaysia was the formation of ASEAN, and oil.

Q: This was the economic union of...?

KATROSH: Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines and Thailand to start with. Now Brunei is in the formal group.

Very typically European diplomatic process to organize very productive and now maturing Asian style democracies. Malaysia is the only country that successfully contained an internal Communist armed uprising. By the time I got there the uprising was over. When I was in Singapore, one of the big issues was the Communist insurgents in Malaysia. We did a lot of work on that in the Consulate.

The United States government was doing what it could in terms of support, diplomatic support, to put it down.

Q: But it was the British military..

KATROSH: Well, yes. But the Malays too. Their leadership got on top of the situation and said, "Damn it we are not going to give in to them." They did an awful lot of the hard work and they are justly proud of it. One is not in Malaysia very long before being told they are the only country in Southeast Asia which for the most part contained Communism on their own. The British and the Aussies were in there to stiffen them and to train them. The British Special Branch also did a lot of work, ferreting out the Communist leadership and that sort of thing, but by and large, if the Malays didn't get with it, it wouldn't have happened. It would have turned out like Vietnam - Cambodia. But the Malays decided they wanted to get rid of the Communists as quickly as they could, and they did.

That was the difference between Malaysia and Burma. Malaysia kept the British there about ten years after WW II to rebuild the superstructures, get the road systems in, get the bridges in, get the universities operating, and then go. But Burma, after the war, said, "Hey, we can run this thing, so go." Of course they couldn't but the British said, "Fine," and went.

During the early 1970 years we were winding down in Vietnam and Malaysia was very concerned about this. When the Embassy in Vietnam was evacuated, a Malaysian official came up to me...as a matter of fact the Foreign Minister, who was a friend...and said, "Look, if you fellows weren't there, we would not have had the ten years to build up the democracy we now have. The Chinese would have been down our throat; we couldn't have contained the insurgency. You fellows took the pressure off. Now I think we can make it on our own. Thank you very much and don't feel so bad."

Q: I have to say that I subscribe to this, although we did it poorly.

KATROSH: Nevertheless there were benefits.

Q: This was not a popular theme in the United States at this time.

KATROSH: I know, I quite agree. We did it poorly, but we did it poorly for different reasons. Anyway these fellows said, "Thank goodness you were there." The officials whom I knew from Singapore days also said, "Don't feel badly. We benefitted from it, you fellows didn't. You have your problems at home. You have a terrible split in your social structure, but be happy that some good came out of it."

In my own mind I think one of the reasons why we are one of the dialogue partners in the ASEAN group, despite many mistakes, is because of our stand against Communism in Southeast Asia. We still have an awful lot of influence in Southeast Asia. Go in and give them the US point of view, try to point out the options they have. By 1970 I think almost all of the Embassies in Southeast Asia were operating this way.

We had a little group in the early 1970s which would meet in Singapore, upper level Embassy officers, about once every three months. We would talk about Southeast Asian

internal conflicts and send a report back to the Ambassadors about what we discussed and what we concluded. It was very interesting. This was the way the reports generally went. "We are on the right track. We shouldn't insert ourselves into ABC situations. We should offer consultation or advice if they want it and some help if we can afford it." I think that paid off. It certainly paid off in Malaysia.

We have serious oil interests in Malaysia and I worked on oil issues. The relationship between the oil companies and the Malaysia government were tough and businesslike.

Q: You are talking about the time you were in Malaysia?

KATROSH: We worked on US interests as required. For example, the Malaysian Foreign Minister came up with the idea for a Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality. We talk to him and say there is heavy conflict going on in Southeast Asia, how about standing back. He said, "We want you here, just stay over the horizon."

As noted earlier, another daily issue was the oil business. Exxon is very powerful in Malaysia. Sometimes they get a little too uppity and the Malaysian government grabs them by the nose and tweaks it a little bit. Exxon then gets upset. But these events, from my point of view, were good events.

After Vietnam one of the things the Malaysians wanted very quickly was a Vietnamese Embassy in town. So there was that. They also were recognizing Beijing at the time. Kuala Lumpur put an embassy in Beijing and Beijing people were coming to Kuala Lumpur. Compared with all of my experiences in the Foreign Service, the time in Kuala Lumpur was the most "traditional"; what I thought an Embassy should be doing. We weren't fighting a war, we weren't shouting "These dirty Communists are coming over the wall." From 1972-75 you could see real growth and progress and construction in bilateral relations. You could see Southeast Asia coming into its own. The Thais began to think independently and Jakarta was well under control in terms of US interests. The Southeast Asians didn't vote with us half the time in the U.N. but when the chips were down and we really needed their cooperation they gave it, and not reluctantly, they gave it willingly.

So I would say that if someone wanted to understand effective Asian diplomacy, if they looked over the period 1970-1985 and see how the Embassies operated in that part of the world, there would be some lessons to be learned.

ALPHONSE F. LA PORTA
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1972-1975)

Ambassador La Porta was born and raised in New York and educated at Georgetown and New York Universities. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. During his career the ambassador had

several assignments in Washington in the personnel and administrative field. His foreign assignments include Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, New Zealand, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission, and Naples, Italy. In 1997 he was named Ambassador to Mongolia, where he served until 2000. Ambassador La Porta was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: Well, then you went to Malaysia in '72. You were there from when to when?

LA PORTA: I was there for three years, the middle of 1972 to the middle of 1975. I knew the ambassador when he was DCM in Jakarta. He was Marshall Green's DCM, Jack Lydman. Having worked for Jack as consular section chief and having been associated with him when I was in the political section in Jakarta, he was receptive to my joining him in Kuala Lumpur. I went to the political section and essentially had the same kind of portfolio that I had in Indonesia: Muslims, regional affairs (in Malaysian terms that included Sabah and Sarawak), relations with Indonesia, ASEAN and also youth affairs.

The political counselor at that time was John Helble, a veteran East Asia officer, and my colleague and Chinese affairs expert was Murray Zinoman. We reported to the DCM, Bob Dillon, with whom I was later privileged to serve with in Ankara, Turkey. Overall we had a strong and competent embassy. Jack Lydman was a steady hand, to the point that a few people found him somewhat cold-blooded and aloof.

Q: Well, let's look at Malaysia at this time. Could you sort of describe the political situation, the government that you'd be dealing with?

LA PORTA: The prime minister when I arrived was Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was known as the father of Malaysian independence in 1963. Between 1961 and 1963 there was that strange federation with Singapore in which neither the Tunku, as he was known, and the prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, were very comfortable with each other. Malaysia peaceably went its own way in 1963. Tunku Abdul Rahman represented the Malay aristocracy that had been nurtured, if not coddled, by the British during their nearly 100 years of control. He had a very patrician view of governing and was trusted by the Chinese and Indians, but not by Malay "Young Turks" who wanted to assert their political primacy. Fortunately the British left a number of very strong institutions, one of which was the civil service. They were very good, and they are very good to this day. Secondly, the British left a strong educational system with a growing university system. Thirdly, they imparted a sense that merit counts in that society, whether a meritocracy in government service, the private sector, the educational system or whatever.

Q: Wasn't there a problem, I don't know the area, but what I gather there's this gap between the Chinese who always, I mean, even in our country, are extremely hard working and the Malays who one thinks of as being more laid back. In a meritocracy I would think this would cause a problem.

LA PORTA: The British approach had been to consign the economy to the Chinese, give

government over to the Malays and keep the ethnic Indian migrant population in the agriculture sector and in petty trading. The British ultimately didn't do the country any favors by having this compartmentalization, but during the period of colonial rule it worked. In other words, there were rough understandings that the Chinese community would be ascendant in the economic sphere; to the extent that any aspiring Malay business people wanted to make a fortune that was fine, but that basically that's the way things were politically. For example, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) represented urbanized English speaking and Chinese speaking Chinese, while the UMNO (United Malays National Organization) which itself initially was a coalition of several Malay organizations, represented the Malays. The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) represented the Indian community, thus there was a comfortable division of labor and politics that the Tunku brought to independence in 1963.

By the early '70s the system of consensus in Malay politics had broken down in the racial violence of May 1969 and you had activist fringe groups beginning to appear. A chauvinistic Chinese party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) began to launch appeals to lower class, Chinese-educated Chinese who claimed basically "You are not getting your due in this system. You're held to a subordinate status. You need to get more of the benefits; the health care system isn't operating in your favor. You're having difficulty getting your kids into schools. You're not allowed to teach Chinese in the state schools. You're dominated, moreover, by these Taipeians in the Malaysian Chinese association who controlled the large economic conglomerates."

There were a couple of radical splinter groups in the Malay side. There was the People's Party that attempted to take a Marxist approach. They never got anywhere but they made some noise until they were outlawed. But, more seriously beginning in the early 1970s and significantly by 1973 and '74, Islamic oriented student groups emerged. The deputy prime minister was discredited and later jailed, Anwar Ibrahim, started an organization called ABIM, the Malaysian Islamic Students Union, at the University of Malaya. Other organizations were started at the State Islamic University and on other campuses to represent Islamic students. Looking back on it, they were less Islamic but more anti-establishment, so they challenged the regime of the Tunku, the old line politics, the party elders the ones that had grown up under the British and received their education largely in British universities. They wanted Malaysia for Malays, for the indigenous population. This was a very formative period because by the late '70s and '80s these organizations grew and propagated fundamentalist Islam, Islamic revival, and imported religious movements. So, by the mid '80s they were quite prominent indeed.

Q: You were looking at the Muslim side of things, did you have contact with the Imams, the Mullahs, in other words the religious leaders? Were they important at that point?

LA PORTA: Yes and no. For the most part, they were not important politically in most of Malaysia, except in the Northeastern states of Kelantan and Terengganu and to some extent in two other Northern states, Kedah and Perlis. A chauvinist Muslim party developed called the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party; its English initials are PMIP and they are still the Islamic opposition to UMNO, the ruling Malay party in the National Front

Coalition. The Mullahs were important as the teachers at a couple of Islamic universities and a couple of the Mullahs took seats in parliament so you had to deal with them. More importantly from our embassy's point of view, we really focused on the students.

My wife, who is a lawyer today, was then in the stages of finishing her law degree at George Washington University. George Washington University allowed her to take some courses for elective credit at the University of Malaya. So she joined the University of Malaya Law School. Most classes were taught in English, but a few were taught in Malay which, in light of our previous service in Indonesia, made it possible for her to take those courses. She took a course in Islamic law in Malay. She took a course in Islamic family law in Malay. She took Malaysian constitutional law. And she took criminal and other courses and she got full credit from George Washington University and fulfilled her elective requirements that way. By her going to the campus virtually everyday for classes, we got to know students of all types. It wasn't a deliberate or crass move on our part to extend our influence, but it was great in terms of developing associations and becoming familiar with the organizations.

We also had another inroad through my avocation with theater. One of my colleagues who in the political section who followed Chinese politics was Murray Zinoman; his wife Joy Zinoman, who today runs the Studio Theater on 14th Street in Washington, DC and has been enormously successful in developing what is the second largest theater company in Washington, next to Arena Stage. She's an absolutely brilliant woman, actress and acting teacher. Joy at that time taught theater at in the university. We organized a group called the Kuala Lumpur Players. It was largely comprised of young Malaysians of all ethnicities and Joy directed the plays. I was one of her actors. We got into a younger group of interesting and politically alive people. And so we had very fortunate personal contacts with younger Malaysians. Further, my neighbor was a young business executive. He was Malay and his wife was Australian; they had young children about our kids' ages. We became very close to them. He came from an establishment Malay family from the Northeast and he was in business, so through him I was able to join the Rotary Club and got to know young Malay business people.

Q: Was this a sort of a homegrown Islam or were its roots fairly strong and tied to Saudi Arabia or anything like that?

LA PORTA: Islam in Malaysia in the early '70s and into this day had quite strong ties with the "great schools of Islam," al Azhar University in Cairo, the universities in Baghdad and Pakistan and other large religious schools and communities in the Muslim world. Malaysian religious scholars very much looked to the Middle East for their theological orientation. Therefore Malaysia tended to be, and increasingly became more and more fundamentalist in terms of adherence to the rituals in and terms of scholarship. The development of Islam in Malaysia is different than in Indonesia which tended to be more syncretic, more homegrown and developed clear lines of "Indonesianness" that separated it considerably from the mainstream of Islam as practiced in the Middle East and taught in the great Islamic universities.

In Malaysia, there were even in those days growing links with Muslim universities, movements, missionary bodies in the Middle East. Indeed, these contacts were pursued not only by Malays, but also through Indian Muslims who had contacts in India with large Islamic organizations there and schools and universities in Pakistan and other places. There was a different quality of Islam as practiced by the mainstream and what is observable today because beginning with the student movements in the early '70s there was a ratcheting up of observance and fidelity to the tenants of the faith by the Malays in Malaysia.

Q: As to the situation during the time you were there, two things. One, were we concerned about the Muslims as a force and two, did the ruling group of Malays in the government...were they not as observant Muslims as a group that was coming up?

LA PORTA: Well, the latter characterization is certainly true. The older civil servants in government and business and elsewhere, such as the universities, were generally more relaxed about their practice of Islam. They celebrated their main holidays with ostentatious displays and spending a lot of money on festivals. Of course weddings were a great occasion to display this. I remember one time when the Tunku, the Prime Minister, came to dinner at the ambassador's and my wife and I were invited to the dinner. The Tunku not only loved roast beef in the British tradition, but he also loved lobster which is forbidden to some Muslims. We had lobster and shrimp as well. Some strict Muslims, although shrimp don't walk on the land. The Tunku always had to have the best Scotch, whereas practicing Muslims began increasingly to give up alcohol. Most upper class Malays at that time wouldn't hesitate to eat pork or ham at least in private, if not in public.

Q: Were we interested? I mean you had this as part of your brief, but was this more of just a matter of oh hey, let's divide up in society and you take that as opposed to saying we really are concerned about what's happening or we see this in the future of maybe posing a conflict for us?

LA PORTA: I think the concern with student activism in general was a very strong concern that was reflected here in Washington in the Department and in other agencies. You also had a dynamic happening on the Chinese side. This was called the Emergency wherein the Communist Party of Malaya waged an insurgency since the early 1950s. We were still seeing the remnants of it in the early '70s in the jungle areas on the border of Southern Thailand in the Northern states of Malaya. The insurgents were largely Chinese. There was a small minority of Malays who recruited into the Communist Party, but by and large they were mostly Chinese and they had direct links with the PRC and with China and kindred communist movements elsewhere in Asia. The insurgency also operated in Sarawak on the border with Indonesia. In the early '70s some remnants of armed groups were operating in the border area and interestingly those insurgents managed to co-opt some Indonesian communists as well as the Peoples Party of Brunei.

Q: What about the Malaysian influence, I mean it had a significant hunk of Borneo. How was that gong?

LA PORTA: I visited Sabah and Sarawak several times a year and I had good contacts in those state governments. Sabah was probably characterized as a semi-autocracy run by a traditional Malay chief, Tun Mustapha, who assembled quite a feudal group of Malays and non-Malays around him and manipulated virtually everything in Sabah until the late '80s. In Sarawak the situation was much more diffuse because of the state politics. There were Chinese based parties, there was a Malay based party, there were a couple of other groups that had no particular characterization. A coalition government ran Sarawak and so the Malays and the other parties had to conciliate with each other. You had three basic groups. You had the Malays; the Dayaks, which are the indigenous Borneans and the Chinese in Sarawak as well. While today nobody really questions the adherence of Sabah and Sarawak to Malaysia, by the early '70s that early questioning period that you saw in the mid '60s had worn off. There were issues with Sabah wanting more autonomy, less oversight, both politically and in governance. Sarawak was a little bit messier, interesting, but messy. I mean the politics were just a little messy.

Q: Was there any attraction of these provinces to Brunei or not?

LA PORTA: Well Brunei was the odd man out. The original British plan in 1961 for the Borneo states and Singapore and Malaysia was to incorporate Brunei into the federation but Brunei never joined. The Sultan of Brunei said, no, I'm not going to have anything to do with that. I'm going to sit here on my little pile of oil. He didn't know that he had gas, but the LNG (liquefied natural gas) was there too. It may have been in the mid '70s there was a book that was published by the author of Clockwork Orange, Anthony Burgess, called Devil of a State. It was a novel that was crudely based on Brunei. It was rather amusing because it characterized this very tight state ruled by this autocratic elderly sultan. The old sultan kept his ties with the UK and was always in favor in London and had a good audience there, but he just said, no, I can't get along with Lee Kuan Yew and the Tunku.

Q: What about Lee Kuan Yew? Is he sort of sticking to his island?

LA PORTA: Not really. It was always said of Lee Kuan Yew, and I don't know if the quote is historically accurate or not, you know, if I only had Indonesia to govern, just think what I could do. I think the personal antagonisms and the bad blood between Lee Kuan Yew, the Tunku and other Malaysian leaders certainly contributed to a lot of the stress, and sometimes created stress, during that period of the '60s and '70s. My view is that the relationships really didn't settle down and become quite pragmatic until somewhere in the '80s. I think you always have had this kind of uncomfortable elbowing and you had points of contention which are still not settled today over water rights, for example, because much of Singapore's water supply comes from Malaysia. Then you had issues of the traffic across the causeway. You had issues of overflight rights including planes overflying Singapore, and planes coming through Malaysian air space to land in Singapore airports. Also, Singapore's armed forces found themselves in Malaysian waters as soon as they poked their nose out of their bases. You had a lot of difficult issues that recurred with nauseating regularity every year or every couple of years, so nothing is

ever settled.

Q: You were there during the end game in Vietnam. How did that play in Malaysia?

LA PORTA: I think that Vietnam was viewed on the popular level in mainland Southeast Asia with a great deal of suspicion as to U.S. motives. In other words, like more modern parallels in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was viewed as an attempt of the U.S. to extend its hegemony. That is certainly the line the Chinese took in criticizing the United States, so that even ostensibly friendly governments have echoed that line.

On the other hand, in Malaysia, you had also a layer of people in the bureaucracy – the army, the security services, and some others in government – and also some in the political parties who did buy into the notion of falling dominoes. It was hard for them to articulate publicly that “We’re a domino. Here we are, come and get us. Come and give us to the communists.” Malaya, having fought its own communist insurgency, was very mindful of the potential for encroachments by the Vietnamese.

These feelings were exacerbated by the refugee flow which we began to see in Malaysia beginning in the early ‘70s even before the fall of Saigon. The United States had to set up a refugee program. We had to stand up our own program before the days of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) because there were hard cases and a large outflow from Indochina. There were a lot of difficulties with the Malaysian authorities even at that early period who refused to recognize that a refugee problem existed, even to the point of causing the death of hundreds who fled because they were not allowed to land in Malaysia. The problem was compounded in the late ‘70s and through the ‘80s by the Khmer Rouge takeover in Cambodia as well. There were really dislikes over the refugee situation in not wanting to absorb alien populations from Indochina and absorb their problems – political problems primarily. Also, as far as ASEAN that had been founded in 1967 was concerned, the ASEAN response was to create kind of a bubble around the original five ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines) and to try to keep at these external forces.

Q: At this time, I mean in talking around the embassy and all and political sections elsewhere, did we feel that enough time had passed to allow the dominoes in that area to get stronger, that they weren’t as vulnerable as we certainly felt when we started to intervene in ‘64.

LA PORTA: There was a strong feeling that the entire region was vulnerable. We also had to engage with the Malaysians on the use of Penang and other places for R&R for our forces. We also used Singapore for R&R so we had large numbers of soldiers. We did a lot of procurement in Malaysia and Singapore in particular, but also in Thailand. We had big bases in Thailand that were sources of problems with the Thai populace as well as depending on the political attitudes of successive Thai governments. Then you had the Philippine issue which by and large the Indonesians and Malaysians and Singaporeans didn’t care too much about. In fact, the Singapore armed forces by the mid ‘70s were using some of our base facilities in the Philippines for their own maneuvering and

training. From the standpoint of our policies and attitudes in terms of what we conveyed or what Washington felt, there were significant strong concerns about the ability of these nations to withstand serious communist pressures.

Q: Well, at that time we saw China as being an expansive communist power, is that right?

LA PORTA: Absolutely. I think that the concern over Chinese espionage over other kinds of Chinese influence in the region very greatly conditioned our attitude toward Southeast Asia. It also became, as radical Islam is today, a justification for our doing a lot in terms of assistance, wanting to leverage help for refugee relief issues, military assistance and trying to encourage even at that early date some form of ASEAN military cooperation.

Q: Student demonstrations in October 1973 brought down the Thanom-Praphat government in Thailand. Were there any reverberations in Malaysia?

LA PORTA: Frankly, I can recollect there was little reaction or concern in Malaysia where the students were far less active and there was little pressure on the government. We (the embassy) were more worried than the Malaysians were.

Q: Saigon fell on 30 April 1975. Were there any reverberations in Malaysia?

LAPPORTA: There was a certain "I told you so" attitude that was particularly reflected in the press. Our political relations did not change much.

Q: Were there any, we sort of covered the water. Were there any sort of major incidents or concerns during your time there?

LA PORTA: Yes. One of the biggest incidents occurred a few weeks before I was due to leave in July of 1975. Basically the Japanese red army came to call.

Q: Oh, yes.

LA PORTA: The Japanese red army, radical homegrown communist / extremists / anarchists, had been surveilling our embassy which was located in the top three and a half floors of the AIA Life Insurance Building on Jalan Ampang. Also resident in that building were the Japanese Embassy, the Australian Embassy and the Swedish Embassy, which partially shared a floor with our consular section, the ninth floor. We had floors 10, 11, 12 and the penthouse.

Five Japanese red army operatives, who were well-armed with explosives and weapons, seized our consular section and the other offices on the ninth floor of the building. They killed two building guards and other people were wounded in the takeover. The embassy offices were open (this occurred during business hours), so our consular section was full. Employees of the insurance company and the Swedish Embassy, in all about 55 people,

were taken hostage by the red army types. Most of them were grouped into the few rooms that we had for our consular section. True to their threats, they did put plastique around the main uprights supports of the building and in the elevator shaft. It was morning when this occurred and we were in an embassy staff meeting. We heard that something was going on down in the consular section and we didn't know quite what it was. It was not very long before we began to hear the demands of the Japanese red army kidnappers. What they wanted was to force the release of a number of their followers who were in prison in Japan as well as to remove some of their followers to Libya and Algeria. Those were the favored places. When you had a terrorist, you sent them to Algeria or Libya, because that's where they all wanted to go. Political exiles conveniently went to Sweden.

The negotiations went on for almost four days. The Malaysians, I will have to say and I think by everybody's recollections were admirable. The interior ministry, the minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie moved in. It took him about a day to figure out what was happening. I think he was out of the city traveling, but came back and took charge. The Malaysian police set up an operations center in the building that was quite effective. The transportation minister, Tan Sri Manickavasagam, was also involved because they wanted aircraft. They wanted an aircraft to be ready at the Kuala Lumpur Airport to fly them to the Middle East. We immediately evacuated the embassy.

Q: Did you get out?

LA PORTA: We evacuated the embassy but several of us stayed behind to keep communications with Washington open. The station chief, an economic officer, myself and a couple of other officers stayed, while the Chargé, Bob Dillon, went off and set up the command post at the Ambassador's residence according to our emergency plans. So those plans worked. We had a working radio voice network and we began reporting to Washington, to State's Operations Center. We had the traditional open telephone line as well. We kept filing reports on schedule. My job in that thing was to be in the embassy, to manage the communications and to do the reporting. I would get reports from our command post, from the chargé, and other officers that we had stationed with the Malaysian command post. The economic officer who was with us was Dick Jackson, who was in charge of the telephones to be in touch with the terrorists mainly because he had a wonderful low-key manner and telephone voice. He was quiet, reassuring, a good listener, and so forth. In the chancery, the station chief was the senior person aboard. We had a military attaché with us and fortuitously we had a diplomatic security technician visiting at the time. He was an electronics type. He was able to run wires down and put microphones down into the airshaft to the ninth floor and set up tape recorders to monitor any ambient noise. This was extremely valuable because we were able to pick up the voices of people, both the captives as well as some of the captors.

Q: Who were the American captives?

LA PORTA: The American captives were our consul, Bob Stebbens, and one other officer who was working in that section at the time. There were also four FSNs, but U.S. official captives were only two in number. There was a group of about half a dozen

Americans who were in the consular section for services as well as the Malaysian consular clientele. There were also people of several other nationalities who either worked for the insurance company and Swedish Embassy on that floor. The embassy also placed liaison officers with the Canadian and Japanese embassies in the building.

Q: The Japanese would be intimately involved in this. How did they work?

LA PORTA: They were pretty invisible. To the extent that they were involved, it was a Tokyo problem, in essence they said, I'm sorry, we can't do anything, talk to Tokyo. It was a remarkable case of denial in the sense that they didn't want to play. Their embassy felt no particular responsibility and whether issues relating to the hostages and demands of the red army people were going to met or not, that was all a Tokyo problem, not theirs. Ultimately, what happened was that the government in Tokyo did decide to make a commercial aircraft available. They did take a couple of red army captives out of jail. There were several others who didn't want to leave jail in Japan. So, they loaded this plane up with a few officials and a couple of captives. They flew it into Kuala Lumpur Airport.

The minister of transportation offered himself as a substitute hostage for the hostages that were in our building. But the red army cadres loaded all of the hostages in buses. They went to the airport. The minister substituted himself for the hostages at the airport. He got in the plane; one or two officials went along with him. The red army cadres and the official government hostages took off for Egypt. There were extraordinary problems in getting air clearances to expedite the travel over the Indian Ocean especially as the Indians didn't want to let them through. The Sri Lankans didn't want to let them fly over. They got to Africa, skirting the Middle East, but again the Egyptians said, no, we won't give you air clearance. They forced the plane to land, I think in Ethiopia, where it was refueled and took off again, finally arriving in Algeria where the rest of the red army people joined them. Basically they were recycled into the international terrorist stream. Several were recaptured later, but a couple were involved in other incidents.

From the human point of view, there were a lot of things that were remarkable about the whole experience. After we had established contact with the red army terrorists, they wanted food. My wife and some other embassy people we could talk to, because our civilian telephone lines were still open, went to Kentucky Fried Chicken and A&W Root Beer downstairs in the building and got food and sent it up to the ninth floor for the hostages. They also sent us up food. After a couple of days they allowed somebody to bring up clean laundry. It was truly a remarkable experience with let's say the dangerous side of the Foreign Service. It was an extraordinary example of how people work together. It was also an extraordinary terrorist incident because almost no sooner than it happened, it was forgotten and does not crop up in any of the kind of Department listings of terrorist incidents. That to me is also symptomatic, pardon me if I editorialize of where our government's head has been about terrorism for 35 years. Incidents occur, they're easily forgotten, not much is done except some tweaking around the edges and we lurch from incident to incident which are becoming more serious and deadly all the time.

Q: How did people get out? They had, did they go out from helicopter or what?

LA PORTA: From the building?

Q: Yes.

LA PORTA: The terrorists allowed the use of the freight elevator, which was on the side of the main bank of elevators. We determined afterward they had indeed booby trapped the main elevators, but not the freight elevator. They may not have known about that initially, but they didn't booby trap that one. We were able to get supplies and ultimately, as the days went on, one or two people were able to get out.

Q: Was there a problem in communicating with the Japanese captors particularly that they didn't speak much English.

LA PORTA: They had two people who did speak English well enough. Dick Jackson also spoke some Japanese. He was not fluent in Japanese according to my recollection, but he spoke enough to at least conduct a courtesy conversation. I think that one of the important things that we observed, as we now know from many other hostage incidents, the criticality of the "degree of confidence" between the captors and the negotiators. In other words, if they have somebody on the other end of the phone or the radio whom they think that they can trust. We very carefully went through down the SOP (standard operating procedure) and said, only Dick Jackson will have contact with them, nobody else. It worked.

We also had Dick on the phone to Washington to talk to the psychiatrists and hostage experts back here. One of the aspects that was not endearing about the whole incident was Henry Kissinger, whom I believe by that time was Secretary of State.

Q: He was Secretary of State.

LA PORTA: Kissinger said we are not going to deal with the hostages in any way, shape or form. We're not going to ask for any special consideration for any of the hostages. He just simply compounded the degree of difficulty in getting a solution.

Q: Well, I mean this has come up a couple of times in my interviews about, well I mean the cartoon of assassination of the PLO over our ambassador and _____ and Kurt Moore. We made that; I mean the same thing with Kissinger and Nixon. They said, we're not going to deal, it's this tough attitude. I think there was another one in Mexico. It sounds great, but you eventually do deal in some way.

LA PORTA: Exactly.

Q: This is posturing which endangers lives and that group was particularly susceptible to posturing.

LA PORTA: That is exactly how we felt. That he was endangering the lives of all of us. If the hostages had taken that seriously, or had really believed it, they could have blown the whole building apart. I think that's a particularly unfortunate feature of that period. Two other things stood out about that incident. One is that while we were holed up and sitting above the area that was held by the terrorists, my replacement arrived in Kuala Lumpur. His name was Scott Butcher. Scott and his family arrived at the airport and said, oh, gee whiz, that's surprising there's nobody here to meet us. Well, he and his family took a cab and they set out for the embassy. They figured well, a communications glitch or something like that. All of a sudden he came into the downtown area and there's a big cordon around the area where the AIA building is. He finally got in touch with someone but I'm not sure how and found out this terrorist incident was going on. In the last two days of the hostage crisis, before Scott was able to get into the embassy and joined us upstairs. Scott had just come from serving in the Operations Center. He was traveling when the incident happened, but it was terrific to have somebody who had that experience who knew all the players in Washington, who knew what they wanted in terms of information and was able to help us "work" the Washington end. The first thing you do in any terrorist incident is to keep a very detailed log of everything, every telephone call, every communication, nobody talks unless it's recorded on paper or in other ways.

The other thing on the downside was the behavior of the media. The media in Malaysia were okay, but the newspapers back here in the U.S. were just jumping all over the place. Number one they had to figure out where Malaysia was, but also, once it became known who was in the embassy and so forth, a lot of the newspapers, the New York Times and Herald Tribune in New York and Newsday in particular, started harassing our relatives. My wife's parents were called by newspapers out in the Midwest and my mother was harassed mercilessly for details. She was told by my wife not to say anything as anything you can say might be sensitive or harmful. After we left Malaysia and I came back, prior to my next assignment, I made a formal protest to the publisher of Newsday and I did get an apology for that harassment. Maybe it's one of these things where terrorist incidents were new at that time, but certainly the appetite of the press for getting information at all costs, human and otherwise, was certainly evident.

Q: One question, or was there anything else, any other thing?

LA PORTA: I think those were the main highlights. Looking back on it and I think everybody in the mission felt that the role played by our chargé, Bob Dillon, who was the DCM, was absolutely brilliant. Bob has had a distinguished career in Middle Eastern affairs and by personality, by quiet leadership, and by keeping his cool, he was able to deal very effectively with the Malaysians. Even Henry Kissinger's pronouncements didn't have as much effect as they might have.

Q: I would imagine he or someone would have a problem with dealing with the families there, your wife included and all.

LA PORTA: Well, Bob Stebbens, our consul, had a wife and two children. It was very

difficult for her and for I think the embassy rallied. My wife stayed with his wife and we were good friends as Bob worked for me earlier in Indonesia. Again, all the things you were supposed to do worked. The families looked after the families. People behaved in a good way. Our communications worked. Our SOP was right. We followed the book. We communicated to beat the band. We really did. We made sure that every detail was given and known. We had a concentrated liaison effort with the Japanese, and the Malaysia operation center; other things were very professionally done and went well.

STAN IFSHIN
Political Officer
Kuala Lumpur (1973-1975)

Mr. Ifshin was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1942 and graduated from John Hopkins University. He entered the Foreign Service in 1967. He has served in numerous posts including Saigon, Taiwan, Kuala Lumpur, Jakarta and Philippines. He was interviewed by David Reuther in 2001.

Q: [laughter] So you are out of language training and you get home leave and then you go to KL.

IFSHIN: I don't know if I got home leave at that juncture or not. No, because I had home leave before leaving for Tai Chung. As a matter of fact, when I was supposed to leave for Tai Chung I was on home leave. And my father died in an accident that weekend. I was leaving that Monday and he died on the Friday before. Originally I was going to go to Europe on my way to Taiwan, I was going to go the long way. But of course, I stayed with my mother and her family I think a month or a month and a half, and then flew directly to Taiwan from New York. I was pretty shook up at that point actually, I was in emotional turmoil.

Q: But your foreign service assignment now is in Kuala Lumpur, were you in the political section?

IFSHIN: Right.

Q: Was it is a joint political/economic section?

IFSHIN: No. We had three FSOs, and one other officer. And one other officer in the political section. There was the chief of the political section, a Malay speaker, and myself as the Chinese speaker.

Q: So of the three, were you the lowest ranking, youngest officer then?

IFSHIN: Yes.

Q: So you that meant you got to do the biographic reporting, or... what were your duties?

IFSHIN: It's interesting, actually, because Kuala Lumpur or Malaysia, as you know, the politics are very much ethnic politics. You have these Chinese-based parties, and the Malay-based parties, even a couple of Indian-based parties, and a few mixed parties which tend to be Chinese. So I'm basically responsible for the Chinese parties. So in addition to the usual, being the protocol officer and the biographic reporting officer and the normal cats and dogs, and map procurement and publications procurement and those other good things, I had these very distinct responsibilities for covering the principle opposition parties then, as well as component parties of the ruling coalition. Which was an interesting way for it to fall out.

Q: Fairly serious. This was basically your first foreign service overseas tour.

IFSHIN: Right.

Q: And you're talking to the highest level of the opposition party... senior gentlemen in their own...

IFSHIN: Yes.

Q: How did you feel? They were obviously older than you were by 30 years... the aura of being from the American embassy can carry a young officer quite a ways?

IFSHIN: In Malaysia, then at least, the U.S. carried somewhat less weight than it was to subsequently. They tended to be very British-oriented at that point. But I didn't find any problem getting in touch with people. Maybe I dealt with the second level people more than the first level.

Q: But that's good liaison anyway.

IFSHIN: Right.

Q: You have a very distinct portfolio and it's a crucial one. Malaysia has gone through the insurgency period and they're trying to integrate these groups so the trends and whatnot that you are picking up are telling. Where was Malaysia at that time?

IFSHIN: The traumatic event that pretty much hung over things was the '69 race riots. Just to trace the history there, if you'll recall Malaysia was formed of Malaya, Singapore, and Borneo provinces, east Malaysia. The Chinese-Malay balance tended to be fairly close at this point. At least from the Malay point of view, the understanding was that the Chinese would dominate economically but they [the Malay] would dominate politically. Of course, Lee Kuan Yu was not going to take a back seat to anybody. I think it's unrealistic to expect that, and he was making a bid for power nationwide, so they expelled Singapore. Subsequently the remnant Chinese still made a bid for political power and came darn close to winning the '69 elections. The Malays came out and rioted and all

sorts of rules were instituted to ensure that the Malays would continue to hold political power indefinitely. Plus the various, for want of a better word, affirmative action programs which were meant to promote the *bumiputra*, the sons of the soil, the Malay, as opposed to the other communities. And there was a great deal of dissatisfaction on the part of the Chinese. There were Chinese who of course were interested in working out a different kind of accommodation and there were Chinese who were interested in overthrowing things and radically changing them. There were all sorts of movements and currents and developments among the Chinese. And then quite a few Chinese were leaving, a big Chinese emigration to Australia at that time.

Q: So in fact from this position, you are talking to all kinds of Chinese groups, not just the established political opposition. You're getting around town and you have a fair arm around the Chinese community. What were their concerns at this time, which is '73-'75?

IFSHIN: Well, they were, what's our future in Malaysia. We've got it okay now, but what's the future for our children was the major question. Are we going to continue as second-class citizens here?

Q: You're there through the American withdrawal from Vietnam, which is just up the street, if you will. Is that impacting on the domestic situation in Malaysia?

IFSHIN: There was tremendous ferment in that part of the world at that time. I remember... a little back-patting here. I was out on a trip when somebody threw in some sort of anti-U.S. remark in the context of Vietnam. I was speaking to some group, I don't remember what it was. But I kind of exploded and said, let's remember the context of American involvement in Vietnam. You as Malaysian should remember Konfrontasi and the Pyong Yang, Hanoi, Jakarta, Beijing axis that was going to sweep Southeast Asia or Asia. America sacrificed to give you time to build your country, etc., in fact all of the southeast Asia countries were allowed to have that time, and now you have a chance to either use it or our sacrifice has been in vain. It cost us a lot but you've gotten a lot out of this. There was a lot of applause, and everybody was rah rah, and I felt very good about it at the time.

The other thing was we were dealing with boat people.

Q: The fall of Saigon in April '75.

IFSHIN: Right. A number of them evacuated to islands... Well, they evacuated to Malaysia and the Malay government put them on islands. They approached us and asked when are you going to take these people? We said we're not going to take them until we at least have a chance to interview them, or talk to them. Well, that was very unsatisfactory to the Malay government, they just wanted us to take them, pick them up and take them home to America. Eventually we did get a chance to talk to them and we formed a little team of about 4 or 5 of them and went off to this east coast Malaysian location. It was an island offshore and we'd take a banca over to the island every day to interview. We were staying in a rather ramshackle government guesthouse on the

mainland. I tell this story because there was a fairly amusing incident. It's amusing now. I wake up one morning and I have an enormous welt under my eye. I don't know what it is, but it's this really ugly looking welt. It gradually goes down and I continue doing my work. We go back to Kuala Lumpur and I see a British physician who was the embassy doctor. He said, oh, it's a centipede bite. And I said, aren't centipede bites supposed to be fatal? He said, well, sometimes... obviously yours wasn't. [laughter]

Q: [laughter] Well, let's look at the fall of Saigon for a moment. Saigon falls, people start floating in to the isthmus both in Thailand, I was up in Songkhla, as the counsel there. Were you aware of any interchange we were having with the Malaysian government, or what was this and whose responsibility... and what not?

IFSHIN: I can't really tell you a lot more than I've already hinted at. They just wanted us to take them. They didn't want to give us access. I know that, early on. And our position was, well, we're not going to do anything until we've had a chance to talk to these people and interview them. If we can develop that they have a basis for entry into the United States, that is they have a relative, or they worked for the U.S. or there is some other reason, we're not just taking them. But if we can develop this, we'll take many.

Q: As far as the way the embassy handled this flow of people... most of that fell to the political section to report on the refugees, to carry the messages?

IFSHIN: I'd say it was a general embassy effort. The team that we formed included me, a political officer...

Q: With your Vietnamese...

IFSHIN: Yes, I knew that, that's why I was on the team I believe. Although, as I told them at the time, I'd made a deliberate effort to forget my Vietnamese when I was studying Chinese. In fact, it was interesting how my Vietnamese came back as I was hearing it every day. But we had an economic officer on the team, and I believe a consular person. Maybe a USIS person as well. It was just an embassy effort, we tried to get people to go off and interview.

Q: With the American withdrawal from Vietnam, which is '73, I believe, are you getting any feeling this is impacting on Malaysia. That they're thinking that their situation is more delicate than before?

IFSHIN: I'm trying to remember when Sukarno was overthrown...

Q: '65, I think.

IFSHIN: Yes. I think they were really more relaxed than they might have been. That really changed the whole constellation in that part of the world, when Jakarta was no longer hostile. When Malaysia was no longer being attacked as a creation of British imperialism. They now had friends and while they were sympathetic to us, they were not

as anxious about their own situation as they had been.

Q: Your major reporting responsibility was the Chinese political parties. Did you see opportunities to touch bases with colleagues in other embassies who were also looking at the same issues?

IFSHIN: Yes, basically the Australians of course and the Brits had very good contacts in Malaysia. And the Japanese on occasion.

Q: This is a regular procedure? In Beijing, we had Tuesday monthly lunch.

IFSHIN: No. They were a group of youngish diplomats who sort of hung out together and gravitated together, but it was never... It was more social than work related. Although as Al LaPorta, who was number two in the section, used to tell me... I remember once something had happened, I can't remember what, but it had us all puzzled and I would say I'm going to a party tonight and maybe I'll learn something. The next morning I would come in and Al said, what did you learn? I said, it wasn't that kind of party. He looked at me all disgusted and said, Stan, they're ALL that kind of party. [laughter]

Q: [laughter] What did you think was America's priority in Malaysia at that time?

IFSHIN: Our priorities were almost strictly economic. Malaysia was a major provider of natural rubber and tin, and we were interested in its continuing in that role and being a trading partner of the U.S. Human rights did not exist at that time as part of foreign policy. We were sort of interested in democracy, out of our own personal predilections we favored those things. But our basic interests were economic.

Q: Just about the time you arrived...

IFSHIN: Let me just mention that during the time I was there, our ambassador was succeeded by Frank Underhill who had been political consular in Manila and then deputy chief of mission in Seoul before coming to KL as ambassador. He was really a brilliant political officer in many ways, a brilliant drafter, and a lot of fun. Again, another anecdote just popped into my head. The South Korean ambassador was calling on him. The Korean issue was coming up in the UN and he had been to see the Malaysian foreign minister and had gotten their agreement to support our position, that is the U.S. – South Korean position. Our ambassador, Frank Underhill, reported this conversation, whether the Malaysian said 'yes, I hear you', or 'yes I hear you and agree with you', or 'yes I hear you and agree with you and will do what you want' remains to be seen. [laughter]

Q: Free will always is one of the great diplomatic problems, isn't it?

IFSHIN: Bringing it back to my Peace Corps anecdote about getting people to commit. People don't like to say no in that part of the world. They will always say yes if they possibly can, but what they mean by yes is another question. Pinning them down and circumscribing their freedom of operation pretty sufficiently so that you can be pretty

certain of what they will do is the trick.

Q: After you arrived in KL, the Thai government fell. Did that get any notice in Malaysia?

IFSHIN: When you mention it, I have vague recollections, but I can't say that it did. Part of my responsibility was to cover the area around Penang because it was largely Chinese, so I would at least get that far up the coast. When I left Tai Chung and went to KL I got a boondoggle in which I had stopped off in Bangkok and Songkhla and the Philippines as well to discuss insurgencies and the Muslim problems in the border areas. So I was aware of these problems and of course they were always the Communist remnants in southern Thailand. But I can't say that people were terribly concerned with what was happening in Thailand. Maybe they were in the foreign ministry.

Q: Malaysia's focused basically in other places, they're looking at Indonesia, that where threat, danger was coming to them.

IFSHIN: I think so.

Q: As your first full tour in the foreign service, what did you think of your duties and what you were learning professionally?

IFSHIN: I found it professionally rewarding and very interesting. One incident occurred when I was there which we have not talked about which might be of interest, and that was the Japanese Red Army seizure of the American consulate and the taking of the consul and other persons as hostages at that time. The American embassy occupied the eleventh, twelfth, and penthouse floors of a downtown office building. The Consulate was on the ninth floor, a suite of offices. The Swedish embassy was also on the ninth floor, in an adjacent suite. I forget what floor, but the Japanese were in the same office building. The Japanese Red Army seized the consulate, and took our consul and a bunch of other people hostage. I happened to be outside the building when this all occurred and there was a big mob scene in front of the embassy when I was coming back. I spoke to police and they weren't letting anybody through. I called the embassy and they said, go stay with our consul's wife. I went off, she was Latin American, and I was doing my best to comfort here and various other American wives started showing up.

I went back to my apartment and spent the night in my apartment, a full night's sleep. The next morning I got up and the siege was still going on. I went up to the police and identified myself. They let me through and I actually went up to the embassy this time. They wanted me to go down to the Japanese embassy to act as liaison. I took a walkie-talkie and was in the Japanese embassy for the next 24 hours or so as this drama unfolded. What the terrorists were demanding was the release of prisoners as I recall. Eventually, the Malaysians agreed to their demands and the exchange was to take place at the airport where they were to get a plane and fly off.

I went off with our charge d'affaires, Bob Dillon, who was the DCM. I don't remember if

Ambassador Underhill was out of the country or what, but in any case he was not there. I went off with Bob Dillon to the airport where the home affairs minister was on the phone with various heads of state around the world trying to persuade them to allow this plane to land. Eventually, we got Madame Bandaranaike to agree to let them refuel in Sri Lanka. Colonel Qadhafi agreed to let them land in Libya. Eventually we had our hostages released, and they left with the prisoners. I think the prisoners had been flown in from Japan. They wanted Japanese prisoners. They flew in from Japan and the exchange took place at the airport.

Q: Your job as liaison at the Japanese embassy, were you talking to the ambassador or their DCM or their political consular ?

IFSHIN: I think basically their political consular, more often than not.

Q: He was finding out what was going on in Japan and then you would be able to pass that on to our own people?

IFSHIN: Right.

Q: Who was the consular officer?

IFSHIN: There was only one consul. It might have been Bob Stebbins. He was released eventually. There was also an embassy employee who was taken hostage. Everyone else was Malaysian, visa applicants of one sort or another.

Q: Anything else about that full assignment that struck you as an interesting description of either the foreign service life or how an embassy operates? Did you get the feel that we did understand what was going on in Malaysia, that we did have enough contacts?

IFSHIN: Yes, I think so. As I say, our interests tended to be economic rather than political. But I think we basically understood what was going on and we had a broad range of political contacts. More than I've seen in other places I've served, in fact.

Q: You're saying our interests are mainly economic and you're the officer liaisoning with the large Chinese community which is economically oriented, and I see that the next thing you're going to do is go to FSI for economic training. Is there any connection? [laughter]

IFSHIN: Well, I thought, this is making me a well-rounded foreign service officer. Again, this was lack of understanding of how the foreign service really worked and what the foreign service wanted me to do. But I thought I should know about economics and that would make me a better political officer.

Q: When did you leave KL then?

IFSHIN: As I recall it was December of 1975.

FRANCIS T. UNDERHILL
Ambassador
Malaysia (1974-1977)

Ambassador Francis T. Underhill was born in New Jersey in 1921. He graduated from Wesleyan University in 1942 with a B.A. He received his M.A. from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1943. During World War II he served in the U.S. Navy and in 1947 he joined the Foreign Service. Ambassador Underhill's postings included Lisbon, Bilbao, Djakarta, Warsaw, Kuala Lumpur, Manila, and Seoul. He was interviewed in 1988 by Henry Mattox.

UNDERHILL: In contrast, the American ambassador's role in Malaysia was completely different. We had no AID program there and no military assistance program.

The only non-diplomatic function was the Peace Corps. The Peace Corps had come to Malaysia in the early 1960's, as a gesture of the Malaysian Government towards the United States, and done under the magic of the Kennedy personality.

Q: They didn't really need one, in other words?

UNDERHILL: No. They didn't really need one. Malaysia was a very nice country to do good in because the life was pleasant there. There were some tentative offers in the early 1960's from AID in Washington to establish a mission there. One of the things that AID insisted on was diplomatic status and privileges for their AID people. The Malaysians said, no. No other foreign service was granted this status. Malaysia was doing very well economically and really didn't need American AID.

The position of the United States was illustrated when I arrived there as ambassador in 1974 and discovered that one man in the Foreign Office was in charge of North America, South America, and Africa. In contrast, ten officers were in charge of their relations with Indonesia and the other ASEAN countries. We didn't loom terribly large on the Malaysian horizon in the political sense. We were however very important to them economically. There were many more officers involved in economic relations with the United States.

Q: What was the nature of these economic ties?

UNDERHILL: Malaysia is the world's largest producer of rubber, tin, and palm oil, so access to our markets was of immense importance to them. They were very much interested in anything that would restrain, or restrict, or reduce trade in these important commodities.

Q: Now to continue on Malaysia. You had this completely different situation when you arrived in Kuala Lumpur from the setting and circumstances that you had in Seoul. Did you find the lack of these close ties, the lack of leverage, frustrating? Or did you find it a relief?

UNDERHILL: I liked it because there was a decent distance between the two governments. There was less manipulation in the way that the Malaysians dealt with us.

American diplomacy faces a serious problem when we are providing economic and military assistance, a Peace Corps, and other programs of active cooperation. When you go to them for something, they must ask themselves, if I say no or if I don't agree, what is going to happen to our assistance programs. There is therefore a conscious or unconscious element of manipulation in how they deal with us. There is a great difference between how they talk to the American ambassador and how they talk to the New Zealand ambassador, for example. A country that can do so much to them and for them is in a different position. I could deal with the Malaysians without this fog hanging over the relationship since there were no assistance programs other than the Peace Corps in the country.

My return to Malaysia was like Habib coming back to Korea. I knew the people, and they knew me. It was an extremely easy assignment because the younger officers that I had known twelve years earlier were now at the top. They knew and trusted me. I had no problem in getting access.

In fact, on problems which at other posts would have involved a formal call at the foreign office, I could handle over the phone.

Q: This would be, for example, representation that you had been instructed to make?

UNDERHILL: That's right. Sometimes there would be a urgent request from Washington that Malaysians vote with us on an issue that was coming up in Geneva the following morning. The time element was extremely critical. Other countries that I've worked in in Southeast Asia would use their known inefficiency as a way of avoiding these decisions. They would agree, but later you would discover that the instruction never arrived at New York or Geneva. You were never sure that it hadn't arrived through inefficiency or because of deliberately duplicity.

If the Malaysians disagreed with us they would tell us directly, "No, we don't agree with you, and for these reasons, cannot vote with you on this issue. We're sorry." On the other hand if they agreed, a telegram went out promptly and Malaysia voted with us.

Q: There was no leverage involved, there was no implied punishment, or reward involved?

UNDERHILL: That's right. I recall one instance, of a U N vote on Korea. We were putting strong pressure on Malaysia to change its decision to vote against our position.

Pending at the time was an offer to sell Malaysia small arms left over from the Vietnam conflict at rock bottom prices. I suggested that if the U N vote was that important, we might use the leverage of the arms deal to bring Malaysia around. The Department said "no." Then I discovered that the South Korean ambassador was not making anywhere near as strong representations as I was instructed to make. I told Washington that I didn't feel that I should be taking the lead in this issue. I learned later, from Phil Habib that Henry wasn't happy with me and the way that I had handled things. I saw no reason for us to be more vigorous in protecting South Korean interests than the South Koreans were prepared to be.

Q: The reason was to be more Catholic than the Pope.

UNDERHILL: That's right.

Q: One other questions I wanted to ask before I get off on something else. Did you have a club of ambassadors in Kuala Lumpur that met weekly, monthly, for luncheon, or anything of that sort?

UNDERHILL: No. We had nothing like that. The only thing that was comparable to it was a Saturday morning golf game with a group of Asian ambassadors. I and the Australian, I realize some time later, were the only Caucasians in this group. It was the Burmese, the Korean, the Filipino, the Singaporean, and the Indonesian. Those were the regulars. I found that this was an extremely valuable source of information and gossip.

The general run of ambassadors in Kuala Lumpur were held at some distance. Malaysian priorities were concentrated first in their ASEAN partners, and then in the nonaligned group, the Islamic group, and the Commonwealth. The major powers, the United States and the USSR were out on the outer fringe. It was like a series of concentric circles. There wasn't much point in talking to the Belgian ambassador, for example.

Q: And you actually got work done and you made contacts?

UNDERHILL: Yes. Some were people I had known from other Asian assignments. The Indonesian ambassador for example had been the military attaché when I had served in Kuala Lumpur 12 years earlier. The Indonesians and Singaporeans through their own local communities, had access to gossip, and information which wasn't just generally available. They could also interpret things that I had read in the newspapers. I made it a practice to read the Malay language newspaper because it provided a different slant than you got from the English language paper.

We'd start the golf game at 7 o'clock on Saturday morning and by 11 o'clock we'd be finished. Then I was usually able, if it was anything really important, then to go to the office and send a short message. Most of the time it wasn't necessary.

Q: But it happened?

UNDERHILL: Not very often, Henry. One of the things I felt was a measure of my success in Malaysia was that neither Henry Kissinger nor any other trouble-shooter came on a visit.

Another thing that illustrates our relationship with Malaysia was that we had very few congressional visits. We had no programs, to inspect, no shopping, no tourist attractions of any great consequence. When a congressman did come, he got no more attention from the local government than a Malaysian congressman would have received in Washington.

Q: Didn't automatically get to see the reigning monarch?

UNDERHILL: The Malaysians would not have thought it appropriate. The Asian Development Bank had a meeting in Kuala Lumpur in the summer of 1974. We sent an obscenely large delegation of 60 people led by George Shultz, who was then the Secretary of the Treasury.

Q: My experience with posts that I served in, congressmen were always pretty royally treated. I guess it's just a function of the particular country. In Malaysia, though, you were saying American congressmen received no great, special treatment?

UNDERHILL: In the almost four years that I was there, we had not a single congressional visit that came to Malaysia as the end purpose. We had a few that came through on their way to somewhere else, or was part of some other meeting.

At this Asian Development Bank meeting there were, as I recall, three senators and four congressmen as advisors to our 60 man delegation. The Malaysian Government had a dinner for the delegates and the alternate delegates. Each country had a delegate and four alternates. Our senatorial and congressional group, though, were all just advisors and they weren't invited to the Prime Minister's dinner. They were allowed to stay at their hotel.

In either the Philippines or Korea, where I had served immediately prior to coming back to Malaysia, American congressmen would have been automatically included in any entertainment of this sort.

Q: Did the American congressmen take out their dissatisfaction with this state of affairs on you?

UNDERHILL: I got no indication that there was any dissatisfaction. I had a reception for the American delegation and not one congressman complained to me about not being invited to the Prime Minister's dinner.

Another example of this Malaysian attitude was reflected in the way they treated CINCPAC. The Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific, in most of the other places where there is a military assistance program or a big American presence, is treated royally. CINCPAC tends to regard himself as a sort of regional ambassador standing above all the

other mere country ambassadors. He arrives on his own special aircraft, and expects to see the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister, the King or the President.

When he came to Malaysia the Malaysians were duly informed. I went personally to the Foreign Office to announce the visit and to be sure that they understood who he was. The visit was placed in the hands of their senior naval officer. The senior civilian that he saw was the Director General of the Ministry of Defense. CINCPAC was so displeased that he cut short his visit and left a day and a half early.

Q: Well, that will show them. Who did you go to see in the Malaysian Government to inform them about the forthcoming arrival of CINCPAC? What level would you announce something like that?

UNDERHILL: Henry, I don't recall. I'm pretty sure I went to the Ministry and left an aide memoire. I could have seen the Foreign Minister at the golf course also. I might have gone to the Chief of Protocol or I might have called on the senior civil servant, the Director General of the Foreign Office. He was the career professional that I did most of my business with. I talked to the Foreign Minister on more ceremonial occasions, not the usual run of embassy business.

Q: This contact that you dealt with normally on the usual run of embassy business would be the equivalent of what in Washington?

UNDERHILL: It's kind of hard to find an exact counterpart. It would be the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, probably, or the Deputy Secretary of State.

Q: Of course, at much larger scale of operation.

UNDERHILL: I had access to virtually anybody in the Malaysian Government that I had needed to see. In Malaysia the ambassadors from many countries had relatively little to do and would try to get to see various ministers for no other reason than to pass the time of day. The Malaysian Government tended to be a bit standoffish for this reason.

I was criticized by a Foreign Service inspector because I didn't see more ministers. I had no problem at all when I had business, but I think that they respected the fact that I didn't bother them if I didn't have business. When I did want to see them, I got in immediately.

Q: Another reason, I suppose, for the ambassador from Austria, for example, seeking out a minister or two so that he could report to his government that he had seen such and such a minister.

UNDERHILL: That's right. Yes.

Q: To shift gears again. Now, the first year that you were there, in August, there was a serious hostage incident. The Japanese Red Army raid, which included as one of the hostages a consular officer on your staff.

UNDERHILL: That's right.

Q: Could you describe that? Not so much what happened; that anybody can find out. But anything that happened behind the scenes that wouldn't show up in the reporting. And, even more particularly, how did you handle a crisis situation like that? How did you organize the embassy to deal with such?

UNDERHILL: Henry, the ironic thing about it was that I was in Flat Rock, North Carolina, when this took place.

Q: I just assumed that you were there.

UNDERHILL: I wasn't. I was home on leave at the time. I had a good DCM, and we were, in a sense, on the periphery. We were the hostages, but the issue was between the Japanese Government and the Japanese Red Army. The United States did not have to bargain with the terrorists. The terrorists demanded that the Japanese Government release their colleagues from jail and provide an airplane to take them to Libya. The Swedish consul had an office on the same floor and was taken hostage at the same time.

It was over, I think, in about four days at the maximum. Before it became necessary for me to go back, the crisis was over. I had a good DCM and he handled the situation well.

Q: Who was it?

UNDERHILL: It was Robert Dillon, who was later ambassador in Lebanon. Kuala Lumpur was the last place in Southeast Asia where the United States embassy was not in its own building. We had three floors of a large office building. The Red Army people looked like young Japanese businessmen until they took their Uzis out of their briefcases. They got on the elevator, get off on the ninth floor, walked down the hall with business offices on both sides, went into the consular section and took everybody there, including the consul hostage.

Q: So the DCM was just a floor or two above while all of this was going on?

UNDERHILL: That's right. Yes. He was two floors above.

Q: What about the residence? Did we own the residence there?

UNDERHILL: Yes. We had a very nice residence on a golf course.

Q: Golf, once again.

UNDERHILL: Yes. Golf was a very important aspect of life in Kuala Lumpur. Golf Digest Magazine in May of 1988 has an article I wrote called, "The Third World on the

First Tee." And it's an analysis, somewhat tongue in cheek, of why golf is so popular in the Third World.

Q: I'll have to take a look at that. My niece lives in Kuala Lumpur and is married to a Malaysian Chinese. It's not my niece, it's my second cousin. Her father, my first cousin, is a great golfer so he goes out there as often as he can--not a great golfer, an avid golfer.

Well, were there an other instances during your time in Kuala Lumpur when you had to organize on some kind of streamline basis of that sort?

UNDERHILL: No. I don't think there were, Henry.

Q: So it was a relatively relaxed tour there?

UNDERHILL: It was a relatively relaxed tour.

ROBERT S. DILLON
Deputy Chief of Mission
Kuala Lumpur (1974-1977)

Ambassador Robert S. Dillon was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1929. He received a bachelor's degree from Duke University in 1951 and joined the State Department in 1956. In addition to serving as ambassador to Lebanon, his career included positions in Venezuela, Turkey, Malaysia, and Egypt. Ambassador Dillon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

Q: That is very interesting background to a continuing thorn in US foreign relations. As you mentioned, when the Cyprus crisis sprung up in 1974, you were headed to Malaysia as the DCM. How did you get that assignment?

DILLON: I was "GLOPed". You will recall that Henry Kissinger had decided that all area specialists should have out-of-area assignments. As I understood it, he had gone down to Mexico to a big conference and had run into all these Latin American types who had never served anywhere else. He instructed that they be reassigned out of the area. When it was pointed out that his instructions would mean that lot of other reassignments would have to take place, he decided that all Foreign Service personnel would have to have at least one tour out of their area of specialization. So in my case, it meant an assignment to South-east Asia--out of the eastern Mediterranean. A friend of mine had told me that the Bureau for East Asian Affairs was looking for a DCM for Malaysia; he said that if I were interested, he would put in a plug for me with the Ambassador, Frank Underhill. Frank had the opposite problem; he had many years of experience in South-east Asia. He was a wonderful man and an excellent professional. He was on his second tour in Kuala Lumpur; therefore he was under pressure from the Department to chose a

DCM who had had no experience in Malaysia or the area. He had gotten a list of seven or eight candidates; why he chose me I don't know, but I am glad he did.

So off I went and arrived towards the end of August, 1974. Most of the time, it was a happy tour. I confess that towards the end, I became somewhat bored. When you are accustomed to dealing with Turkey-Greece-Cyprus, there is constant tension and never a dull moment. There were real American interests at stake in that area. This was my first assignment where there really weren't strong American interests at stake. We didn't wish the Malaysians any bad luck and there was always some interest in the on-going emergency on the Thai border--oil had been discovered there. But it was very different from being in the eastern Mediterranean. Malaysia was a much more typical diplomatic assignment during which you spent a lot of time going to the Foreign Ministry, arguing with officials about obscure U.N. resolutions which neither they or we cared very much about. So by the time the three years had expired, I was bored and ready for a change. For the first two years, I enjoyed it very much, particularly because Underhill was so good and I felt that I had learned a lot from him.

My job as DCM was a fairly standard executive officer role. He encouraged me to get as far into substance as I wanted. There wasn't that much pressure on the substantive side. I did get involved to some respect and tried to become familiar with the issues, but both the Ambassador and Frank Bennett, who was the chief of the Political Section, were very good and were both long-time experts in the area. I didn't feel the need to compete with them on substance, even though I was very interested. So I played the standard DCM role: I served as the executive officer of the Embassy, sort of running the mission, and stood in the place of the Ambassador when he was gone. But I didn't try to become a South-east Asia expert.

It was the first assignment since early in my career during which I did not feel that I contributed on the policy side. I occasionally drafted messages, but frankly this was a situation in which the policy judgements were very much the Ambassador's. I agreed with them; he was a brilliant man and very nice. I did see eye-to-eye with him, so that there weren't any policy differences. We both had the same point of view. Neither of us was very enthusiastic about American involvement in the area. We were reducing our presence in Vietnam heading towards the final disaster. Underhill had served all around the area; he was annoyed with a lot of Washington initiatives which tended to involve us more deeply and didn't make any sense. Everyone--AID, CIA or somebody--always seemed to have some great scheme to save Malaysia. Well, Malaysia didn't want to be "saved"; it was happy with the way things were going.

In the early summer, 1975, when Underhill was gone, a team came from Washington to explore the provision of assistance to the Malaysian armed forces to help them in their battles against the Communist terrorists (CTs). Who were these Communist terrorists? They were probably something like 1,200 Chinese who had been in the jungle for many, many years. They were the remnants of the old emergency, which had never ceased. It was kind of a nasty little jungle warfare that was just continuing. At any time, there would be 10 or 11 battalions of the Army or from the Police Field Force (PFF) deployed

in northern Malaysia, just south of the Batong salient in Thailand. The guerrillas would move back and forth across the border. They would find sanctuary across the border and then move south periodically. They supported themselves by terrorizing the Chinese merchants in the towns on the fringes of the jungles. They would occasionally assassinate somebody. In fact, shortly before I arrived, they had managed to murder the Chief of Police. Casualties on the Malaysian side probably ran two or three per month. It was an insurgency that in fact was very well contained. The Malaysians were probably putting the right amount of effort into this low-level warfare. In any case, Washington sent a team headed by an Admiral, who turned out to be William Crowe, later Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. Ted Shackley, a well known CIA man who used to be the station chief in Laos, was on the team along with an Army Colonel who was an expert in irregular warfare. When Underhill heard that this team was coming, he was sufficiently concerned that he almost delayed his home leave. But he decided that if I couldn't handle it, then I didn't deserve to be a Foreign Service officer. And I agreed with that judgment. I promised not to give away the store. Underhill felt that we should not involve ourselves in the Malaysian affairs. The team talked to a lot of people in Kuala Lumpur, particularly on the intelligence and psychological side. They spent about a week or ten days interviewing and talking about the insurgency. Members of our staff went along on one or two meetings; I went to a couple of them. But in general we gave the team a free hand. I thought that the team was very nice; I was particularly struck by Crowe. At one stage, we went to the jungle to observe the insurgency. We got in a small plane and flew to Ipoh, a primarily Chinese town on the border of the area. Then we got into a helicopter, flew off into the jungle, landing at a firing point, manned by a PFF battalion. There were distinctions between the PFF and the Army; I considered the former to be more competent even if it was lightly armed. The Army tended to be commanded by Malay royalty and they weren't very great soldiers in my view. The PFF and others were good soldiers. In any case, we had dinner at the firing point, we stood by while a howitzer fired into the jungle, but we never did see any insurgents. Crowe loved it; he really got a kick out of this trip. He enjoyed the PFF officers and was happy with the display they put on for him and his team. It was a lot of fun. Crowe had been in Vietnam and had served on a jungle river boat there and was therefore familiar with the environment. He kept saying how much fun it was and that he hadn't had as much fun since having left Vietnam. I enjoyed the visit myself, but I began to worry that Crowe was becoming so fascinated with the activity that he might just pursue the wrong policy. We helicoptered back to Ipoh, where we got on our small plane and back to Kuala Lumpur. Three days later, the team came to my office. Crowe had a big smile on his face. Shackley was glowering. So I sensed that there was some tension in the team. Crowe sat down and in his "old boy" Oklahoma style said: "Bob, I think these folks are doing just fine. I don't think they need any assistance from us!" I could have kissed him. Shackley obviously strongly disagreed, but there wasn't much he could do. So ended the Washington mission. I think the story illustrates that Crowe was a brilliant guy and had the right instincts. It also illustrates what mischief Washington can sometime dream up. Shackley and his crowd were desperately looking for some way to carry on what they had been doing for a long time in South-east Asia--Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. It was not needed in Malaysia and would have been a great mistake for us to get involved there; certainly the Malaysians didn't want us. If it had been a lesser person than Crowe, he might have gone along with the

Washington desire, but Crowe very clearly saw the potential pitfalls and had enough stature and strength of character to say "No" to Shackley.

Q: How about AID?

DILLON: It wanted to have a program in Malaysia. The Peace Corps had a presence and we thought that that was a worthwhile activity. But we did not believe that there should be an AID mission in Kuala Lumpur. AID was interested because Malaysia was successful; that is a little facetious, but AID was so tired of being given work in the "basket cases", that it wanted to work in a country which might well succeed. Malaysian exports were doing very well: oil, rubber, tin and palm oil. Oil was just beginning; the other commodities had been traditional exports. During the mid-70s, these commodities had a good world market. That provided enough foreign currency for economic development. The Chinese business community in particular was extremely competent. The Malays, who dominated the government, were not as concerned with "economic development" as they were in getting their own people into the private business sector. That was called the Bumiputra program (Bumiputra meaning "the sons of the soil"). There had to be Malays in on everything. Much of the government's effort was directed to what we would call an "equal opportunity program" or quotas. There were Australian, New Zealand and British businessmen located in Malaysia who were under a great deal of pressure from the government to employ Malays, not Chinese. Malaysia is not a big country; it might have had 10-12 million inhabitants. It was not a wealthy nation, but the economy was growing fast. I have a lot of respect for AID. I have enjoyed my association with AID over the years. But in this case, I thought it was very clear that the Agency wanted to get into Malaysia because it appeared that there would be a successful economic development effort and it wanted to be part of a success story. I didn't consider that a very good reason to establish an AID mission.

Typically, the US Government was also interested in selling arms to Malaysia as soon as it became clear that the country could afford to pay for them. Every time you turned around, there were salesmen from our Defense Department, wanting to sell F-5 planes (the Northrop built fighter-bomber). The Malaysians were finally persuaded to buy 20 or 30 of them. It was not clear that they needed them; on the other hand, it really isn't up to foreigners to tell a sovereign country that they don't need armaments. They certainly did not need them to meet the insurgency. Interestingly enough, when they finally got them, they immediately (within weeks after the arrival of the first planes) mounted air strikes against the insurgents in the north and pounded their own positions instead, killing 15-20 of their own troops. What made it even worst was that under ordinary fighting circumstances, Malaysia would have lost that many soldiers in 6-7 months. This time they managed to do the same damage in 15-20 minutes.

These are examples of our activities in Malaysia. We had a very good agricultural attaché, John DeCoursey, who was a lot of fun because he knew a lot. An agricultural attaché in a country like Malaysia knew everything. If you are out in a plantation, he can tell you where everything is, what the markets are, etc. His reporting was interesting and

important. We bought commodities from Malaysia and we exported machinery and other things.

The three years in Malaysia were conventional in a lot of ways, but a happy assignment. I have already described the Crowe mission. I should mention another episode which happened a few days after they left. This had to do with terrorism. My wife was going to Indonesia for a teachers' conference--she was teaching at the International School of Kuala Lumpur. I went to Jakarta with her for about three days and then I returned to K.L. I was back at my desk, trying to look important, shuffling through telegrams, thinking undoubtedly deep and important thoughts. All of a sudden, I heard a series of shots. I recognized immediately the sound of small arms fire, 9 mm pistol shots. I ran to the door of my office; there were people outside milling around wondering what was going on. It was hard to tell. The Embassy occupied the top three and a half floors of a skyscraper in the middle of Kuala Lumpur. The half floor was occupied by our consular section. The rest of the floor was occupied by the Swedish Embassy, which was run by a Charge'. We recognized quickly that the shooting was taking place on that floor. So we rushed down the steps to see what was going on. There was still some shooting going on. We could see the door of the elevator opening and one of our Malay guards being shot at by someone in the corridor. The guard took a bullet right under the eye and fell back into the elevator. The door then closed and we managed to get the man out on a different floor and to a hospital. Then another guard came up and he was shot through the chin--the bullet came out through the jaw. It was then that I understood for the first time why in situations like this the traditional metal jacket is the wrong kind of ammunition. Fortunately, in this particular case, it was the "bad" guys who were using steel jacketed bullets. But our guys were both shot in the head; fortunately they both survived. One wasn't even knocked down. But the ricochet effect of the bullets was the worst. Every time someone fired, the bullets would bounce all over the place; that was terrifying. You get a sense of being shot at from all sides. We sealed the floor off very quickly with Marines and our security officer standing on the stairs to prevent the perpetrators, whom we did not know at the time, from going upstairs to our other floors. The elevators were shut off. The Malaysian police arrived very quickly and sealed off the floor from below. So the terrorists were locked into the 9th. floor. We didn't really know what was going on; we were speculating whether it was some "nut" who had a perceived grievance against the consular section or was it a terrorist attack. In effect, we reached a stalemate for several hours.

Occasionally, we would hear firing. Fortunately no one was killed, although there were four wounded. At some stage of the siege, one of the Indian guards attracted attention and was wounded. At sometime during the early afternoon, a note was thrown out by the perpetrators, announcing that they were members of the Japanese Red Army. Their demands were primarily on the Japanese government. The Japanese Deputy Prime Minister happened to be visiting Washington at the time; we assumed that the attack was timed to coincide with that visit. The Japanese had some JRA people in prison; our "invaders" threatened to harm their hostages if their colleagues in Japanese prisons were not released. At about the same time, a Foreign Service officer, Dick Jackson, who had a beautiful voice, and I were standing at the switchboard. The telephones were still working and a Malay operator was on duty. She answered one of the incoming calls and

turned to me: "The head of the terrorists wishes to speak to you". This was my first experience in this kind of a situation, although I had picked up a couple of pointers somewhere along the line. One was that the decision maker should avoid being one of the intermediaries; that puts one in an impossible position.

As I said, Dick Jackson was standing next to me. For the next four days, he brilliantly distinguished himself. In any case, since he was standing there, I asked him to answer the call. He instantly appeared to understand the game, although he also had never had any experience. He spoke in a nice, friendly, unthreatening voice. He kept saying; "You know I don't make the decisions, but I will relay your concern to our Charge' who is here in the building". He sounded just like the text book said he should. So we had conversations with the JRA, especially about their demands and threats to execute some hostages if the Japanese government did not release some of their prisoners in Japan. By this time--the episode had now lasted several hours--a huge crowd had gathered outside our building. Newsmen began descending from all over the world. The only areas outside that were not filled with people were those which could have been targets of the terrorists' fire. The Japanese Ambassador arrived. A "war" room was set up on the ground floor in some offices belonging to the bank that owned the building. The Minister of Interior, Ghazali Shafi, came personally. It is important to understand the configuration of the elevators because they played a major role in the incident. There were three elevators in the building. Two faced into the lobbies; by this time, both of those had been disabled and were stuck on the 9th floor. The other elevator, although in the same bank, was the freight elevator and it had doors opposite to the passenger ones. Our communications were through this elevator because the way it faced, no one could shoot through its doors. The steps were closed because we and the terrorists had established fields of fire on the steps. So I went down the freight elevator to the meeting on the first floor. That was the beginning of an exhausting four day siege. The Japanese sent their Minister of Transport to supervise their side of the process; he brought with him a man from their Middle East office because for some reason they assumed that the JRA has something to do with the Middle East--why they came to that conclusion is still a mystery to me, although I knew that some of the JRA had been trained in Lebanon. One of the interesting parts of the story is that that Middle East man, with whom I became friendly, is the Japanese Ambassador in Washington today.

A negotiation ensued. I was getting lots of unhelpful advise from Washington. Henry Kissinger, who was the Secretary of State, was on a plane to Belgrade. He communicated with us; he seemed primarily interested that the American Charge' not agree to anything because "the United States does not negotiate with terrorists", etc. Later, Larry Eagleburger became the main point of contact. He repeated many of Kissinger's injunctions, but in a much more palatable way. I think I understood my role. When I realized that the JRA's demands were against the Japanese and not against us, I was probably the happiest man in the world because, among other things, it made my role a lot easier. The pressure was on the Japanese; the Malaysians just wanted to give in to the terrorists because they wanted to end the incident as rapidly as possible.

Naturally, the electricity was turned off. Kuala Lumpur is in the tropics and the temperature was in the '90s and very humid. We sweated gallons and gallons of water. We had a generator which ran the elevator. I would run up and down from my floor to the ground and back. We continued our communications with Washington. Our telephone line to the Operations Center was kept open the whole time. At the beginning, when Washington called, I answered; then I realized that the same principle which applies to negotiations with terrorists also applies to Washington: let some one else answer the phone. I told my staff that when I was asked for, I "couldn't be found". Al LaPorta, who is now the DCM in New Zealand--a very capable Foreign Service officer--became the liaison with Washington. I can still see Al, somewhat overweight, bearded, naked to the waist, saying very politely to Washington: "I just don't know where Dillon is. He may be downstairs, but in any case, I will get a message to him." It didn't take me long to figure out that if I were always available to the phone, I would be talking to Washington 24 hours each day. Every ambitious so and so in Washington wanted to be in on the action; so they all wanted to talk to me and give me their advice. We wanted advice, in small and well conceived doses, but Washington is very difficult to deal with, particularly in situations like this. People there panic; we felt tremendous tensions, but not panic.

I should mention one particular phase. We had a security officer--Wayne Algire--, who was a large and overweight. He was inventive and resourceful. He was running all over the place as was the Station Chief. We were dropping mikes through the walls in an effort to hear what was going on on the 9th floor. We didn't know how many terrorists there were; we didn't know how many hostages there were. We knew our consul was there. We tried to put together a list of whom might be held hostage. We speculated that there might have been 20-32 hostages. It turned out that there were 52, six or seven Americans and a few other foreigners. But most of the hostages were Malaysian citizens. We provided food and water to all of them during the four days. The terrorists were very suspicious of the food and water. They were afraid to drink anything we sent because they thought it would be drugged or poisoned.

The freight elevator, which moved agonizingly slowly, was of tremendous importance to us since it was the only way we could move up and down. A Marine guard stayed on the elevator at all times. At one point, the elevator stopped running. It had broken. There was great consternation. We finally located by phone the Chinese technician who maintained the elevators. He came to the building. It turned out that the motor that drove the elevator was on the roof. How does the Chinese man get to the roof when the sole elevator was not working and the stairs were blocked by gun fire? We suggested that he walk to the ninth floor, crouch there until an opportune moment arrived and then run across. The maintenance man was no dummy. He said that if we Americans wanted to be foolish like that, that was alright with him, but there was nothing in his job description that required him to risk his life that way. We tried all sorts of persuasions, but nothing happened. Finally Wayne Algire, overweight as he was, went up on the roof and crawled into the tiny space where the motor was housed. He laid on his back, with a telephone cradled in his ear, taking advice from the Chinese mechanic downstairs. The conversation went on for some time, but eventually the security officer of the American Embassy fixed the elevator! There were many heroes in this incident, but Dick Jackson and Wayne Algire

stand out. Finally, the Japanese agreed to exchange some JRA prisoners which they were holding for our hostages. A JAL 747 flew to Kuala Lumpur.

Then another crisis ensued. One of the four JRA prisoners, who was supposed to have been brought from Japan, refused to be part of the exchange. The terrorists didn't believe it. There were extended exchanges. Finally, we were able to patch through a telephone call from our building to the jail where this fourth JRA member was being held. Everybody of course could listen in to the conversation. So we could hear what was going on. The fellow in Japan just didn't want to be any part of this exchange; he wanted to stay in jail. So the terrorists were finally reassured. Then the question arose about asylum. Who wanted them? That was the job of the Malaysian Minister of Interior. That was a further excruciating process. He looked around all over the world. We suggested Libya, but they refused. No one else would take them. Finally, the Libyan government agreed to permit the JAL 747 to land in their country. I remember sitting with the Japanese Ambassador who was sweating buckets; he was very good, but as you can imagine this was a very difficult period for him. We used English because most of the senior Cabinet officials had been educated in England. As the Japanese Ambassador came under greater and greater pressure, his English deteriorated which made matters even more difficult. When we heard that the Libyans would accept the plane, the Japanese Ambassador drew a big sigh and said "Ah So"--exactly what you see and hear in the movies.

Then we had to worry about air clearance for the plane between K.L. and Libya. We managed to get everybody's agreement except from Iran where the Shah--in what I viewed as a grandstand gesture, but which Kissinger might have considered quite appropriate--said if that plane entered Iranian air space, it would be shot down. So we had to work out a longer route, avoiding Iran. The plane had to be refueled once; Ceylon was chosen for that. Mrs. Bandaranaike was the Prime Minister. The Malaysian Gazali Shafi, who was a very persuasive man, was on the telephone to her. We were all sitting around listening attentively. Mrs. Bandaranaike was saying "No" in a very excited tone. She didn't want any part of the refueling. She said if the plane tried to land, she would order her troops to shoot. Gaz refused to take "No" for an answer; he oozed charm. He was full of understanding for her plight and reassured her of his understanding for her position. On the other hand, he kept pointing out that if Ceylon didn't let the plane land, some innocent people would die which he was sure no one really wanted. After an exhaustive forty-five minutes, Mrs. Bandaranaike finally gave in. The plane would be allowed to fuel, but would be surrounded by Ceylonese troops which would be instructed to shoot if anybody tried to get out. Gaz turned around and gave us a big smile. The Japanese Ambassador once more drew in his breath. By now, all the arrangements were made, except working out the modalities of the prisoners' exchange. That also proved to be excruciating. Every step had to be covered. The terrorists had to come down the steps and board a bus which would be waiting at the entrance. They would be accompanied by all the hostages. The bus would then go to the airport. The terrorists agreed to take out all the explosives which they had dug into our walls and take them to the airport with them. There they would explode them on the tarmac before boarding their plane. They demanded that the JRA prisoners be exchanged at the airport. They also demanded that

four senior officials fly to Libya with them where they would be released. At this point, we were talking to the terrorists over some hand-held sets. That enabled us to come down in lock-step; Wayne Algire would say: "I am now going to take one step backward" and the terrorist would say: "OKAY. I will now take a step". It took us three hours to clear the building--that was to come down nine flights. You can imagine how our nerves were at this stage. We had not slept for four nights, which, incidentally, was a great mistake which I never repeated again.

We finally got the terrorists and their hostages on the bus driving through streets that were filled with people who wanted to observe this action. The bus went to the tarmac. I didn't involve myself directly in the prisoners' exchange. I waited where our hostages would be released. The exchange was finally completed. They blew up their explosives--turned out that it was most, but not all. When I saw what a huge crater was made by the explosion, I was shocked; I hadn't realized the full extent of the power on the 9th floor just below us. I was glad that I had been ignorant. The terrorists let the hostages go, one by one, starting with the non-Americans. The last man out was Bob Stebbins, our consul whom we later found out from the other hostages had behaved with great courage and dignity. The plane flew off. The four official hostages, one of whom is now the present Japanese Ambassador to Washington, went with the plane to Libya. There they were released and returned to Kuala Lumpur. I must say, in conclusion, that Stebbins was badly treated by the Department. Just as he was being released, a newspaper man shouted a question at him. Stebbins answered by saying that at another time he would like to have coffee with his keepers and talk politics. That comment infuriated Henry Kissinger. Now the guy had been under tremendous pressure; he was after all the chief hostage. Everybody who had been a hostage paid high tribute to Stebbins for his leadership, steadiness, etc. But the damn State Department held his comment against him. I realized when he spoke that his remark was injudicious and I was sorry that he said it. I grabbed him, hugged him and told him not to say anything more. I rushed him to the car, but the damage was done. His comment was widely reported. When a few days later he went to Washington, he was stunned when Phil Habib, then Under Secretary for Political Affairs, bawled him out--on instructions, undoubtedly. It took me a long time to get over the bitterness of how Stebbins was treated; he was deeply wronged because his performance as a hostage had been an inspiration. It was very sad and insensitive how the Department behaved.

Later, typically, people came out to see the Embassy. We were chastised for not having taken sufficient security precautions. We turned Wayne Algire loose on the project--we called the Chancery "Fort Wayne" from then on. Less than a year later, we had another group visit us from Washington. It represented the General Accounting Office. It criticized us severely for the "Fortress" we had built. I don't want to exaggerate this aspect; we just shrugged it off and accepted the irony of two bureaucracies, one condemning us for not locking up the Chancery and the other for doing so. What I really felt very strongly about was the treatment that Bob Stebbins received. In my eyes, he was a hero.

Q: As the hostage episode was winding down, were you continuing to get gratuitous advice and instructions from Washington?

DILLON: Indeed I was, but Al LaPorta, who was another kind of hero, was simply intercepting them and was smart enough, after a while, not even to give them to me. You may think that was dangerous; it would have been, except that Al was a smart, savvy Foreign Service officer who could be trusted to make the right judgments. So he didn't bother me with the unhelpful advice and that was good because we had enough on our minds. The problem was that in the Department there were people that were reacting to Henry Kissinger's strictures that we should never negotiate with terrorists. Apparently, he was quite concerned that I would do that. In fact, I wasn't, but I must admit that I have some reservations about the policy. The Japanese Minister of Transport became so angry at what he considered to be our negative attitude that, at one point, he refused to speak to me. That went on for about 36 hours. Murata, whom I mentioned earlier and who was then one of the Japanese involved in the negotiations and now the US Ambassador in Washington, picked up the communications slack and so he became our contact. In any case, the Japanese were very upset with us, even though we did give them some assistance, such as providing communication facilities. We can do that in a crisis. I found that interesting. The Department issued a very restrictive LIMITEL world wide in order to insure that our traffic went unimpeded. We communicated to Washington on a FLASH basis, so that we had instant communications with Washington and world-wide. We also had instant telephonic communications.

The USIS people did a good job. In a situation such as we had in Kuala Lumpur, you not only need to keep the Secretary of State advised, but also your USIS staff. In a hostage crisis, the town immediately fills up with newsmen. There are hundreds of calls from news organizations and from concerned people from all over the world. It is very important for the person in charge to get that public relations operations away from him or her as soon as possible. We put it in the USIS office. That staff took every incoming inquiry, except those that we received from the Department. They dealt with all the newsmen and media representatives. They shielded me from them. They performed very effectively. Unless you go through one of these experiences, you can't fully appreciate the contribution that a professional P.R. staff can make. We didn't have any instructions on this aspect of the incident. Somewhere in the Foreign Service manual, there was the beginning of a chapter on terrorism. It included a check list which was helpful. I began to appreciate check lists because, in truth, once an incident begins, you don't have time to make one up. You also don't have time in a crisis to pick up a thick manual and read about the philosophy of terrorism or Henry Kissinger's strong views about negotiations. What the leadership needs is a list of things that should not be overlooked. As I said, we fortunately had some of that.

The biggest mistake I made was not to set a duty roster to insure that everyone, including me, got sufficient sleep. After K.L. in subsequent crises, that was one of the first things I did. I did not do that in K.L. because it always seemed that the crisis was about to end and then it would drag on for more time. I was so tired at the end of the four days that I

literally couldn't see straight. I think everyone was in that same condition. We were absolutely exhausted and that was dangerous and I never repeated that mistake again.

Q: Let me just ask one more question about the terrorist episode. After it was over, and particularly when you returned to Washington, did you have the feeling that if anything would have gone wrong, it would have been viewed as your "fault"?

DILLON: I did indeed get that feeling. I should mention one other thing. When the K.L. crisis developed, a task force was established in Washington. It did good work. It was very supportive. When it sent a message, it was always an encouraging one which was always helpful. It was the people at the top that were a problem. You do get the feeling that if things go awry, it is your fault. I don't know whether that is paranoia or whether it was just Mr. Kissinger in this case; it probably is just endemic to the way our government works: if things don't go well, it is your fault; if they go right, a lot of people take credit. We did in his case get a certain amount of credit. Everybody got a Superior Honor award; I got a piece of paper saying that I had done a great job. I was very glad to get it. But during the episode, I must say that I did not feel that I was getting much support from the top of the US government. You feel that everyone else is running for cover so that if something awful happens, they can distance themselves from catastrophe. I had the impression that at the top levels in Washington, where the ambitious people work, everyone was making it quite clear that whatever happened, he or she had done the right thing and that if matters went awry he or she could not be faulted. I had that same feeling during later incidents in which I was involved.

Q: We are now in 1991. I guess a current illustration of that attitude is what recently happened to Ambassador Glaspie in Baghdad when the Secretary of State and Washington in general distanced themselves in a hurry from her actions.

DILLON: If one of the hostages had been killed or something else had gone wrong, probably the Charge' in Kuala Lumpur would have been held responsible. Of course, when the incident was over and all had been settled satisfactorily, there were plenty of people who shared the accolades. I must say that your colleagues are fine in cases such as the K.L. one. It is at the higher levels that the problems begin. That comment covers both political appointees or career people who work with them. I was well treated after the K.L. incident; I got a nice telegram signed by Henry Kissinger which I may still have in my files. I don't assume that Kissinger wrote it, but I assume he signed it. The message said all the right things and was very complimentary of the staff. That staff had not been picked because of its expertise in terrorism; it was just a regular Foreign Service staff, but it was very good under very trying circumstances. Almost all of them acted almost automatically; they didn't have to be told what to do. They just reacted and did what needed to be done. They adapted very quickly. I have named two or three of them already, but in all fairness, all had to be complimented. The communicators worked their tails off. I was on the 11th floor; they were on the 12th. We had emptied the 10th floor. The 9th floor soon became completely occupied by the terrorists. They occupied not only our half, but soon took the whole floor including the Swedish Chancery, manned by the Charge' and his secretary and probably one of their employees. Most of the hostages had

come to the 9th floor for US consular business or were our employees or had been pulled off the elevators--some people had been trapped in the elevators. I don't remember why that last group was even in the building.

As I said, there was nothing special about our staff in K.L. A couple of them--Al LaPorta, for instance--were people whose subsequent careers demonstrated clearly that they were above average, but most of our staff were typical Foreign Service people. It just so happened that at the time, our two area specialists (Ambassador Underhill and Bennett, the Chief of the Political Section) were gone, Al LaPorta was the acting chief of the Political Section. The Station Chief had left only a few days before. His replacement arrived the day before the incident began. He was a good officer--sensible, professional. He didn't conspire to take over the show, as sometimes happens. He made it clear immediately that he and his resources were at my disposal. We discussed what could be done and the station played a role. The communication staff were typical common people and turned out to be absolutely superb. They never got excited. They worked around the clock, snoozing when they could. Three floors beneath them were many pounds of explosives placed in the walls; if anything had gone wrong, all the people from the 9th floor up at least were likely to be killed. That didn't seem to bother them. Algire was a very good security officer; he was probably above average and performed superbly. He didn't get excited; he was inventive and resourceful. For me at least, the picture of Wayne Algire on his back in that cramped space with a telephone cradled next to his ear, sweat pouring off of him as if he were in a stream, fiddling with those mysterious pieces, following the instructions of the Chinese technician whom I never did see, making various attempts to get the equipment working again. He must have been there for an hour and a half or two hours. It wasn't an easy task. Then all of a sudden he announced that he thought the machine would work again. And it did! If I had had to do that, we'd probably still be there; I could never have figured it out.

That was K.L. and the highlight of my tour there. It happened in August 1975.

Q: What was the Malay reaction to the fall of Saigon which happened while you were there?

DILLON: It did particularly not upset the Malaysians. It upset us because many people in the Saigon Embassy were our friends and we saw pictures of them running for planes and helicopters. As far as Malaysians were concerned, Saigon was a long, long way away. They didn't have a feeling that the events in Vietnam would effect them. At an earlier time, there were Americans who saw Malaysia as part of the "domino chain" and threatened if Vietnam were to fall to the communists. But when it actually happened, the Malays did not feel threatened and I am not only referring to Viet Cong sympathizers. I am speaking of the broad population spectrum. Thailand was in between Vietnam and Malaysia. The Malaysians were gaining confidence as they managed to repress their own insurgency. It certainly didn't do American prestige any good and some of our people worried about that. If I had been an old Southeast Asian hand, I might have worried more. But I didn't.

The only thing that I remember of Malaysian strong reaction to foreign affairs--and I was very surprised by it--was an outpouring of emotion when Zhou En-lai died. I was always interested in China and had followed developments there as best I could. But I had never understood until that event the degree to which Zhou En-lai had become a hero among the "overseas" Chinese and others as well. I was just struck by the outpouring of emotion when Zhou passed away. He had at the end become the symbol of the "white hats" in China as opposed to Mao and the Gang of Four. But the Malaysian reaction was an eye-opener to me.

ROBERT H. MILLER
Ambassador
Malaysia (1977-1980)

Ambassador Robert H. Miller was born in Port Angeles, Washington in 1927. He joined the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included positions in France and Vietnam, and ambassadorships to Malaysia and the Ivory Coast. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

Q: September 19, 1990. This is the second interview with Ambassador Robert H. Miller concerning his career. In our last tape we ended up talking about when you were Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asia with responsibilities for Southeast Asia. So now we are coming to the period of 1977-80 when you were ambassador to Malaysia. How did this appointment come about?

MILLER: I had been in the Department for six years and Deputy Assistant Secretary in the East Asian Bureau for three years since 1974, and, of course, at that time there was a change in administration. Jimmy Carter had been elected in November 1976 and the new team under Cyrus Vance came in on January 20, 1977. Dick Holbrooke was appointed Assistant Secretary for East Asia and Pacific Affairs. He had been a junior Foreign Service officer when I had been a First Secretary in Saigon, and I think we both agreed that it was time for me to move on as he came in to take over his duties. I didn't have anything against Dick Holbrooke and I don't think he had anything against me. But I had been there for 3 years and he wanted his own team. As a career officer my hat was thrown into the ambassadorial ring at that point and eventually out came Malaysia. This made sense from my standpoint and the Department's because I had a lot of experience in Southeast Asia, particularly in the Indochina problem by then, and had been working for the past couple of years, since the fall of Saigon and Phnom Penh, on the whole range of Southeast Asian problems. So the powers-that-be approved my nomination as Ambassador to Malaysia. I was confirmed by the Senate and left for my post in June of that year.

Q: Were you getting any feeling that there were political appointees who were trying to get this job? After all Malaysia would seem like a nice appointment to give to somebody who is a non-professional.

MILLER: I don't recall at the time feeling that political appointees were making it difficult to get an appointment as an ambassador or even that it was difficult to get Kuala Lumpur as an ambassadorship. My recollection is that there were a lot of people contending the ambassadorships at the beginning of the Carter Administration, including political appointees, and I sensed that I was fortunate to get Kuala Lumpur with all the competition, career and political. I do not recall that I was specifically contending against a potential political appointee.

Q: There was an attempt, I think, in the Carter Administration to try to get professional appointments, wasn't there?

MILLER: I assume that Carter was under the usual pressure as the victorious presidential candidate to name political appointees. Most of his appointments in Southeast Asia were career appointees with the exception of Dick Kneip in Singapore. Kneip was a former governor of South Dakota who had been a political crony of Jimmy Carter's or had gotten to know him during the presidential campaign. He had no background in diplomacy and I think little instinct for it. But other than that I would agree with you that the Carter Administration, whether it was the influence of Cyrus Vance or not, appointed a good percentage of good career people as ambassadors.

Q: As you went out did you have the feeling that the Carter Administration and Holbrooke came in and wanted to change course towards Southeast Asia, or...?

MILLER: Dick Holbrooke, himself as an old Vietnam hand and having participated in the preparation of the Pentagon Papers under the aegis of Secretary of Defense McNamara--was intent on reconciling with Vietnam and establishing diplomatic relations and getting on to having a productive relationship with all of Southeast Asia. This was the kind of the turning point that Dick had hoped to accomplish during his stewardship of the East Asian Bureau.

My own view is that two things intervened to thwart Dick in achieving those goals. One was the drive in the White House to establish diplomatic relations with China. Chinese-Vietnamese relations were tense, as they have often been throughout history, and the White House gave priority to improving our relations with China rather than with Vietnam.

The second thing that thwarted Dick in his desire to see a reconciliation with Vietnam was Vietnam's mistake of demanding what they alleged was Nixon's commitment to provide 3.5 billion dollars in aid as the price for establishing diplomatic relations. Of course Nixon's commitment for the 3 billion plus in aid was if the North Vietnamese would honor their signature on the peace agreements as negotiated in Paris during the Nixon/Kissinger years. And, of course, they hadn't done that. They had swept over South Vietnam and unified Vietnam by force. It was politically impossible--not even Dick Holbrooke was in favor of meeting that condition, and therefore any hope of reconciling with Vietnam went a-glimmering during the Carter Administration and while Dick was

Assistant Secretary of East Asian Affairs. Later, of course, during the Carter Administration Vietnam invaded and occupied Cambodia and that made it impossible for any administration for some years to come to establish relations with Vietnam.

Q: What was the situation in Malaysia when you arrived there in 1977?

MILLER: Our relations with Malaysia were traditionally very good. We had two areas of contention within the context of overall relations. One was sort of a traditional problem or difference of perspective between the number one consumer nation for primary products and Malaysia, a number-one producer of primary products. In this case tin, rubber and palm oil. Malaysia was very supportive of the UNCTAD proposal at the time for a common fund into which consumers and producers would provide funds to help stabilize world prices of eighteen or so of these products, which were very vulnerable to price swings because of either over- production or over-consumption. The US had a very different perspective, feeling that the fund would never work--that it would be too cumbersome, although we were in the process of negotiating through the UNCTAD mechanism. We had many differences with Malaysia and other primary producers on the subject of the common fund.

The other, more immediate crisis problem, was the great flow of Vietnamese boat people across Malaysian beaches. It had already begun by the time I arrived in the middle of 1977 and became a crisis problem for Malaysia over the next couple of years. Malaysia, of course, felt that we were responsible for the flow as we had failed in Vietnam and that also as a big wealthy country we had the obligation to take these refugees almost before they landed on the beaches. That was a constant irritant in our relations during my tenure in Malaysia.

Q: How did you deal with that problem?

MILLER: Essentially we dealt with it by working with the Malaysians, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' representative in Kuala Lumpur, and with other resettlement countries like France, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and others, to solve Malaysia's problem. I felt that it was a considerable accomplishment on the part of the US mission while I was ambassador there to increase the intake of refugees for resettlement into the United States from something like 600 a month to about 5500 a month. So we had a tremendous refugee operation in Malaysia at the time headed by a young fellow, Joe Gettier who worked wonders, both in terms of gearing up on the US side to take these refugees and working out the various problems both with the UN machine and with the Malaysian government. He really accomplished miracles.

Q: Was he working under you?

MILLER: He was with AID, of course, but working under my authority and direction basically to do what we could to relieve the pressure on the Malaysians.

Q: How did you deal with Washington? I assume there was always reluctance. They would much rather not have the problem.

MILLER: The Washington perspective was different than the field perspective. The Washington perspective was that Indochinese refugees had to be resettled within US communities and therefore there was a big domestic political aspect that the people in Washington had to deal with. There was a big bureaucratic, interagency organization which plugged also into domestic departments and agencies of the government and into the great private sector voluntary agencies in order to get local communities to accept these refugees. From the field we were always pressing for earlier decisions and decisions for bigger quotas. From the Washington perspective, they were pressing us to increase international cooperation--get more countries to take more so we could take less--and also getting us to press the local UN authorities to improve conditions of the local camps in order to reduce the incidence of disease, to improve the screening process to make sure that we didn't take in what we would call any "ringers" from the standpoint of our laws and regulations. We couldn't take ex-criminals, drug dealers, and obviously we couldn't take people with communicable diseases. We also had criteria as to what categories of refugees we could take. People with relatives already in this country, people who had worked for the US government in Vietnam, etc. So Washington had a different perspective putting a lot of pressure on us and we had a field perspective putting a lot of pressure on Washington. But together I think we accomplished a tremendous movement of refugees during the time that I was there.

Q: Were the Malaysian authorities cooperative or were they difficult to deal with?

MILLER: Overall we got a lot of cooperation. There were crises. From the Malaysian standpoint they have a very delicate ethnic balance in the country which I used to call the fatal flaw of Malaysia. It was one of the most successful former colonies among all the former colonies throughout the world. It was one of the most prosperous, most politically stable, but they have an "ethnic fault" line running the length and breadth of their country between the Malay Muslims and the pork-eating Chinese. They looked upon this tremendous, uncontrollable flow of refugees on their beaches as an uncontrollable influx of people of Chinese culture--many Vietnamese refugees were of Chinese origin.

Q: The Vietnamese essentially come not from the Malay culture but from southern China.

MILLER: Not only that but all of these Chinese-culture people were coming across the beaches in some of the most traditionally Muslim Malay areas of Malaysia, thereby creating difficult and tense internal domestic political problems for the moderate Malaysian government. Therefore the Malaysian government had domestic pressures on them, including from radical Islamic elements which were anxious to embarrass the moderate Malaysian Government, to get us, because it was all our fault, to solve this problem immediately. When there were new influxes of boats on the east coast--they seem to come in waves--that was when our moments with the Malaysian government became the most tense. But both governments realized that we had to work together to solve the problem. I think they recognized from the statistics that we and the rest of the

international world were stepping up our intake of refugees. I think they realized that we were cooperating and we were able to work out whatever transitory problems there were.

One of the big crises was when a big old cargo boat called the Hai Hong arrived, for the first time on the west coast of Malaysia, about 20 miles from Kuala Lumpur, with 2500 refugees aboard who were not starving, but were underfed, and among whom disease was beginning to break out. It was an overcrowded, desperate humanitarian situation. The Malaysian government's reaction was to tow the ship out to sea and not let it land. It was the last straw for them. I was getting urgent instructions from Washington not to allow that boat to be towed out to sea. The US TV network cameramen were there to film this thing. I went to see the Prime Minister, and we talked the thing out and he finally agreed--he was being pressed, of course, by his experts to get the thing towed out to sea so that they could ignore it. But finally, the Prime Minister agreed that, if we and the other members of the international community and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees would interview the refugees on the boat, in the harbor and take them directly to the airport to go to their resettlement country, so that the Malaysian government could assure its people that they were not increasing the number of refugees in the country, they would not tow the boat out to sea. We worked out that compromise and that crisis was solved.

Q: You must have done a great deal of work together with the Australians, Canadians, French, and to some extent the British?

MILLER: Frequently. We usually met under the auspices of the local UN High Commissioner for Refugees, who was at that time an Indian gentleman, one, to solve problems for providing adequate care for the refugees in the camps; two, to present a common front the best we could with the Malaysian government; and three, to work out the problems of quotas, categories of refugees, etc. The Malaysians, as time went on, became concerned about what they called the "residual refugees" whom nobody would take; they were afraid that they were going to be stuck with them. There were certain hardened criminals, or people who for one reason or another were totally unskilled and therefore fit no resettlement country's criteria for acceptance. We would get together to discuss those problems and see whether we could come to agreement that some country, one country or another, would accept them to take them off Malaysia's hands. So we did work very closely with the other resettlement countries.

Q: Did Vietnam have representation in Malaysia at that time?

MILLER: Vietnam had an ambassador, and the Malaysians, had bilateral and also ASEAN discussions with the Vietnamese, but at that time in the late '70s, the Vietnamese were not very cooperative. The Malaysian and other ASEAN governments had the feeling that the Vietnamese were trying to encourage the outflow of refugees in order to destabilize the rest of Southeast Asia. I don't know whether they were correct or not.

Q: So there wasn't any really working together...?

MILLER: No, not at all. The Vietnamese, I believe, attended big international conferences on refugees in Geneva and there was pressure put on them to cooperate and slow down the outflow, etc. But in Malaysia proper where I was working I don't recall any instance or evidence of Vietnamese cooperation with the Malaysians or with the international community.

Q: What was your impression of the UN and the caliber of person you had to deal with?

MILLER: I would say very good. They had lots of problems of coordinating this international effort--international staff coming from different bureaucratic cultures and backgrounds trying to work together--but I would say that even though we had our frustrations with them and they with us, that on the whole their operation was very effective.

Q: What were American economic interests in Malaysia and how did you deal with these?

MILLER: Our basic interest was to try to encourage US investment in the country and also in Malaysia as one member of a regional grouping--ASEAN. We had a growing investment on the part of EXXON. They had an expanding oil drilling and production operation on the east coast of Malaysia. While I was there oil companies also brought into production a natural gas extraction operation in east Malaysia off of Sarawak and Sabah. So there were big US oil investments there along with other countries' oil companies. We had a fairly major and growing semi-conductor investment in Malaysia. US companies, Texas Instruments and a number of other companies, were installed there. They were competing with the Japanese semi-conductor companies that were also getting installed there.

One of the problems for the American business community was Malaysia's new economic policy. The policy had been instituted after the race riots of 1969 where hundreds of Malays and Chinese were killed. The Malaysian government had decided on an economic policy designed to equalize the opportunities for Malays to improve their economic conditions. The government set certain rules for foreign companies as well as domestic companies which required that Malays by 1993 have up to 1/3 of the equity in these companies, that Malays be represented on the board of directors, and that Malays be adequately represented on the employment rolls. This gave some of the American businessmen some difficulties in terms of finding qualified Malays, etc. In effect, it was a massive equal opportunity program for the majority. On balance, I think the US businessman found that he could operate in Malaysia, that Malaysia was receptive to foreign investment. As I recall, our investment probably including the oil investment was something over a million dollars while I was there.

Q: Texas Instruments moved much of its production there and in a way we encourage this type of investment, but at the same time it means a drain on American jobs. Is the ambassador getting directions from Washington concerning this? How does this play out?

MILLER: That is an interesting subject, and a confusing one. The Carter Administration, as I recall, changed the rules under which we were operating with respect to American business. As I recall, we were not to encourage US companies to try to sell arms. There was an attempt at least to leave the armament companies more on their own. Similarly, we were to be neutral with respect to the desire of American companies to find investments in Malaysia. Our role was more or less restricted to making sure that American companies were treated fairly and equally with Japanese companies, British companies, French companies, in other words, with other international companies working in Malaysia and that they were treated fairly by the Malaysian government if they had any problems.

Q: Did you have trouble with businessmen at this time? Did they complain about not getting enough help from the embassy?

MILLER: I don't recall any specific problem from an American businessman saying that we were not giving him enough help. Let me make a couple of points. One, I was very pleased that during my tenure in Malaysia the American business community formed an American business council and they got the Malaysian government's approval for the council. It was an American chamber of commerce, but for some reason the Malaysians didn't want it known by that name. We also succeeded in getting the then deputy prime minister, now prime minister, Mahathir as the first formal speaker before that club. I think that was a very good beginning for the council because basically Mahathir at that time laid down the rules by which foreign businessmen were to operate in Malaysia. He said, "We made the rules to solve our own internal problems, but we want foreign investment and if you are willing to play by our rules you will find a very receptive climate here." And then he said, "If any of you find in dealing with the Malaysian bureaucracy inconsistent with what I say here today, come and see me." And a couple of businessmen did come to me saying that they were have problems and would like to get to see the deputy prime minister to see if they could be worked out. He did receive them and I understood that their problems were resolved. So, I would say we had a fairly good and constructive relationship with those in government, including the deputy prime minister.

I recall businessmen have individual problems, some of which, I think, were self-inflicted, but I don't ever recall getting the complaint that there was general unhappiness with the role of the US embassy.

Q: One of the things we try to do in these oral histories is to aim them at people who probably have not been involved in foreign affairs themselves. Could you tell us what you would do during a day as an ambassador in Malaysia?

MILLER: I would start out by reading the morning cable traffic...

Q: This would be from the Department of State.

MILLER: Well, from the Department of State to find out if we had any new instructions in terms of demarches to make on the Malaysian government, or reports to send to Washington to answer their queries. I would read cables from neighboring posts to see if there were any regional developments that affected our business one way or another in Malaysia. I would certainly read cables from other major capitals of the world that were sent our way to keep up to date on major world developments. I would also read religiously the Wireless File, the document sent out daily by USIA containing important public statements by the President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, as well as articles which would keep us up to date on major developments within the United States. In other words, try to keep well informed about what was going on in the world, in the United States, in the region where I was serving and elsewhere in the world, to make sure that I was up to date on anything that might affect the conduct of my responsibilities in Malaysia.

The second thing I would do is have a staff meeting with at least the Deputy Chief of Mission, the Political and Economic Counselors, the Defense Attaché, the PAO and maybe one or two others to sort of plan our work day and to see whether I needed to be brought up to date on any developments that they were aware of but which I was not aware of.

Thirdly, almost any work day would have a number of appointments. Either a visiting American businessman; a foreign ambassador who wanted to call on me to compare notes about something; or perhaps a visitor from Washington, either an official visitor or an unofficial visitor who would want a briefing. There would probably be either some luncheon commitment or a dinner commitment that would require my attendance either for social reasons or for business reasons; to make contacts under informal circumstances with colleagues, with Malaysian government officials, with American businessmen, etc.

Finally during the course of the afternoon, a lot of reports, primarily cables, would end up on my desk for approval for transmittal to Washington to answer Washington's requests for information, or initiated by us to make sure Washington was aware of developments in Malaysia in case they got press queries or congressional queries, or so we could on a continuing basis contribute to the policy-making process in Washington.

Q: The social side--the reception or cocktail is often the bane of the foreign service life. How valuable were they?

MILLER: I would say that if you include cocktail parties, dinner parties and other social invitations, I think they are very important for a number of reasons. They are also a lot of hard work, not just social occasions. You never know when you are going to find out something from somebody that is important to you in carrying out your responsibilities. Very often you could find out things on social occasions that people would be reluctant to tell you in a formal setting in the office. In terms of social occasions generated by Malaysian officials, there again you were showing them that you were interested in things they considered important--ceremonies, ribbon cutting ceremonies or other traditional ceremonies or occasions and therefore you were building up your knowledge and

understanding of the local culture, what they considered important and hopefully making a favorable impression on them so that you would improve your ability to deal with them and carry out your responsibilities. If you got to know the ministers well or the secretaries general in the ministries, when you had to go see them on business and sometimes make points on which they disagreed, if you had a good personal relationship with them the conduct of business was made that much easier. The process of developing a good working relationship was enhanced by seeing them in informal social situations. So the cocktail circuit is very hard work, but it does serve an important underlying purpose.

Q: How did you find your staff?

MILLER: I had a very good staff. It was my first ambassadorial assignment and I was very pleased with my staff. I can't think of any professional staff member who was a problem, whom I didn't feel was pulling his or her weight. It was a very productive staff.

Q: Did you have much dealing with people in the embassies of neighboring countries?

MILLER: Yes. We had a relatively small diplomatic corps and a very close-knit one. The Singapore ambassador was the Dean. He had been there many years. He is now the president of Singapore. He was a highly respected colleague who did what he could to get us together. But we also had our own professional reasons to see our colleagues to exchange information and judgments, to coordinate positions, etc. I don't recall any of the ambassadors or chargés in Malaysia who were difficult to get to know with the exceptions of the ones representing countries we had no relations with, like the North Koreans and Libyans. But we saw a lot of each other and often compared notes. It was particularly important to stay in touch with the countries that were taking refugees in order to work out problems, compare notes, exchange ideas, etc.

Q: This particular time from '77 to '80 what was the feeling of those involved in matters with Vietnam? Was there the feeling that Vietnam might become a major destabilizing power in the area?

MILLER: During the first year and half or so that I was there, the intentions and motivations of the Vietnamese were suspect because of the great refugee outflow and the impact it was having on the entire region. There were efforts on the part of the ASEAN governments in particular to try to persuade Vietnam to slow down the outflow. Vietnam was not cooperative at all. Then, of course, when Vietnam invaded Cambodia and occupied it at the end of 1978, there was great consternation and I think indeed a genuine feeling on the part of the ASEAN countries, particularly closest to Cambodia like Malaysia and Thailand, that Vietnam may have aggressive designs on the region. And we were concerned about that. Vietnam had just signed a security pact with the Soviet Union and nobody was quite sure what Vietnam's ultimate intentions were. So there was great concern in the region and I think a great concern on the part of many foreign embassies there.

We were still in the period of the aftermath of the fall of Vietnam and Cambodia to communism and the failure of the US effort there. There was apprehension on a lot of people's part that the US was "going to turn tail and run." We tried to assure them that that was not the case. We indicated our interest in establishing a dialogue with the ASEAN countries whenever they were ready. We pointed out that we continued to have security ties both with the Philippines and Thailand and that we maintained these commitments.

So there was concern about the security, stability of the region and about Vietnam's intentions. There were a lot of common concerns throughout the diplomatic community, particularly the Western diplomatic community and the ASEAN diplomatic community.

MELVIN R. CHATMAN
Director, Refugee Office, USAID
Malaysia (1977-1980)

Mr. Chatman was born in Oklahoma and raised in California and Michigan. After graduating from the University of Michigan, he pursued theater interests before serving in the US Army in Korea and Vietnam. In 1970 he joined AID and spent the rest of his career with that agency. His overseas postings include Vietnam, Malaysia, Bangladesh and San Salvador. He also had assignments with AID in Washington and New York City dealing with refugee, rice imports and training issues. Mr. Chatman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2006.

Q: Well then so we are talking around '76 or so? What did you do after this?

CHATMAN: Then I went back to, where did I go? No I was assigned to Malaysia because you know about '77 or something like that there was a big influx, after the war had settled the end of the war was over, a couple of years later all of these Vietnamese decided to leave Vietnam.

Q: The boat people.

CHATMAN: The boat people. Malaysia was the focal point of all that. I went and I was the director of the refugee office in Malaysia for a year, deputy director for one year and then director for one year of the refugee office in Malaysia who processed all those people.

Q: What was happening in Malaysia with refugees? What was the attitude of the Malay government?

CHATMAN: Well the Malay government didn't want them to settle in Malaysia. That was the big thing so they put them on little isolated island and they put them on those

islands temporarily where they could be processed by these voluntary agencies where they could interview them and accept them and then the voluntary agencies would ship them back to the States and find homes in the resettlement areas for them back in the States.

Q: How did that work?

CHATMAN: It worked like a dream. It was a little busy but...because we were getting some months we would get 20,000 refugees.

Q: Well if you are processing people there have to be some people who aren't processable, I mean, for one reason or another.

CHATMAN: Very few. Because some countries didn't...see what happened was there were several countries that were the big processors, like the U.S., Australia and a couple other countries really took a lot of them. The U.S. took a million or a half a million of them or something like that.

Q: Canada?

CHATMAN: In smaller numbers but there was almost a home for everybody unless the guy was a criminal or something.

Q: What happened if the guy was a criminal, what did you do?

CHATMAN: I don't really remember because there were not that many...it was very hard to...unless the guy did something in the refugee camp it was almost impossible to do anything and to prove what the person did in Vietnam.

Q: The refugees that you were seeing, the boat people, I'm familiar with what happened to so many of the boat people who ended up around Thailand, I mean they were preyed on by Thai fishermen and pirates and all that. The Malays, did this happen or was this...

CHATMAN: The Malay's were not as bad the Thais were animals to the refugees.

Q: Yeah.

CHATMAN: But see the refugees would love to stay in Thailand because they were Buddhists, they looked very Thai looking and because they looked so Chinese looking they really weren't that welcome in Malaysia because the Malay's didn't particularly like the Chinese that they had.

Q: Yeah, they had a long...

CHATMAN: So they didn't have a big deal about wanting to stay in Malaysia.

Q: They had a war on.

CHATMAN: Plus it was Muslim and they were pork eaters and all of that.

Q: So there wasn't much incentive on either side for absorption?

CHATMAN: No, no.

Q: They both wanted to get the...

CHATMAN: As long as we got them out of there the Malay's would accept them. The deal was as long as we processed them and got them out of there the Malay's would allow them to land on their shores. What they didn't want them to do was to turn them back to sea where they would inevitably die because those old boats and things like that were falling apart. That's what they didn't want them to do.

Q: So in a way it was a system that worked because everyone...we wanted to resettle them, the Vietnamese didn't want to stay there and the Malay's didn't want them there.

CHATMAN: Right, and as long as we kept shipping them out the Malay's didn't have any problems.

PETER B. SWIERS
Political Counselor
Kuala Lumpur (1979-1981)

Peter Swiers was born in Brooklyn, New York and graduated from NYU. He entered the Foreign Service in 1961. He served in numerous posts including Athens, Frankfurt, Moscow, Berlin, Kuala Lumpur and Copenhagen. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1994.

SWIERS: Then was I was called in by Walt Silber and Jim Rosenthal who had been involved in Vietnam affairs when I was in the Paris peace talks. They saw that I was available and the Department was reestablishing the political counselor position in Kuala Lumpur which had been abolished during the Vietnam war but there was so much was activity in Malaysia that the department agreed to reestablish it. It was a rare thing when you think about it. Jim saw my name and asked whether I like to come out. You remember we had that GLOP.

Q: A program to get regional specialists into other regions.

SWIERS: I thought it was a wise thing; it was a perfect GLOP assignment for me; it should look good on my record. So I agreed to go to KL. Within a month or so before we were ready to go, Jim Rosenthal was reassigned, and Lyle Brecken who was the other of

two officers who had worked for Ambassador Bob Miller was asked by Bob to be his DCM. I was practically on my way to KL., but clearly Lyle had much different ideas.

I think Lyle really wanted to have a Malaysian hand in the job. This was going to his first DCMship; he was an FSO-02 and quite nervous about it. We had known each other in RPM, he had succeeded Leon Firth as director of the office of security affairs. I mention this for the record; this was the second time where I had a job offered to me, as in Berlin, where I was not the choice.

I'd just like to back up because there is an interesting anecdote for the record about Leon Firth. It was in RPM when I met Leon for the first time. He was a Foreign Service officer when he and his wife Lynn had their second set of twins - twin daughters. Leon was offered a position on the House Intelligence Committee. I believe it was by Les Aspin rather than Al Gore who was still a congressman at the time. Leon had served in Belgrade and was an absolutely brilliant person; he had a real dilemma because for him to join the House Intelligence Committee was not go on leave without pay - the traditional route. They wanted him to sever his ties entirely to the Foreign Service so there would be no conflict of interest. Leon was in a real dilemma because here he was with four children all of a sudden. I remember him talking about it to me and I said: "I just don't know how to address it. Do you really want to go abroad again, number one? Number two this is a great opportunity." He made the decision to go to the House Intelligence Committee and everything else is history. He was brilliant. A real loss to the service, but actually to our country an even greater gain.

Q: You were in KL from when to when?

SWIERS: I was in KL from '79 to '81. I keep using the word "transition" because I think it's so important to be understood. We were beginning to realize that we had not only withdrawn from Vietnam but that we also tried to lower our profile throughout southeast Asia. The ASEAN countries were quite nervous. I'm one of those in retrospect who felt we should not have gone into Vietnam in the first place, but I'll never fault the people who made the decisions because as we know there was a different perception of the world.

Vietnam taught us a number of things which we probably didn't see before - i.e. that communism is not monolithic, that there were differences of interest between the Chinese and the Soviets which were profound. It was only in Vietnam that we began to understand the real hatred between the Vietnamese and the Chinese. These were things on which sadly we were not well-informed, or at least nobody paid attention to those who knew them.

There are two basic concerns in southeast Asia in 1979. One was the U.S. willingness to meet its commitments - a familiar sound today. Even those in southeast Asia who may have criticized our policies on Vietnam were worried by the precipitousness with which we pulled out of Vietnam. Did that mean that the U.S. would not meet its other commitments? We know SEATO died in the process of our withdrawal. Secondly our

focus was on the Soviet Union. ASEAN's focus was on China with perhaps the Thais having oddly more of a more benevolent view.

Q: What about Malaysia?

SWIERS: The Malaysians had a great concern which went back to the emergency of 1948 when there were conflicts in that country between a 55% ethnic Malay population, a 35% Chinese population, an 8% Indian population and a 2% residual European population. I would note of course that the country was 45% Moslem, all of whom were Malay. So there was an immense concern about what the Chinese role might be. I don't think we fully grasped these differences in our policy because we were focusing on the Soviets.

Q: This is still in '79.

SWIERS: Yes. We did not have as much a focus on the Chinese in terms of our presentation to these countries. This changed somewhat sometime between '79 and '80 while we were there. The Soviets, who can always pull your chestnuts out of the fire for you, rather clumsily sent the aircraft carrier "Kiev" - not a full aircraft carrier but a half aircraft carrier - into the South China Sea on its way to Vladivostok and its way made it had it go up and do a little circle into the Gulf of Thailand.

This was part of the Soviet plan, under Admiral Gorshokov, to develop a blue water navy which they could project into the Pacific. Until that time, the Pacific was largely a U.S. lake except for Soviet nuclear submarines, which were aimed against us, not perhaps against others. I think I have mentioned before that I have to give Harriman great credit for his rejection of the Soviet demand for a role in the occupation of Japan which would have given them an access to the Pacific which they did not get until nearly 30 years later.

Q: Peter, you left Malaysia when?

SWIERS: I left Malaysia in July of 1981.

PAUL P. BLACKBURN
Public Affairs Officer, USIS
Kuala Lumpur (1980-1984)

Paul P. Blackburn was born in Hawaii in 1937. He received his BA from Haverford College in 1960 and an MA from the School for Advanced International Studies in 1962. His postings abroad include Bangkok, Khon Kaen, Udorn, Tokyo and Kuala Lumpur. Mr. Blackburn was interviewed by Charles R. Beecham on November 18, 2002.

Q: Okay, tell me about the Malaysia job.

BLACKBURN: I was very happy to be assigned as PAO to Malaysia. I had been

fascinated by the country when I first visited it in 1963, and then in 1970 had briefly done dissertation research there on the Malaysian media. On that latter visit I stayed with Jodie Lewinsohn in the grand PAO mansion that I later “inherited.” Not only was I pleased with the job, I was nearly ecstatic that I would be living in an abode with a clay tennis court in its front yard.

Before I left for Kuala Lumpur I called – on successive days – on USIA Director John Reinhardt and East Asia Area Director Jodie Lewinsohn. After saying they thought K.L. was an excellent first PAO assignment for me, each had quite different advice about my dealings with the Malaysian FSNs. John said I should exercise strong leadership and try to overcome my tendency to be too easy going and lenient with FSN employees. In contrast, Jodie said she feared that, because I was so awfully stubborn, I would be too demanding and pushy with the staff, so should go easy on them. I never did figure out which one had me sized up accurately – perhaps they both had!

Malaysia was an ideal place to begin my 15 years as a PAO. For starters, support from my Ambassadors – Barbara Watson, Ron Palmer, and Tom Shoesmith – and my DCMs – Lyaal Brecken and Mike Connors – could not have been better, and the American and FSN staffs were highly competent. A complete turnover of American staff accompanied my arrival at the post to replace Wes Fenhagen. Tony Sariti came in as CAO, Edie Russo as IO, and Joann Quinton as EO. Craig Stromme, then the JOT, returned as CAO my last year in K.L. and much later joined me in the EAP Public Diplomacy Office. Among the many standout FSNs were cultural specialist Sharifah Zuriah Al-jeffrie, senior FSN advisor Selvendra Rajendrum, IV/exchanges specialist Dorothy David, librarian Sophia Lim, and my secretary, Helen Lee, who later became the DRS specialist and was replaced by Tina Chee.

I learned to chair a binational Fulbright commission – the Malaysian American Commission for Educational Exchange, or MACEE – and I enjoyed interacting with the excellent contacts my predecessors and the FSNs had developed at all levels of the society. In my first months on the ground, I met political leaders from all the major parties, the educational and cultural elites, and revered figures such as the country’s first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, and the President of the High (Supreme) Court, Tun Suffian. The latter had been an Eisenhower Exchange Fellow and chaired the EEF selection committee.

It was exciting to work in a country with such a rich racial composition. Both the post’s DRS and our USIS staff reflected the tapestry of Malays, Chinese and Indians – Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians – that is Malaysia. Although the USIS FSNs were by and large excellent and worked together well considering their disparate backgrounds, I had to handle some challenging management problems. When easing out certain long-time staffers and tightening up procedures, I tried to apply lessons learned from my inspecting days.

Americans in Malaysia at that time enjoyed a special status. American investors were setting up semi-conductor factories in large numbers, military cooperation was close, and

the Malaysian Government was sending the cream of its Malay students on undergraduate and graduate scholarships to American universities. People wanted to meet Americans, and took pains to explain to us the ins and outs of Malaysian society and politics – typically from the ethnic perspective of the particular speaker. And, best of all, they did it in fluent English, a fact I appreciated after having been at sea so often in conversations in Thai and Japanese during my previous assignments.

Q: Tell me more about the educational exchanges.

BLACKBURN: Malaysian officials, like then Education Minister Musa Hitam, and our Embassy paid considerable attention to the Malay students in U.S. academic programs, especially those who had gone on to study in America. Typically they were young and impressionable. Often they had negative reactions to the permissive environments in which they suddenly found themselves, and for which they were not well prepared. Some analysts believe that Islamic radicalism in today's Malaysia got its first major impetus from disillusioned Malay students who were part of that big wave that went to the U.S. Though we recognized such dangers at the time, overall we thought that having thousands of bright young Malays go to the U.S. was an exciting and hopeful development. Our USIS Country Plan for Malaysia even included promotion of educational linkages as a major objective, nearly up there with our security and trade goals. The focus of the post on advising U.S.-bound students led us to hire Marti Thomson, who first ran the volunteer-based student advising operation at MACEE and then became the first – and most distinguished – “Regional Educational Advising Counselor” for USIA and later the State Department.

Besides promoting educational exchanges and linkages, I spearheaded the formation of the Malaysian Association of American Studies, an organization that continues to flourish to this day.

Q: Wasn't a new U.S. Embassy constructed in Kuala Lumpur about this time?

BLACKBURN: Yes, it was completed in 1983. All USIS facilities, including our off-site “Lincoln Center,” were moved into the new building. I developed a public affairs strategy aimed at both showing off the new facility – which had a terrific design that incorporated Malaysian motifs and did not give one the impression of being the fortress it really was – and encouraging in-person and off-site usage of the library holdings and reference services we had brought over from the Lincoln Center. In carrying out the latter objective, Sophia Lim developed and implemented a brilliant outreach strategy that later was used as a model for other USIS posts throughout the world.

To bring Malaysians comfortably into the Embassy, I dreamed up an art exhibition titled “American Experiences, Malaysian Images.” It featured the work of Malaysian artists who had spent time in the United States. Each artist was invited to show one piece completed before going abroad, one while in the U.S., and one after returning to Malaysia. The catalogue we produced gave each artist his or her own spread. It was a beautiful product, all paid for by a grant from ESSO. The show was opened by a Cabinet

minister and proved a great success. I was so happy with the idea that I replicated it in Thailand on my next assignment, though in that case with very mixed results.

My work on the Malaysian media led me to pay particular attention to the Malaysian press. I had many excellent contacts, some of whom I inherited from legendary Information Officer Mike Brown and some of whom I developed on my own. Helpfully, a convivial gathering – that Mike had earlier promoted – of Malaysian journalists and foreign information officers was held on Friday nights at one or another of the local watering spas.

My marriage to Winona having come to an end by that point, I married Pek, a Malaysian-Chinese academic about six months before leaving the post. Our celebratory wedding dinner was held under a big tent on the fabled tennis court at the PAO residence. Pek, who currently teaches at American University, takes Washington-based students to Malaysia for summer courses – so I feel still connected to the bilateral educational exchanges I started working on during that assignment.

RONALD D. PALMER
Ambassador
Malaysia (1981-1983)

Ambassador Ronald D. Palmer was born in Pennsylvania in 1932. He received a bachelor's degree from Howard University in 1955 and a master's degree from Johns Hopkins University in 1957. Ambassador Palmer joined the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included positions in Indonesia, Malaysia, Denmark, the Philippines, Togo, and an ambassadorship to Mauritius. Ambassador Palmer was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991 and 1992.

Q: Today is June 13, 1991 and this is a continuing interview with Ambassador Ronald D. Palmer. Ron last time we had just gotten to 1981 and you had left Personnel. You were appointed as Ambassador to Malaysia at that time. How did that appointment come about?

PALMER: When the Reagan Administration came to town, the transition group was seated at the State Department. I was roaming all over the building talking to folks as part of my job. When I heard the transition group was installed, I went around to see who they were. They included Ambassador Robert Neumann, who went on to become Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, and the man who became the Under Secretary for Management whose name is Richard Kennedy.

A very strange circumstance at the time was that the feelings on the part of the outgoing Carter people were so bitter against the newcomers. So there got to be some nonsense. The Carter people were suggesting that not complete personnel records be turned over to

the incoming folks. I couldn't quite understand what the rationale for that was until I realized that the concern about the character of the incoming people was so high that some people felt they just couldn't trust them. I couldn't stand for that. I was the one in Personnel with the responsibility for this kind of exchange. Harry Barnes had been fired. So basically I was Acting Assistant Secretary. Joan Clark came along as the incoming Director General, but not really having control of the system and how things were to be done she relied on me.

Perhaps the most basic reason is that when I was teaching at West Point back in 1967-69, I used to take PT at noon. I was on the basketball team of the Social Sciences Department playing "murder ball." I would be taking my shower about the same time as the Deputy Commandant of Cadets was taking his after his exercise. We used to chat. That guy's name was Al Haig. So when Haig came down I was one of the few people that he knew and I was trusted.

Richard Kennedy, is without a doubt one of the most difficult and stormy characters I have ever met. But in contrast to many people whom he could bully...and he was thoroughly capable of bullying...for some reason he couldn't bully me. It was just that I found the whole thing funny. So when he would start raising his voice, I would start laughing. As a consequences in some strange way we had rapport.

One fine day Malaysia was on the group of posts that needed to be filled and we sent up perfectly good candidates. I was on the list but just there because I had had Malaysia experience. Bless my soul, when the thing came back, I think Joan Clark had gone to the meeting, I was the one who had been selected. I think it had a lot to do with the circumstances of being a steady person in a changing transitional situation.

Q: When you went out there what did you see and those you talked to see as American interests in Malaysia in this 1981-83 period?

PALMER: I had very strong feeling about the place of Southeast Asia generally in American policy. I didn't really feel the region was getting the attention that it deserved and specifically I had very strong feelings about Malaysia and its potential to be a better partner of the United States if the US and Malaysia could find a way of developing that relationship.

The difficulty on the American side is the continuing difficulty we have with many, many states. While we may be a very large star in their sky, they are often barely visible in our own sky. This was resented by the Malaysians. I was sensitive to that but there wasn't very much I could do about it. Candidly, I felt the Malaysians were somewhat complacent, somewhat self-satisfied, rather as if Malaysia was the center of the world. So I had my problems from that direction.

Having said that I felt that my major interest was in trying to demonstrate through the interactions of the two countries that the United States, 250 million people, and Malaysia with perhaps 15 million people could have an effective relationship notwithstanding their

differences in size. What it meant was that both sides would have to take each other seriously. That was where I spent a good deal of my time trying to have them understand us and us understand them.

We had a range of issues. Perhaps refugees was one of the most poignant and difficult. On refugees I have to say that Malaysia was then and has continued to be very helpful and very supportive.

Q: Explain what the refugee problem was.

PALMER: If you look at a map you will observe that Vietnam is not quite due north of Malaysia but is north. The water currents are such that if you launch a boat, and get out into the ocean and just point south basically you will run into Malaysia. This was what a large number of people from Vietnam had done starting from the fall of Saigon in 1975...so-called boat people. In the beginning a lot of them were Chinese and that represented a very special problem in Malaysia given the ethnic makeup of the state which is Malay and Chinese. These people drifted into the Malaysian State of Terengganu and there an island, Pulau Bisot, which had been made into a refugee camp. There were great problems in terms of coping with feeding these people, supplying security, etc.

In this context, the Malaysians particularly, but at that time period, the Singaporeans and Indonesians as well as the Thai, in terms of overland refugees, depended upon American and Australian and European guarantees to take the refugees out of the camps. In the case of the first asylum countries of which Malaysia was one, there was never a notion that these people would stay there permanently. They obviously could not sustain these types of ethnic infusions and the idea was that the refugees would go on some place else.

So, there was a constant sort of tension over the case loads...the number of refugees on the one hand and the number of persons that were being taken off to go elsewhere on the other hand.

But I thought, and I still think, that the Malaysians handled that pretty well. There was a large humanitarian aspect to it. There was also a very, very complicated domestic political problem about it as well.

I will speak later on about Prime Minister Mohamed Mahathir because he got the world's attention when all this started back in 1975 when he was Deputy Prime Minister by basically saying that Malaysia was going to shoot these refugees as they came ashore because they were simply illegal immigrants. That powerfully focused the minds of those involved in refugee issues.

Typically in those days there would be somewhere around 20,000 refugees in a camp. In certain seasons when the winds would change, and depending on circumstances of what was happening back in Vietnam, you could get very large numbers of people just sort of floating in. They used the lights from the flares from the offshore oil wells to guide them.

Q: The Malaysians wanted to get them out and we were putting a lot of pressure on the Malaysians not to cast them out, did you find yourself betwixt and between?

PALMER: I must say that I had a certain kind of attitude towards my mission or even about myself. It was that the only way I could work with the Malaysians successfully was if they trusted me. Of course, I had the same attitude with regard to my colleagues in the American government. They could trust me as well to do as well as I could in terms of pursuing the American agenda, as long as I felt the Malaysian interests were also being adequately looked at.

Much had to do with the setting of reasonable targets of off-take of refugees. When I say reasonable I mean that our targets had to be sufficiently large and realistic that the Malaysians would accept that this was our best effort, that we were doing the most we could. They were reasonable. However, they knew that if we wished to we could take all these folks in. In their mind whether or not we did so had to do as much with political will as it did with other types of persuasions.

In any event, we periodically had visits from the UN High Commissioner for Refugees out of Geneva and members of his staff who were located in Bangkok. As far as I am concerned our Embassy always approached these matters with as much candor, earnestness, and sincerity as we possibly could. That was true also in terms of our dealings with the Malaysian government and also in our dealings with the American government.

So, it worked. This comes back to the notion of how I pursued the mission. I think I am describing to you a kind of pro-active approach which doesn't mean that I was ringing the Tocsin at every point either in terms of American relations with the State Department or with Malaysia, but it did mean that I was not afraid to call a spade a spade when I thought the case needed it.

The next issue I want to raise is narcotics. Here the Malaysians were outstanding. We at that time had three DEA agents in the country and the Malaysians were very cooperative in terms of operations we would run in Penang. Malaysia in those days was a transit country in terms of heroin coming out from Thailand and then going on to Europe, etc. Unfortunately, people who move a product within a country tend to get paid in the product whatever it may be. So with heroin falling off the truck, so to speak, it did become somewhat dispersed in the Malaysia and therefore became a very, very frightening problem for the Malaysian government.

At the time that I was there, 1981-83, there was relatively little processing equipment in the country. That has changed somewhat. A certain amount of processing facilities have developed in the area where the Malaysian Communist Party was operating. I will come back to that somewhat later.

The point is that through the time I was in Malaysia the number of local Malaysian heroin addicts ranged from something like 120,000 as a bottom, conservative figure to a high figure of as many as 400,000. This was a very frightening problem.

Q: Those proportions are quite high for a small country.

PALMER: Exactly.

Q: Particularly an Asian country that hasn't normally reached those proportions.

PALMER: There were several aspects to this, all of which were very troubling to everyone. We were always trying to find ways of dealing and coping and we are still doing so. Malaysia, after all, was a country going through tremendously upsetting, destabilizing kind of changes of all types: socially, politically, psychologically. These changes have their impact. I would say that Malaysia in many ways is the prototypical country of the "paper chase" in terms of getting academic documentation. If you don't pass what used to be called the 11plus examination you are shunted into less than higher level of academic pursuits and preparations. God forbid if you don't pass the lower certificate examination in the first half of secondary school at about the age of 15/16. You do not have a chance to go on to higher levels of secondary schools which would take a child up to about 18/19 years of age and which would enable you to go directly into medical school, and the whole schooling kind of system that the British installed.

Q: I am interrupting here, because I want to focus more on what you did as the American ambassador. You have been a schoolteacher too long, you are explaining Malaysia well, but lets focus on what you did.

PALMER: Then I have to say that where all I said before comes out is that you have people who return to the villages and sometimes you have a drug being dispensed in the villages. It is hard to imagine anything worse than that.

So we brought in experts in terms of dealing with narcotic issues from places like Daytop, which is in New York. This was a rugged, harshly, disciplined sort of approach. We did a lot in the way of teaching training programs. We worked very closely with the police, with the educational authorities and also with political authorities.

One of the things that I spent a lot of my time on then was commodity issues. Malaysia has been one of the world's largest producer of tin, rubber, cacao, and palm oil. The early 1980s was a period in which there was a down turn in commodity prices. One of the particular problems which manifested was in tin. The United States has had a stockpile of strategic materials since World War II and I don't know what it consists of today. But typically it consisted of everything from feathers to minerals, including tin. I am not able to remember how many tons of tin the United States has in its stockpile. But our stockpile has tin in vast amounts, hundreds of thousands of tons, and so periodically the United States releases tin from its stockpile in an attempt to realize a certain amount of return and for other reasons that have to do with simply trying to move materials through the

stockpile. Although we were sometimes moving tin in dimensions of 12 or 13 thousand tons a year, we were not acting like a producer, although the levels of tin we were releasing came close to the levels that some of the actual tin producers were putting on the market. To the producers we appeared occasionally to act as if we were not trying to get the best price we could. We seemed to be acting without regard to market conditions to many people interested in tin. This is an issue that has been going on since about 1962.

Tin was not the only commodity problem. There was also rubber. We went through a long problem with rubber and I really don't know how the rubber stockpile issue came out. In contrast to rubber, of course, aged and had to be released or thrown away. I think when tires were changed in the United States so that instead of using synthetic rubber the new radial tires needed a certain amount of natural rubber that gave a boost to natural rubber use. This synergistic result seems to have helped the rubber stockpile problem to be susceptible to a net resolution.

In any event the stockpile issue was a terrible problem in bilateral relations and had been for many years. It made the United States appear like a bully, like we really didn't care what happened. It was a strange situation.

Many of the smaller producing mines were ones that were working over territory that had already been used. These US tin releases tended to reduce the price of tin and made some of the Chinese labor-intensive operations uneconomic. This caused Chinese entrepreneurs to put political pressure on the Government.

This added to existing Malay-Chinese problems. These US tin releases were typically Chinese and very labor intensive. The Malay-Chinese issue was a sensitive problem, as you know.

The tin issue became inflamed in bilateral relations in 1982. One of the strangest things that started happening was that there was a mystery buyer who came into the market. This mystery buyer started driving the price of tin up. In this context the American in GSA, the stockpile manager, and the mystery buyer were sort of vying with each other. One day I sent a long message into the State Department going over the heads of the regional bureau. At that time John Holdridge was the Assistant Secretary and I simply was not getting satisfaction in terms of what I thought the issue needed in terms of attention.

So Larry Eagleburger was at that time the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, and Larry has always been one of my supporters, gurus. He was involved in my selection to my first ambassadorship in the mid-seventies. So I sent a message For Eagleburger: From Palmer, describing what was happening. We were creating enemies and a situation that was simply untenable.

Apparently Eagleburger bounced the thing back to Holdridge and company, which did not make John my friend to say the least. John sent me a very vigorous telegram criticizing my cable to Eagleburger. Eventually, I also got a somewhat less than

wonderful evaluation of my performance from him. It was good but not wonderful. I paid the price. That's life.

In due course, I was called on the telephone one day to come see the Prime Minister. Prime Minister Mahathir tried to give me holy hell. I wouldn't take it because there was no reason to give me holy hell. I said whatever was happening on the market, was the result of the US selling in the market, but it was also the result of the mystery buyer. There was something happening in the market that was unusual and it looked as if someone was attempting to corner the market and drive the price up. I had my suspicions that it was the Malaysians. Until then I had always had pleasant relations with Prime Minister Mahathir who was a very, very rugged character. The meeting was unpleasant but it was a standoff.

I went back to my office whereupon the Prime Minister called to tell me that he was going to have a friend of his get in touch with me to explain the Malaysian situation in greater detail. I wondered who could do that better than the Prime Minister. It turned out that this friend was a man who was a Malaysian Senator at the time. His name was Daim Zainuddin. Daim was a business partner of the Prime Minister. He was happy just doing business but he had become a politician--reluctantly. He had been involved in land development and housing. Daim called me and asked if I could come around to his house where he and some friends could talk to me about some of these issues and problems. I agreed.

I went to his house and met him. I had never seen him before. He was sharp and intense. I knew quickly he had a first-class mind. As I entered the house, I saw there were about ten people seated there. I noticed there was an embassy officer with his Chinese girl friend. Daim's wife said, "Tonight we are not going to act like Malays. We are not going to be indirect. Tonight we are going to tell you exactly what is on our minds."

They proceeded to do so, the ten or so of them with me in the bull ring. They were all biting and chewing on me. I soon discovered that this had no malevolent intent. They were trying to explain the world from their perspective. It was not just tin. It included the whole range of issues including the lack of investment by America and the fact that the US was not taking Malaysia seriously, in their view. They said Malaysia was exactly the kind of country that the US ought to be trying to help: a country that did good things for it, a country that had self respect; a country that had no intention, ever, of groveling before the United States. We had a really vigorous exchange.

Finally Daim's wife, whose name is Mahani, stopped it and declared time out. She is a wonderful woman. We had a meal. We established a good relationship despite all the debate. It was basically that they were accusing me and the United States of not being able to do things that we really couldn't do and of doing things that we weren't doing. So a large part of my effort was trying to explain my version of reality to them. I don't know whether I was successful but I think they realized I was sincere and was telling the truth.

Q: Were you trying to explain that we didn't feel there was essentially a problem in Malaysia and were more concerned with the Middle East, etc.?

PALMER: I did it a little differently because that approach will make people angry. What I did instead was to try to explain simply in bilateral terms what the US and Malaysia ought to be trying to do with each other. I did make the point that Malaysia had to be realistic. Malaysia was never going to get the type of attention that perhaps larger and more powerful countries would inevitably get. I tried to say that in a way that did not incite my audience. This went on and on and on.

At the end of the evening, I had said everything that I could possibly say and I felt that they had said everything they could say. I was very impressed though that I had met with extraordinary Malays. These were personal friends. This had been a very serious, high level, non-political group of citizens. They were well disposed towards the United States but they were intensely nationalistic, proud of their country and society, and demanding of respect for Malaysia.

Q: There was not an ideological problem?

PALMER: No, no. Fortunately, the young man who had been there from the Embassy came in to see me the next day and I had a chance to review the evening with him. He was in the political section and I asked if he would be able to do a message that would give the flavor of the encounter. He did a good job and sent in a useful cable.

This would have been about March or April, 1983, because in June that year there was the ASEAN Ministerial meeting in Bangkok. After the meeting, Secretary of State Shultz met with all the US ambassadors to ASEAN and we talked back and forth. After that he called each of us in for individual discussions. I had been pretty vigorous in stating my views, as seen from Malaysia. I had disagreed with the Secretary when all the others were generally letting him say whatever he wanted to say. He had been very hard on the Third World generally and I finally made a long speech disagreeing with him. I said whatever he thought was the problem with the Third World was not the case in ASEAN, except for the Philippines which was the American problem. The rest of the countries out there were by and large trying to do things in the way that the US said we wanted and ASEAN ought to be given credit for that.

When he called me in he said, "I never understood the Foreign Service's personnel system." Therefore, I knew I was going to be relieved and that there was nothing at that point waiting for me in terms of a next assignment. That was okay with me. That is life in the fast lane. The Secretary turned to tin. He said, "What can we do about tin?" I said, "Do you want to do something about tin, Mr. Shultz?" He said, "Yes." I said, "All we need to do is become predictable." He asked me to explain.

Q: He was an economist.

PALMER: Yes. So I explained the role of the various producers. I explained the nature of the market, how much was going into the market and what the result was of US tin disposal policy. Do you know, I was the last Ambassador to be received at that time. Then he said I should come with him to the Five Plus One meeting where the five ASEAN Ministers would address the Secretary of State. This was the dialogue session. Shultz took his seat and I sat with the ambassadors. Very quickly into this session, somebody, not the Malaysian, addressed Shultz and essentially said that there was a major problem with the United States in terms of tin. This person said you are cutting our throats. Shultz said that we are going to make a new American policy with regard to the tin issue and indeed with other commodities issues. We were going to be predictable. They would be able to see what we were doing. Our actions would be transparent. The US had no desire to affect markets. Anything we sold from our stockpile we wanted to go into a market that was strong and steady. We had no desire to depress the market because we would then get less for the goods from our stockpile.

I sat there and said to myself, "Hallelujah!" It wasn't that he read my brief, but he had heard everything that I had said.

So I went back to Kuala Lumpur. Now this is June. Along about August I got a highly classified message, you know, the kind you burn before reading, I think it came from Eagleburger. It said that they had got what I wanted, however, in order to get it they had to roll David Stockman (Director of the Bureau of the Budget at that time and a very powerful figure in the Reagan early years) and seven or eight Cabinet Secretaries. Consequently, the Department told me I had what I wanted but not a word of my instructions could be changed because it would mean having to go through another painful interagency process.

I looked at the instructions and saw that there was room to nudge it around a bit. I called up Senator Daim and told him that I thought we had something to work with. I went to see him and discussed my instructions. He said such and such would have to be changed and I told him no changes were possible. That was the problem. In order to make this work we had to keep the tin issue firmly fixed on the result we wished to achieve and my instructions could achieve that if we could avoid too much legalistic hassling.

He went through the process on his side including briefing the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister for Basic Commodities, etc. However, these discussions were difficult. He kept me informed but I had to try to keep up with him. I sent messages back and forth to Washington. Finally Washington agreed to what we had managed to work out and said that they thought we had something that might be put together in a final agreement.

I went to Singapore where Daim was at that point, and we negotiated for a couple of hours and finally decided the way to handle problems was to write a side note, a minute as it were, to the negotiations. So we did so. This was successful with the Malaysian government and the ASEAN Governments. Not long after, Daim told me he was going to have to go into Parliament because he was getting leaned on by the politicians.

After going into the Parliament he became Minister of Finance. I was fortunate in having him for a friend. Our relationship was established in blood...both having to deal with our own bureaucracies. We have had a very pleasant relationship since then.

One of the things that has happened subsequent to my ambassadorship is that the Malaysians have become much more open to foreign investment and much more open to American investment. I am not going to tie it all to me, far from it, but, eventually, the fact that we were able to get this deal on tin was the consequence of White House involvement. Gaston Sigur, Richard Childress and others who were there at that time had a positive view of Malaysia and helped create a better US-Malaysia bilateral atmosphere. This helped greatly in increasing the interest of US investors in Malaysia.

So here in 1991, clearly Malaysia and the United States are not on the same level of warmth of relationship as many countries, but our relationship is on a higher plane. It is better, more open, than many US relationships and I think we really are doing quite well. Many aspects of the relationship have become much more open and helpful to both sides.

One should not forget that there is a defense context to this relationship. One consequence of working, as it were, on tin and getting something together there, was that one day I was in seeing the Prime Minister with the Commander of the Seventh Fleet. Malaysia and the rest of the ASEAN countries have very solid relations with CINCPAC whose headquarters is in Honolulu. CINCPAC has people working in all the phases of political-military affairs and they are outstanding officers in my opinion.

They visit the ASEAN countries periodically and have had a positive influence. Among other things they sometimes take part in helping to set up exercises. One of the points of military exercises is to exercise communication, intelligence and all those functions that need to be good if there is a military requirement. You may have noticed that General Schwarzkopf testified yesterday, June 12, about his concerns about the battle field intelligence.

Q: We are talking about the Persian Gulf War against Iraq.

PALMER: So CINCPAC officers and local military officers hold what are called CPXs, Command Post Exercises. We were doing, and continue doing very nice exercises with Malaysia, Indonesia, etc. So with the Commander of the Seventh Fleet present, I said to the Prime Minister, "Have you ever been on a carrier?" He said, "No." I said, "How would you like to go?" He said that he would like to. Then and there, I was within a month of departing the country, September, 1983, we started the ball going so that the Prime Minister of Malaysia did go and spend an afternoon on the "Carl Vinson," which is a very first class modern carrier. He had lunch, a tour and watched launching of aircraft, etc.

It was a funny situation in many ways because the Malaysian Foreign Ministry did not want the Prime Minister to do it, but he did. Finally it was agreed that there was to be no publicity about the visit. That was no problem. There must have been ten or more on the

Malaysian side and we had a great time. The Navy took us on board in what are called COD aircraft, (carrier-on-deck) aircraft. They looked perfectly innocuous when you see them on the ground, but I began to have concern when I could see that we were being strapped in. I was told we would be landing on the carrier and stopped by use of arresting hooks. If you haven't landed on a carrier and been stopped by the arresting hook it is a very jolting experience.

Then we proceeded to have a good visit. As it became time to leave the Prime Minister looked at me and said, "Surely even the Americans would not be crazy enough to send the Malaysian Prime Minister off an aircraft carrier in a catapulted airplane." I said, "Yes they would." We all laughed; sure enough we all got into that aircraft again and were catapulted off.

The point of all that is that it is possible to have very useful, man-to-man, serious relations with foreign leaders. You don't always try to get everything that you can, you are lucky to get even part of what you want. But there is something very important about getting person-to-person, I don't think it has to be a man necessarily, a woman can be just as effective, but to get relations of confidence going with the foreign leader.

I make the point about this to say that there were several things that advanced the ball during my time there in the country. I hope I am not egotistical in saying this, but I think there has been a long term effect because prior to my being there most Malays had been very distant from Americans. I don't know how people have done after me, but certainly my embassy had good relations with the Malay community, including the nobility. The Americans have always had good relations with the Chinese and that continued during my period. I think we also had pretty good relations with the Indian community. The embassy was well thought of by all three communities, as well as the diplomatic, and expatriate community, including the expatriate Americans.

We had access. We established a kind of a frame of reference in which ongoing plans and attitudes with regard to using the American educational system for higher education developed even more. We had a great USIS headed by Paul Blackburn. I think somehow because we had a good Embassy, we had good rapport. I think this encouraged the Malaysians to get into the mode of thinking of the US as a good place to send students. A pattern was started that eventually led to something around 25,000 students studying in the United States. They came at the freshman level and stayed for four or more years. I don't want to attach that unduly to our embassy's effectiveness but I do believe that the United States was seen increasingly as another possibility for Malaysians.

It started with Malaysians purchasing property and as they did they discovered that there was a lively life and culture in the United States. They discovered the variety of the United States: that there was different types of weather in the United States. I don't say that to make fun of them. Previously, their experience had been in England. Once they started to make more discoveries about the United States they realized property could be purchased at good prices in many places in the United States. Obviously, many of these same people had children and the youngsters started going to college and university in the

States and there has developed a kind of warmth to the relationships over the years. I think this has been really important for both sides.

Now, candidly, I think the United States has got a problem in terms of looking at the Malaysian situation in that Prime Minister Mahathir, having come to power in 1981 and still being in power in 1991, and is likely to be in power for some while to come. He is becoming one of the more senior political figures in Asia. He, himself, is developing a certain third world leadership following and I think it is in our advantage to understand that even though Malaysia is a small country, it does carry a certain weight and authority with the world out there because they have been successful. They have had 8 or 9 percent growth regularly. Malaysia and Prime Minister Mahathir believe they do not get adequate respect from the United States Government.

The point I would simply make is that I think my embassy carried on with something that others had developed in earlier years before us and has been developed since we were there. Basically I saw my mission as continuing the effort to put relations between the United States and Malaysia on an upward curve. They are still on that curve.

Q: You said that you had sort of ruffled feathers back in the Department of State by trying to draw attention to Malaysia. How did that affect your next assignment? You said you left in 1983.

PALMER: First let me say that when I left Malaysia, I had an accolade that very few people have received from the Malaysian Prime Minister. In his gruff way, he stopped one day as we were both at some affair and looked at me very directly and said, "Ambassador Palmer you have done a good job here." Of course I almost had a heart attack.

DONALD MCCONVILLE
Economic Counselor
Kuala Lumpur (1981-1984)

Mr. McConville was born and raised in Minnesota and was educated at St. Mary's College in that state. After service in the US Army overseas, he joined the Foreign Service in 1962. Specializing in Economic and Trade issues, Mr. McConville served in a number of posts abroad, including Panama and Vietnam as Economic Officer and as Economic Counselor in Korea, Malaysia, Mexico and the Philippines. In Washington, Mr. McConville also dealt primarily with International Trade and Economic matters. Mr. McConville was interviewed by Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: You were in Malaysia from when to when?

McCONVILLE: From '81 to '84.

Q: What was the situation, both politically and economically, when you went out there?

McCONVILLE: Politically, a new prime minister had just been elected, and he's still in position. His name is Mahathir. Earlier he had been involved with the riots in 1959 or something like that in Malaysia when there had been these race riots and so forth. He had a reputation at least as being a radical and a rabble-rouser and so forth, and he had been exiled from the major political party there in Malaysia and only recently had been restored, and having been restored to the party, he succeeded in being able to take it over and be elected the prime minister when the previous prime minister either died or was in ill health. I think he had died, or maybe was in ill health and had to step down. So there was a certain degree of apprehension about just how this would work out with this man who had at least been a militant in his younger days. He also had adopted a policy, which he called "Look East." He had professed to be very unhappy that Asians were looking too much to the west, to England and the United States, for their models and that they should look instead to Asians, and he had identified particularly the Japanese as being very successful Asians. So he had something called a "Look East" policy, and there was apprehension about that. The fact is it turned out that he did hold some of these beliefs but he was also very pragmatic. A number of the people close to him were very conscious of the importance to Malaysia of having good relations with the United States and with the UK, so there was much less to this than appearances. But it was sort of a delicate situation to handle.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

McCONVILLE: When I first got there, it was a guy named Ron Palmer. He was there for two years, and then the final year - I'm trying to remember the guy's name; it was Tom. He was an old Japanese hand. He had actually been the consul general in Hong Kong. It was his last tour and he became ambassador to Malaysia. Both of them were career officers. In any event, it was an unusual relationship. Economically Malaysia was doing very well. They're very blessed with natural resources, particularly rubber and tin, although rubber and tin were becoming more of a problem area at that time than they had been, but also with petroleum, and petroleum might have been particularly significant. It wasn't produced on the scale of Indonesia or any of the Arab countries, but it was generating a lot of resources. One of the legacies of the British colonial rule in Malaysia had been to leave in place a very capable civil administration. The civil servants and so forth were of pretty high quality. Now, they were almost all Malays under this sort of arrangement that Malaysia had this understanding between the races that the Malays would dominate the political situation as long as the Chinese were left to pursue their economic interests without too much interference. The Indians, being a much smaller minority, also had to carve out their own role. But it was, in appearance at least, a democracy, but it was a democracy in which the Malays ran the government and the elections were open and fair, but the Malay political party was pretty authoritarian in its own right and could pretty much dictate what happened within the country. The press was free up to a point, but if they overstepped their bounds at all, they could quickly be controlled. At this particular time, tin was still important in Malaysia, and Malaysia was

the world's largest tin producer, but Mahathir, in his early days as prime minister, shortly before I had gotten there, he and some of the people around him had been enticed by one Mark Rich into a scheme to corner the tin market. They had done this all covertly, of course, and the attempt ultimately had failed. They hadn't succeeded in cornering enough of the market, and what really had thrown the real wrench into it was that the U.S. had significant stocks of tin in its GSA (General Services Administration) stockpile and the U.S. began making releases of tin from that stockpile, and this had undercut this effort to corner the tin market. Mahathir never admitted that the government of Malaysia was in fact involved in this effort, but he was personally intensely angry at the U.S. for what he considered had been this effort that had scuttled his plans. So literally during the first year or so I was there, Mahathir never failed to mention, whenever he spoke to anybody, whether it be a group of little old ladies that came by or the visiting prime minister of the UK (United Kingdom) or whoever it was that had any kind of meeting, that he would denounce the USA GSA tin sales. Some of the people who were very pragmatic and also very pro-American within his inner circle saw this as being harmful to Malaysia's interest but they still had to deal with this quirky sort of personality of Mahathir. So they had been approaching us, and we had done a little ferreting on our own, we in the embassy, Ambassador Palmer and myself and some others, and they indicated to us that they would like to find a way to develop a better relationship between Malaysia and the United States but we had to find some way of finessing this tin issue and to come up with some sort of agreement on U.S. tin sales. The most important tin producers, other than Bolivia, which was sort of a wild card, were Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand, so this was to be a U.S.-ASEAN agreement on tin. Also, GSA at the time that was like a black box. They would absolutely refuse to discuss their policy about releases and so forth. What the ASEAN countries -- primarily Malaysia; Indonesia and Thailand were willing to settle for almost anything that Malaysia would be -- wanted was to just get some kind of agreement with us that GSA would just consult with them, just give them an opportunity to have their say. They weren't expecting any promises or any commitments but simply just to be able to have annual consultations. Fortunately, about this time there was a new man named to head GSA in the United States, and when he came to understand this, this made eminent sense to him because he saw the importance to the U.S. of having good relations with these ASEAN countries and there was practically no cost to this. We simply had to go through the motions of having a consultation, letting them have their say. So we ultimately were able to work out an agreement, and we in the embassy were largely the instigators of this. We were dealing with some inner circle of Mahathir's that was outside of the regular foreign policy establishment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and so forth, in Malaysia, and we ruffled a few feathers there.

Q: I would imagine you would have.

McCONVILLE: But these people were truly close to Mahathir and included the Deputy Prime Minister, a guy who subsequently came...

Q: Anwar?

McCONVILLE: No, it was before Anwar. Mahathir subsequently turned on him later on

and severely punished him. Anwar was a young militant at the time and was a favorite of Mahathir. In any event, that again was a pretty interesting period to be in Malaysia, and Malaysia was doing very well economically. Politically, as I say, Mahathir was a wild card, but essentially they were a fair and open government if you accepted the fact they had this unusual relationship with the races there. There was a massive affirmative action program for the Malays, but the Chinese, on the other hand, were doing very, very well in Malaysia, and while they resented a great deal this sort of favoritism of the Malays, they still felt that they were doing very, very well and didn't really want to go anywhere else.

One thing that was happening at this particular period of time, there was tremendous expansion in the number of Malaysian students going to the United States and studying at U.S. universities. Malaysia, again, because they had all funds from petroleum, were able to fund Malaysian students studying abroad, undergraduate studies as well as graduate studies, but all the people who were funded by the government were Malay. Now, the Chinese, those who were making enough money, would send people off at their own expense. Earlier in Malaysia's history, most of these people had gone off the UK or maybe to Australia or Canada or something like that, part of the Commonwealth nations, because of Malaysia's orientation, but at this point in time they were becoming more and more oriented to the United States so by this time at least half or more of these people were going to the United States. Again, this was going to have a very positive impact ultimately on U.S.-Malaysian relations because of all these people who were coming back and were basically bringing back a lot of American ideas and basically good feelings toward the United States. So that was also something that was very much in the interest of U.S.-Malaysia relations and something that we were able to help foster. On the whole it was, again, a very healthy relationship but there were traps out there you had to be careful of. I think one of our major accomplishments was bringing off this U.S.-ASEAN tin agreement during this period of time, which we did manage to pull off despite great odds.

Q: While you were dealing with ASEAN both times, were there any sort of problem states from your perspective in dealing with ASEAN?

McCONVILLE: Mahathir himself was one of them because of his particularly quirky personality. Indonesia was always difficult to deal with, but it would depend upon the issue. They all had their reasons for wanting to have a good relationship with the United States, but you had to recognize that ASEAN itself and the relationships between those countries, it was not going to become a European Economic Community, certainly not anytime soon. They were going to move at their own pace, and you simply had to accept that. It was becoming more and more in our interest to have them functioning at least as an economic cooperative arrangement in that in the international economic arena generally the ASEAN group was a very moderate, pragmatic third-country group. You could work with them very effectively in international economic organizations. They represented a third-country group and had stature within that world, but at the same time they were pragmatic, they were generally Western-oriented, they followed reasonably market-oriented economic models themselves, so it was a very positive force, and for them to be able to come up with a collective position, it generally was easier to work with

them as a group rather than trying to deal with each of them individually, although you still did this on a number of issues as well. But it was a group that was getting more and more stature internationally. Again, by this time I had spent a good deal of my career in Asia, East Asia and Southeast Asia, and many of these people were people that I had come to build up some pretty good relationships with, and I had an awful lot of experience in dealing with the Southeast Asians as well as Northeast Asians. I was very comfortable with that and felt I was pretty effective. Then when I finished my tour there, I went back....

ALPHONSE F. LA PORTA
Deputy Director, Office of Malaysia, Burma and Singapore Affairs, East Asia
Bureau
Washington, DC (1982-1985)

Ambassador La Porta was born and raised in New York and educated at Georgetown and New York Universities. After serving in the US Army, he joined the Foreign Service in 1965. During his career the ambassador had several assignments in Washington in the personnel and administrative field. His foreign assignments include Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, New Zealand, where he served as Deputy Chief of Mission, and Naples, Italy. In 1997 he was named Ambassador to Mongolia, where he served until 2000. Ambassador La Porta was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.

Q: Well, then you went to Malaysia in '72. You were there from when to when?

LA PORTA: I was there for three years, the middle of 1972 to the middle of 1975. I knew the ambassador when he was DCM in Jakarta. He was Marshall Green's DCM, Jack Lydman. Having worked for Jack as consular section chief and having been associated with him when I was in the political section in Jakarta, he was receptive to my joining him in Kuala Lumpur. I went to the political section and essentially had the same kind of portfolio that I had in Indonesia: Muslims, regional affairs (in Malaysian terms that included Sabah and Sarawak), relations with Indonesia, ASEAN and also youth affairs.

The political counselor at that time was John Helble, a veteran East Asia officer, and my colleague and Chinese affairs expert was Murray Zinoman. We reported to the DCM, Bob Dillon, with whom I was later privileged to serve with in Ankara, Turkey. Overall we had a strong and competent embassy. Jack Lydman was a steady hand, to the point that a few people found him somewhat cold-blooded and aloof.

Q: Well, let's look at Malaysia at this time. Could you sort of describe the political situation, the government that you'd be dealing with?

LA PORTA: The prime minister when I arrived was Tunku Abdul Rahman, who was

known as the father of Malaysian independence in 1963. Between 1961 and 1963 there was that strange federation with Singapore in which neither the Tunku, as he was known, and the prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, were very comfortable with each other. Malaysia peaceably went its own way in 1963. Tunku Abdul Rahman represented the Malay aristocracy that had been nurtured, if not coddled, by the British during their nearly 100 years of control. He had a very patrician view of governing and was trusted by the Chinese and Indians, but not by Malay "Young Turks" who wanted to assert their political primacy. Fortunately the British left a number of very strong institutions, one of which was the civil service. They were very good, and they are very good to this day. Secondly, the British left a strong educational system with a growing university system. Thirdly, they imparted a sense that merit counts in that society, whether a meritocracy in government service, the private sector, the educational system or whatever.

Q: Wasn't there a problem, I don't know the area, but what I gather there's this gap between the Chinese who always, I mean, even in our country, are extremely hard working and the Malays who one thinks of as being more laid back. In a meritocracy I would think this would cause a problem.

LA PORTA: The British approach had been to consign the economy to the Chinese, give government over to the Malays and keep the ethnic Indian migrant population in the agriculture sector and in petty trading. The British ultimately didn't do the country any favors by having this compartmentalization, but during the period of colonial rule it worked. In other words, there were rough understandings that the Chinese community would be ascendant in the economic sphere; to the extent that any aspiring Malay business people wanted to make a fortune that was fine, but that basically that's the way things were politically. For example, the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) represented urbanized English speaking and Chinese speaking Chinese, while the UMNO (United Malays National Organization) which itself initially was a coalition of several Malay organizations, represented the Malays. The Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) represented the Indian community, thus there was a comfortable division of labor and politics that the Tunku brought to independence in 1963.

By the early '70s the system of consensus in Malay politics had broken down in the racial violence of May 1969 and you had activist fringe groups beginning to appear. A chauvinistic Chinese party, the Democratic Action Party (DAP) began to launch appeals to lower class, Chinese-educated Chinese who claimed basically "You are not getting your due in this system. You're held to a subordinate status. You need to get more of the benefits; the health care system isn't operating in your favor. You're having difficulty getting your kids into schools. You're not allowed to teach Chinese in the state schools. You're dominated, moreover, by these Taipeians in the Malaysian Chinese association who controlled the large economic conglomerates."

There were a couple of radical splinter groups in the Malay side. There was the People's Party that attempted to take a Marxist approach. They never got anywhere but they made some noise until they were outlawed. But, more seriously beginning in the early 1970s and significantly by 1973 and '74, Islamic oriented student groups emerged. The deputy

prime minister was discredited and later jailed, Anwar Ibrahim, started an organization called ABIM, the Malaysian Islamic Students Union, at the University of Malaya. Other organizations were started at the State Islamic University and on other campuses to represent Islamic students. Looking back on it, they were less Islamic but more anti-establishment, so they challenged the regime of the Tunku, the old line politics, the party elders the ones that had grown up under the British and received their education largely in British universities. They wanted Malaysia for Malays, for the indigenous population. This was a very formative period because by the late '70s and '80s these organizations grew and propagated fundamentalist Islam, Islamic revival, and imported religious movements. So, by the mid '80s they were quite prominent indeed.

Q: You were looking at the Muslim side of things, did you have contact with the Imams, the Mullahs, in other words the religious leaders? Were they important at that point?

LA PORTA: Yes and no. For the most part, they were not important politically in most of Malaysia, except in the Northeastern states of Kelantan and Terengganu and to some extent in two other Northern states, Kedah and Perlis. A chauvinist Muslim party developed called the Pan-Malayan Islamic Party; its English initials are PMIP and they are still the Islamic opposition to UMNO, the ruling Malay party in the National Front Coalition. The Mullahs were important as the teachers at a couple of Islamic universities and a couple of the Mullahs took seats in parliament so you had to deal with them. More importantly from our embassy's point of view, we really focused on the students.

My wife, who is a lawyer today, was then in the stages of finishing her law degree at George Washington University. George Washington University allowed her to take some courses for elective credit at the University of Malaya. So she joined the University of Malaya Law School. Most classes were taught in English, but a few were taught in Malay which, in light of our previous service in Indonesia, made it possible for her to take those courses. She took a course in Islamic law in Malay. She took a course in Islamic family law in Malay. She took Malaysian constitutional law. And she took criminal and other courses and she got full credit from George Washington University and fulfilled her elective requirements that way. By her going to the campus virtually everyday for classes, we got to know students of all types. It wasn't a deliberate or crass move on our part to extend our influence, but it was great in terms of developing associations and becoming familiar with the organizations.

We also had another inroad through my avocation with theater. One of my colleagues who in the political section who followed Chinese politics was Murray Zinoman; his wife Joy Zinoman, who today runs the Studio Theater on 14th Street in Washington, DC and has been enormously successful in developing what is the second largest theater company in Washington, next to Arena Stage. She's an absolutely brilliant woman, actress and acting teacher. Joy at that time taught theater at in the university. We organized a group called the Kuala Lumpur Players. It was largely comprised of young Malaysians of all ethnicities and Joy directed the plays. I was one of her actors. We got into a younger group of interesting and politically alive people. And so we had very fortunate personal contacts with younger Malaysians. Further, my neighbor was a young business executive.

He was Malay and his wife was Australian; they had young children about our kids' ages. We became very close to them. He came from an establishment Malay family from the Northeast and he was in business, so through him I was able to join the Rotary Club and got to know young Malay business people.

Q: Was this a sort of a homegrown Islam or were its roots fairly strong and tied to Saudi Arabia, or anything like that?

LA PORTA: Islam in Malaysia in the early '70s and into this day had quite strong ties with the "great schools of Islam," al Azhar University in Cairo, the universities in Baghdad and Pakistan and other large religious schools and communities in the Muslim world. Malaysian religious scholars very much looked to the Middle East for their theological orientation. Therefore Malaysia tended to be, and increasingly became more and more fundamentalist in terms of adherence to the rituals in and terms of scholarship. The development of Islam in Malaysia is different than in Indonesia which tended to be more syncretic, more homegrown and developed clear lines of "Indonesianness" that separated it considerably from the mainstream of Islam as practiced in the Middle East and taught in the great Islamic universities.

In Malaysia, there were even in those days growing links with Muslim universities, movements, missionary bodies in the Middle East. Indeed, these contacts were pursued not only by Malays, but also through Indian Muslims who had contacts in India with large Islamic organizations there and schools and universities in Pakistan and other places. There was a different quality of Islam as practiced by the mainstream and what is observable today because beginning with the student movements in the early '70s there was a ratcheting up of observance and fidelity to the tenants of the faith by the Malays in Malaysia.

Q: As to the situation during the time you were there, two things. One, were we concerned about the Muslims as a force and two, did the ruling group of Malays in the government...were they not as observant Muslims as a group that was coming up?

LA PORTA: Well, the latter characterization is certainly true. The older civil servants in government and business and elsewhere, such as the universities, were generally more relaxed about their practice of Islam. They celebrated their main holidays with ostentatious displays and spending a lot of money on festivals. Of course weddings were a great occasion to display this. I remember one time when the Tunku, the Prime Minister, came to dinner at the ambassador's and my wife and I were invited to the dinner. The Tunku not only loved roast beef in the British tradition, but he also loved lobster which is forbidden to some Muslims. We had lobster and shrimp as well. Some strict Muslims, although shrimp don't walk on the land. The Tunku always had to have the best Scotch, whereas practicing Muslims began increasingly to give up alcohol. Most upper class Malays at that time wouldn't hesitate to eat pork or ham at least in private, if not in public.

Q: Were we interested? I mean you had this as part of your brief, but was this more of

just a matter of oh hey, let's divide up in society and you take that as opposed to saying we really are concerned about what's happening or we see this in the future of maybe posing a conflict for us?

LA PORTA: I think the concern with student activism in general was a very strong concern that was reflected here in Washington in the Department and in other agencies. You also had a dynamic happening on the Chinese side. This was called the Emergency wherein the Communist Party of Malaya waged an insurgency since the early 1950s. We were still seeing the remnants of it in the early '70s in the jungle areas on the border of Southern Thailand in the Northern states of Malaya. The insurgents were largely Chinese. There was a small minority of Malays who recruited into the Communist Party, but by and large they were mostly Chinese and they had direct links with the PRC and with China and kindred communist movements elsewhere in Asia. The insurgency also operated in Sarawak on the border with Indonesia. In the early '70s some remnants of armed groups were operating in the border area and interestingly those insurgents managed to co-opt some Indonesian communists as well as the Peoples Party of Brunei.

Q: What about the Malaysian influence, I mean it had a significant hunk of Borneo. How was that gong?

LA PORTA: I visited Sabah and Sarawak several times a year and I had good contacts in those state governments. Sabah was probably characterized as a semi-autocracy run by a traditional Malay chief, Tun Mustapha, who assembled quite a feudal group of Malays and non-Malays around him and manipulated virtually everything in Sabah until the late '80s. In Sarawak the situation was much more diffuse because of the state politics. There were Chinese based parties, there was a Malay based party, there were a couple of other groups that had no particular characterization. A coalition government ran Sarawak and so the Malays and the other parties had to conciliate with each other. You had three basic groups. You had the Malays; the Dayaks, which are the indigenous Borneans and the Chinese in Sarawak as well. While today nobody really questions the adherence of Sabah and Sarawak to Malaysia, by the early '70s that early questioning period that you saw in the mid '60s had worn off. There were issues with Sabah wanting more autonomy, less oversight, both politically and in governance. Sarawak was a little bit messier, interesting, but messy. I mean the politics were just a little messy.

Q: Was there any attraction of these provinces to Brunei or not?

LA PORTA: Well Brunei was the odd man out. The original British plan in 1961 for the Borneo states and Singapore and Malaysia was to incorporate Brunei into the federation but Brunei never joined. The Sultan of Brunei said, no, I'm not going to have anything to do with that. I'm going to sit here on my little pile of oil. He didn't know that he had gas, but the LNG (liquefied natural gas) was there too. It may have been in the mid '70s there was a book that was published by the author of Clockwork Orange, Anthony Burgess, called Devil of a State. It was a novel that was crudely based on Brunei. It was rather amusing because it characterized this very tight state ruled by this autocratic elderly sultan. The old sultan kept his ties with the UK and was always in favor in London and

had a good audience there, but he just said, no, I can't get along with Lee Kuan Yew and the Tunku.

Q: What about Lee Kuan Yew? Is he sort of sticking to his island?

LA PORTA: Not really. It was always said of Lee Kuan Yew, and I don't know if the quote is historically accurate or not, you know, if I only had Indonesia to govern, just think what I could do. I think the personal antagonisms and the bad blood between Lee Kuan Yew, the Tunku and other Malaysian leaders certainly contributed to a lot of the stress, and sometimes created stress, during that period of the '60s and '70s. My view is that the relationships really didn't settle down and become quite pragmatic until somewhere in the '80s. I think you always have had this kind of uncomfortable elbowing and you had points of contention which are still not settled today over water rights, for example, because much of Singapore's water supply comes from Malaysia. Then you had issues of the traffic across the causeway. You had issues of overflight rights including planes overflying Singapore, and planes coming through Malaysian air space to land in Singapore airports. Also, Singapore's armed forces found themselves in Malaysian waters as soon as they poked their nose out of their bases. You had a lot of difficult issues that recurred with nauseating regularity every year or every couple of years, so nothing is ever settled.

Q: You were there during the end game in Vietnam. How did that play in Malaysia?

LA PORTA: I think that Vietnam was viewed on the popular level in mainland Southeast Asia with a great deal of suspicion as to U.S. motives. In other words, like more modern parallels in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was viewed as an attempt of the U.S. to extend its hegemony. That is certainly the line the Chinese took in criticizing the United States, so that even ostensibly friendly governments have echoed that line.

On the other hand, in Malaysia, you had also a layer of people in the bureaucracy – the army, the security services, and some others in government – and also some in the political parties who did buy into the notion of falling dominoes. It was hard for them to articulate publicly that “We're a domino. Here we are, come and get us. Come and give us to the communists.” Malaya, having fought its own communist insurgency, was very mindful of the potential for encroachments by the Vietnamese.

These feelings were exacerbated by the refugee flow which we began to see in Malaysia beginning in the early '70s even before the fall of Saigon. The United States had to set up a refugee program. We had to stand up our own program before the days of UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) because there were hard cases and a large outflow from Indochina. There were a lot of difficulties with the Malaysian authorities even at that early period who refused to recognize that a refugee problem existed, even to the point of causing the death of hundreds who fled because they were not allowed to land in Malaysia. The problem was compounded in the late '70s and through the '80s by the Khmer Rouge takeover in Cambodia as well. There were really dislikes over the refugee situation in not wanting to absorb alien populations from

Indochina and absorb their problems – political problems primarily. Also, as far as ASEAN that had been founded in 1967 was concerned, the ASEAN response was to create kind of a bubble around the original five ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore and the Philippines) and to try to keep at these external forces.

Q: At this time, I mean in talking around the embassy and all and political sections elsewhere, did we feel that enough time had passed to allow the dominoes in that area to get stronger, that they weren't as vulnerable as we certainly felt when we started to intervene in '64.

LA PORTA: There was a strong feeling that the entire region was vulnerable. We also had to engage with the Malaysians on the use of Penang and other places for R&R for our forces. We also used Singapore for R&R so we had large numbers of soldiers. We did a lot of procurement in Malaysia and Singapore in particular, but also in Thailand. We had big bases in Thailand that were sources of problems with the Thai populace as well as depending on the political attitudes of successive Thai governments. Then you had the Philippine issue which by and large the Indonesians and Malaysians and Singaporeans didn't care too much about. In fact, the Singapore armed forces by the mid '70s were using some of our base facilities in the Philippines for their own maneuvering and training. From the standpoint of our policies and attitudes in terms of what we conveyed or what Washington felt, there were significant strong concerns about the ability of these nations to withstand serious communist pressures.

Q: Well, at that time we saw China as being an expansive communist power, is that right?

LA PORTA: Absolutely. I think that the concern over Chinese espionage over other kinds of Chinese influence in the region very greatly conditioned our attitude toward Southeast Asia. It also became, as radical Islam is today, a justification for our doing a lot in terms of assistance, wanting to leverage help for refugee relief issues, military assistance and trying to encourage even at that early date some form of ASEAN military cooperation.

Q: Student demonstrations in October 1973 brought down the Thanom-Praphat government in Thailand. Were there any reverberations in Malaysia?

LA PORTA: Frankly, I can recollect there was little reaction or concern in Malaysia where the students were far less active and there was little pressure on the government. We (the embassy) were more worried than the Malaysians were.

Q: Saigon fell on 30 April 1975. Were there any reverberations in Malaysia?

LA PORTA: There was a certain "I told you so" attitude that was particularly reflected in the press. Our political relations did not change much.

Q: Were there any, we sort of covered the water. Were there any sort of major incidents

or concerns during your time there?

LA PORTA: Yes. One of the biggest incidents occurred a few weeks before I was due to leave in July of 1975. Basically the Japanese red army came to call.

Q: Oh, yes.

LA PORTA: The Japanese red army, radical homegrown communist / extremists / anarchists, had been surveilling our embassy which was located in the top three and a half floors of the AIA Life Insurance Building on Jalan Ampang. Also resident in that building were the Japanese Embassy, the Australian Embassy and the Swedish Embassy, which partially shared a floor with our consular section, the ninth floor. We had floors 10, 11, 12 and the penthouse.

Five Japanese red army operatives, who were well-armed with explosives and weapons, seized our consular section and the other offices on the ninth floor of the building. They killed two building guards and other people were wounded in the takeover. The embassy offices were open (this occurred during business hours), so our consular section was full. Employees of the insurance company and the Swedish Embassy, in all about 55 people, were taken hostage by the red army types. Most of them were grouped into the few rooms that we had for our consular section. True to their threats, they did put plastique around the main uprights supports of the building and in the elevator shaft. It was morning when this occurred and we were in an embassy staff meeting. We heard that something was going on down in the consular section and we didn't know quite what it was. It was not very long before we began to hear the demands of the Japanese red army kidnappers. What they wanted was to force the release of a number of their followers who were in prison in Japan as well as to remove some of their followers to Libya and Algeria. Those were the favored places. When you had a terrorist, you sent them to Algeria or Libya, because that's where they all wanted to go. Political exiles conveniently went to Sweden.

The negotiations went on for almost four days. The Malaysians, I will have to say and I think by everybody's recollections were admirable. The interior minister, the minister Tan Sri Ghazali Shafie moved in. It took him about a day to figure out what was happening. I think he was out of the city traveling, but came back and took charge. The Malaysian police set up an operations center in the building that was quite effective. The transportation minister, Tan Sri Manickavasagam, was also involved because they wanted aircraft. They wanted an aircraft to be ready at the Kuala Lumpur Airport to fly them to the Middle East. We immediately evacuated the embassy.

Q: Did you get out?

LA PORTA: We evacuated the embassy but several of us stayed behind to keep communications with Washington open. The station chief, an economic officer, myself and a couple of other officers stayed, while the Chargé, Bob Dillon, went off and set up the command post at the Ambassador's residence according to our emergency plans. So those plans worked. We had a working radio voice network and we began reporting to

Washington, to State's Operations Center. We had the traditional open telephone line as well. We kept filing reports on schedule. My job in that thing was to be in the embassy, to manage the communications and to do the reporting. I would get reports from our command post, from the chargé, and other officers that we had stationed with the Malaysian command post. The economic officer who was with us was Dick Jackson, who was in charge of the telephones to be in touch with the terrorists mainly because he had a wonderful low-key manner and telephone voice. He was quiet, reassuring, a good listener, and so forth. In the chancery, the station chief was the senior person aboard. We had a military attaché with us and fortuitously we had a diplomatic security technician visiting at the time. He was an electronics type. He was able to run wires down and put microphones down into the airshaft to the ninth floor and set up tape recorders to monitor any ambient noise. This was extremely valuable because we were able to pick up the voices of people, both the captives as well as some of the captors.

Q: Who were the American captives?

LA PORTA: The American captives were our consul, Bob Stebbens, and one other officer who was working in that section at the time. There were also four FSNs, but U.S. official captives were only two in number. There was a group of about half a dozen Americans who were in the consular section for services as well as the Malaysian consular clientele. There were also people of several other nationalities who either worked for the insurance company and Swedish Embassy on that floor. The embassy also placed liaison officers with the Canadian and Japanese embassies in the building.

Q: The Japanese would be intimately involved in this. How did they work?

LA PORTA: They were pretty invisible. To the extent that they were involved, it was a Tokyo problem, in essence they said, I'm sorry, we can't do anything, talk to Tokyo. It was a remarkable case of denial in the sense that they didn't want to play. Their embassy felt no particular responsibility and whether issues relating to the hostages and demands of the red army people were going to met or not, that was all a Tokyo problem, not theirs. Ultimately, what happened was that the government in Tokyo did decide to make a commercial aircraft available. They did take a couple of red army captives out of jail. There were several others who didn't want to leave jail in Japan. So, they loaded this plane up with a few officials and a couple of captives. They flew it into Kuala Lumpur Airport.

The minister of transportation offered himself as a substitute hostage for the hostages that were in our building. But the red army cadres loaded all of the hostages in buses. They went to the airport. The minister substituted himself for the hostages at the airport. He got in the plane; one or two officials went along with him. The red army cadres and the official government hostages took off for Egypt. There were extraordinary problems in getting air clearances to expedite the travel over the Indian Ocean especially as the Indians didn't want to let them through. The Sri Lankans didn't want to let them fly over. They got to Africa, skirting the Middle East, but again the Egyptians said, no, we won't give you air clearance. They forced the plane to land, I think in Ethiopia, where it was

refueled and took off again, finally arriving in Algeria where the rest of the red army people joined them. Basically they were recycled into the international terrorist stream. Several were recaptured later, but a couple were involved in other incidents.

From the human point of view, there were a lot of things that were remarkable about the whole experience. After we had established contact with the red army terrorists, they wanted food. My wife and some other embassy people we could talk to, because our civilian telephone lines were still open, went to Kentucky Fried Chicken and A&W Root Beer downstairs in the building and got food and sent it up to the ninth floor for the hostages. They also sent us up food. After a couple of days they allowed somebody to bring up clean laundry. It was truly a remarkable experience with let's say the dangerous side of the Foreign Service. It was an extraordinary example of how people work together. It was also an extraordinary terrorist incident because almost no sooner than it happened, it was forgotten and does not crop up in any of the kind of Department listings of terrorist incidents. That to me is also symptomatic, pardon me if I editorialize of where our government's head has been about terrorism for 35 years. Incidents occur, they're easily forgotten, not much is done except some tweaking around the edges and we lurch from incident to incident which are becoming more serious and deadly all the time.

Q: How did people get out? They had, did they go out from helicopter or what?

LA PORTA: From the building?

Q: Yes.

LA PORTA: The terrorists allowed the use of the freight elevator, which was on the side of the main bank of elevators. We determined afterward they had indeed booby trapped the main elevators, but not the freight elevator. They may not have known about that initially, but they didn't booby trap that one. We were able to get supplies and ultimately, as the days went on, one or two people were able to get out.

Q: Was there a problem in communicating with the Japanese captors particularly that they didn't speak much English.

LA PORTA: They had two people who did speak English well enough. Dick Jackson also spoke some Japanese. He was not fluent in Japanese according to my recollection, but he spoke enough to at least conduct a courtesy conversation. I think that one of the important things that we observed, as we now know from many other hostage incidents, the criticality of the "degree of confidence" between the captors and the negotiators. In other words, if they have somebody on the other end of the phone or the radio whom they think that they can trust. We very carefully went through down the SOP (standard operating procedure) and said, only Dick Jackson will have contact with them, nobody else. It worked.

We also had Dick on the phone to Washington to talk to the psychiatrists and hostage experts back here. One of the aspects that was not endearing about the whole incident

was Henry Kissinger, whom I believe by that time was Secretary of State.

Q: He was Secretary of State.

LA PORTA: Kissinger said we are not going to deal with the hostages in any way, shape or form. We're not going to ask for any special consideration for any of the hostages. He just simply compounded the degree of difficulty in getting a solution.

Q: Well, I mean this has come up a couple of times in my interviews about, well I mean the cartoon of assassination of the PLO over our ambassador and _____ and Kurt Moore. We made that; I mean the same thing with Kissinger and Nixon. They said, we're not going to deal, it's this tough attitude. I think there was another one in Mexico. It sounds great, but you eventually do deal in some way.

LA PORTA: Exactly.

Q: This is posturing which endangers lives and that group was particularly susceptible to posturing.

LA PORTA: That is exactly how we felt. That he was endangering the lives of all of us. If the hostages had taken that seriously, or had really believed it, they could have blown the whole building apart. I think that's a particularly unfortunate feature of that period. Two other things stood out about that incident. One is that while we were holed up and sitting above the area that was held by the terrorists, my replacement arrived in Kuala Lumpur. His name was Scott Butcher. Scott and his family arrived at the airport and said, oh, gee whiz, that's surprising there's nobody here to meet us. Well, he and his family took a cab and they set out for the embassy. They figured well, a communications glitch or something like that. All of a sudden he came into the downtown area and there's a big cordon around the area where the AIA building is. He finally got in touch with someone but I'm not sure how and found out this terrorist incident was going on. In the last two days of the hostage crisis, before Scott was able to get into the embassy and joined us upstairs. Scott had just come from serving in the Operations Center. He was traveling when the incident happened, but it was terrific to have somebody who had that experience who knew all the players in Washington, who knew what they wanted in terms of information and was able to help us "work" the Washington end. The first thing you do in any terrorist incident is to keep a very detailed log of everything, every telephone call, every communication, nobody talks unless it's recorded on paper or in other ways.

The other thing on the downside was the behavior of the media. The media in Malaysia were okay, but the newspapers back here in the U.S. were just jumping all over the place. Number one they had to figure out where Malaysia was, but also, once it became known who was in the embassy and so forth, a lot of the newspapers, the New York Times and Herald Tribune in New York and Newsday in particular, started harassing our relatives. My wife's parents were called by newspapers out in the Midwest and my mother was harassed mercilessly for details. She was told by my wife not to say anything as anything

you can say might be sensitive or harmful. After we left Malaysia and I came back, prior to my next assignment, I made a formal protest to the publisher of Newsday and I did get an apology for that harassment. Maybe it's one of these things where terrorist incidents were new at that time, but certainly the appetite of the press for getting information at all costs, human and otherwise, was certainly evident.

Q: One question, or was there anything else, any other thing?

LA PORTA: I think those were the main highlights. Looking back on it and I think everybody in the mission felt that the role played by our chargé, Bob Dillon, who was the DCM, was absolutely brilliant. Bob has had a distinguished career in Middle Eastern affairs and by personality, by quiet leadership, and by keeping his cool, he was able to deal very effectively with the Malaysians. Even Henry Kissinger's pronouncements didn't have as much effect as they might have.

Q: I would imagine he or someone would have a problem with dealing with the families there, your wife included and all.

LA PORTA: Well, Bob Stebbens, our consul, had a wife and two children. It was very difficult for her and for I think the embassy rallied. My wife stayed with his wife and we were good friends as Bob worked for me earlier in Indonesia. Again, all the things you were supposed to do worked. The families looked after the families. People behaved in a good way. Our communications worked. Our SOP was right. We followed the book. We communicated to beat the band. We really did. We made sure that every detail was given and known. We had a concentrated liaison effort with the Japanese, and the Malaysia operation center; other things were very professionally done and went well.

JOSEPH A. B. WINDER
EAP, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Affairs
Washington DC (1983-1985)

Joseph A. Winder was born in New York in 1939. He received a BA from the University of Michigan in 1964 and his MBA in 1965. Mr. Winder served in the US Army from 1959 to 1962. Upon entering the Foreign Service in 1966, he was posted in Santiago, Bonn, Jakarta, Bangkok and Tokyo. In 1999 Mr. Winder was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

Q: What was happening in Malaysia at this time?

WINDER: Well, Mahathir was very much in control in Malaysia and they were following a development strategy that embraced again the Western economic model and included a lot of American companies. Mahathir, himself, had sort of a love/hate relationship with the American economic model and kept making speeches about looking toward Japan as the model for Asia with a bit more state directed development. His development policies

were sort of bifurcated between emulation of Japan on the one hand and a more open policy to be integrated into the international economy on the other. But, we didn't have any major problems in that area. Our companies were in Penang, particularly electronic companies. There were companies invested in the northeast and that was of interest to them. We had growing contacts on the bilateral military side with them even though they weren't given much high visibility or publicity. So, the relationship with Malaysia, I think, was reasonably good. The main problem was that Mahathir thought the United States, particularly in the press, didn't pay enough attention to Malaysia. He bristled when he came across some map somewhere that didn't even show Malaysia on it. So, he was very sensitive to perceived slights, etc.

We had one incident that revolved around the visit of the New York Philharmonic. The New York Philharmonic had scheduled a tour of Asia with a stop in Kuala Lumpur. In their scheduling they had planned to perform a work called "Shlomo" and Mahathir thought that for some reason the performance of that work would provide the Muslim fundamentalists an opportunity to criticize the government as being soft on forces that might be inimical to Islam. He was always worried about protecting his flank from Muslim fundamentalist forces. Therefore, he told the New York Philharmonic that they would be welcome to come to Kuala Lumpur but they couldn't play that song. They would have to play something else. Before the New York Philharmonic could even make a judgment about that, it hit the press. The New York Times had a front page article. So, we had quite a brouhaha about that. People were calling up the assistant secretary asking what was going on out there. Mahathir got on his high horse saying we tell people what to play here or they don't play here. Then the New York Philharmonic, the union and influential Jewish groups in New York said we couldn't let them dictate what is to be played. In the end the New York Philharmonic dropped Kuala Lumpur from its schedule and added Bangkok. I don't know if they played "Shlomo" or not, they may have, but it demonstrated the difficulty and prickliness of dealing with Malaysia and the frictions that could arise over seemingly small incidents.

Q: How about the Philippines at this time? Were they beginning to cause problems for countries within your area?

WINDER: Not really. There was a problem between Malaysia and the Philippines over Sabah, and in the southern Philippines there were some Muslim insurgents that Malaysians had a certain ethnic affinity for and the Philippines resented that. There was some piracy going on that caused some friction between the Philippines and Malaysia. But basically, ASEAN has been very successful in providing the opportunity to forge stronger bilateral ties between these countries which really had never had them before. The relations between all these countries in the region, except Thailand, had been with a colonial power and links between these countries really didn't exist. ASEAN provided an opportunity for foreign ministry officials, energy ministry officials, businessmen, private citizens to meet, to talk and get to know each other. That really helped in establishing some linkages that ameliorated a lot of the frictions.

Q: How was the Malaysian embassy?

WINDER: They were fine. Actually the Malaysian ambassador when I arrived was a very, very popular fellow in the diplomatic circuit. He entertained very effectively. He left shortly after I took over the desk with flashy news stories about him. His successor was less flashy, but not ineffective. He got out and around but certainly didn't have the same level of visibility and public prestige as his predecessor.

THOMAS P. SHOESMITH
Ambassador
Malaysia (1983-1987)

Thomas P. Shoesmith was born in 1939 and raised in Pennsylvania. His career in the State Department included posts in Japan, Hong Kong, South Korean, and an ambassadorship to Malaysia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1991.

Q: Well, you left that job and was nominated to be Ambassador to Malaysia, where you served from 1983 to 1987.

SHOESMITH: Right.

Q: How did that assignment come about?

SHOESMITH: [Chuckles] Well, I had served two years as senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, which is about the usual length of time, although there is no hard and fast rule. I had been a DCM, I'd been a Consul General, I'd been senior deputy, and, although I wasn't pressing for an ambassadorial assignment, I think that there were some people who felt that we should find some place for Shoesmith. You know, he's paid his way, punched all the tickets, and all that sort of thing. Also, there was a new Assistant Secretary, Mr. Wolfowitz. And he was rather anxious to restructure the place [Bureau of East Asian Affairs] and bring in some other people. So you put all of these things together. When posts open up, and three of them opened up in 1983--Malaysia, Singapore, and Burma--Paul Wolfowitz asked me whether I would be interested in going to any one of these. Which one would you like to go to? I was given a choice. One of the other deputy assistant secretaries was in pretty much the same position as I. He had been there three years instead of two. He was also offered one of these posts. So it came about that way. I guess as a senior officer, and I was a Career Minister, as of that time, it was felt, at least by my Bureau, that, maybe I qualified for an ambassadorial post if one was open. So there was that, plus restructuring the personnel at the top level of the Bureau, under a new Assistant Secretary. So it came about. A conjunction of those things.

Q: Well, when you got to Malaysia in 1983, what did you see as American interests in Malaysia?

SHOESMITH: Well, I knew that they were very limited. There was a growing, commercial interest in Malaysia, that is, a gentle rise in American business interest in investing in Malaysia. On the Malaysian side, there was a rise in attracting, not only American investment, but in developing the U.S. market for Malaysia's exports. We have some specific interests in Malaysia as a major commodity producer, particularly of rubber and tin, both of them products that we stockpiled, at one time. So we had that sort of a connection. Also, in 1981 Malaysia began to send students to the U.S. It had previously sent students overseas to Great Britain and Australia. But in 1983 it began to direct students to the United States. That increased in very substantial numbers, went up very quickly. So that's about where it was, when I got there. Of course, Malaysia has never bulked very large on our scope, our interests in Southeast Asia. Partly for historical reasons, because it was a British colony, and British influence was very strong in Malaysia, even after independence in 1957. But that was waning by the beginning of the 1980's, and under the new Prime Minister. We had a very small and very quiet, military interest in Malaysia. I said "small." Perhaps that isn't saying enough. Malaysia's geographic position on the Straits of Malacca made it of considerable interest to us. We had a very, very small military assistance program covering international military education and training [IMET], worth about \$1 million per year. That amounted to some contact with the Malaysian military. But, as of 1983 it was quite limited. Malaysia had procured a considerable amount of equipment from the United States, particularly aircraft. In 1983-1987, very gradually, the range of contacts between the American military and Malaysian military expanded to include some joint exercises in air and naval operations. In 1986 we began to try to work this out further, to put this relationship in a framework which, in other countries, you might call a Status of Forces agreement. For one thing, to regularize the contact between our military, to provide for intelligence exchanges, and so on. I don't know what happened to that after 1987. But it was growing.

Q: Well, when you have military exercises and all, you pretty well have to have an enemy in mind. The Soviets, the Chinese, the Vietnamese--I mean what was considered the potential threat as far as Malaysia was concerned?

SHOESMITH: Well, I don't know that there ever was a very keen sense of threat, from anywhere, in Malaysia. Of course, during the period of the insurgency, from 1948 to 1960, the Communist insurgency in Malaysia was given strong, rhetorical support and some material support by China. This was during the period when China was supporting "wars of national liberation." That experience, and the fact that there were Chinese Malaysians who were in the insurgency movement, and the fact that Malays tend to think of Chinese as having their first loyalty to their homeland--these factors, this historical experience, taken together, probably account for the fact that if Malaysians were looking for a threat, China was the most likely source. There were possibilities for territorial conflicts with the Chinese in the Spratly Island group and some of those little islands [in the South China Sea], where Malaysia also has some claim.

The Soviet Union was not regarded as a threat by Malaysia. On the other hand the Malaysians--certainly the Malaysian military--were well aware that Soviet warships, and particularly submarines, transited the Straits of Malacca regularly and were also involved,

to some extent, in the South China Sea. As military observers, they would not discount entirely that possibility. Vietnam was not regarded as a serious threat to Malaysia. There was a possibility of border conflicts with the Thai and the Indonesians, and of course, in the 1960's, Indonesia, under Sukarno, had actually launched small forays against Malaysian territory, both on the Malaysian peninsula [Western Malaysia] and in Borneo [Eastern Malaysia]. So there was a need for security against a possibility that there might be border disputes. All of these things. There was enough of a context so that, without specifying who the threat was, we could exercise with the Malaysians quite well.

Q: What about the commercial field? Was there any concern on the part of the Malaysians of too much influence by the Japanese commercially in their...

SHOESMITH: Yes, certainly. The Japanese were heavily--they were the number one foreign investor in Malaysia during the years when I was there. We were number two. And as, I think, is true in many of the countries in Southeast Asia, attitudes toward the Japanese economic presence are ambivalent. On the one hand there is a recognition of the importance of Japanese investment and trade with Japan to the economic development of a country. On the other hand there is a concern, a sort of visceral feeling of unease about the Japanese presence and long range intentions toward the area--at least there has been. I think, really, that this is fading. I think it's been fading for some time, but it was present. And Japanese business behavior in some of these countries was subject to some criticism. They didn't bring local people into management positions quickly enough. Or they didn't invest enough in "downstream" activity for developing the economy, or whatever. But in Malaysia, at any rate, that was somewhat offset by the fact that Prime Minister Mahathir publicly expressed the view that Japan's economic development was, in many respects, a more suitable model for Malaysia's economic development than Western countries, including the United States. He was inclined to admire the notion of "Japan, Inc," the close relationship between government and business. He was inclined to admire and he certainly, many times, complimented the Japanese on the work ethic and the discipline of their society, the amicable relationship between business and labor. All of these appealed to him. He did not feel that the sort of "no holds barred, free enterprise capitalism" was appropriate to his culture or his society.

To some extent, I think, Japan has suffered since World War II, as we did in Europe, from the image of the "ugly American." There was a certain amount of envy. Here was this country that was the aggressor in World War II, and look at it now. Just as you hear echoes of that, and sometimes more than echoes of that in the United States, so in Asian countries.

Q: Particularly where they had felt the heavy hand of the Japanese...

SHOESMITH: As they did in Malaysia. But there again, it was the Chinese who felt the heavy hand of Japan during the occupation, more than the Malays. Because the Chinese were in the resistance. The Malays, for the most part, were not. That was the resistance that evolved into the insurgency.

Q: Well, were there any major problems you had to deal with while you were ambassador there?

SHOESMITH: Well, Malaysia is, of course, a predominantly Muslim country. A constant characteristic in the orientation of Malaysia's foreign policy gives a very special place to the Arab countries. Of course, Malaysia has no diplomatic relations with Israel. Regarding Middle East problems, we would approach the Malaysians on U.S. initiatives on things that were happening in the United Nations. If it was a Middle East issue and we tried to obtain the understanding or the support of the Malaysian Government, it would be very difficult. This was also true on matters of terrorism, since the Malaysians, the Malaysian Government was inclined to look at some terrorists as people who were fighting for national liberation, and not just going around, terrorizing people. So we often had problems in that respect.

Also, Malaysia, in its foreign policy orientation, certainly under [Prime Minister] Mahathir, had a very decided, "Third World" outlook. So, not only is the prime minister frequently critical of U.S. policies, and particularly economic assistance and trade policies and is critical of what the U.S. is doing in those areas, with respect to Third World countries. He also feels that we are exploiting them and trying to establish a neo-colonial relationship. He is publicly critical of the United States. Not constantly, but when the occasion arises. This would always raise hackles in certain parts of the United States, in the Congress in Washington. The Malaysian Government, perhaps in 1985, launched an initiative in the United Nations to declare Antarctica the heritage of all mankind. It advocated taking it out of the regime that's managed by the signatory states and put it under the United Nations. It had echoes of the old Law of the Sea controversy. We found that unacceptable. So there was that kind of controversy in the United Nations. These were generally the areas. On the other side of the coin we had very good cooperation up until 1987 with Malaysia on refugee and narcotics issues and on dealing with Cambodia. Even on trade issues, while we had conflicts of interest, it was relatively easy to negotiate those out with the Malaysians, whether it was textiles or protection of intellectual property--even the very sensitive issue of commodities, where we would be releasing materials from our rubber stockpile, with the possibility that that might affect world commodity prices. For the most part we were able to negotiate these out, with relatively little difficulty. Because the asymmetry between the economies and the political influence of the two countries is so obvious. You know, Malaysia, even a strongly minded and strong willed prime minister such as Mahathir, cannot be entirely ignorant of the realities. But it was, for me, a fascinating experience.

Q: Did you get much of a chance to talk to the prime minister? You're shaking your head. Did you talk mainly with the foreign minister?

SHOESMITH: Yes. I dealt mainly with the foreign minister. I personally found it very uncomfortable, dealing with the prime minister. There were very few occasions when I felt it was necessary. He is not a very approachable person. The United States has no special position in Malaysia at all. In other words, very little. That was one of the interesting things for me, because I had always served in countries where the United

States was number one. Korea or Japan, even Hong Kong, or Taiwan. In Malaysia, we're not number one. And there is a sensitivity in Malaysia that extends beyond the prime minister to suggestions of pressure from the United States. So my attitude toward the prime minister was to keep a very low profile. If a matter had to go to the prime minister, I would not have hesitated to do that, but I didn't seek opportunities to meet with him, as some of my diplomatic colleagues did, from time to time. I saw no profit in raising matters with him, oddly enough.

Q: Well, did you have any problems? Here you have a strong willed prime minister and the United States. The world and Malaysia did not revolve around American policy. This is not always easy to translate back in Washington. I take it the Bureau of East Asian Affairs understood the situation, and your ties to the East Asian Bureau. I mean that there wasn't a problem in letting them know that you're not going to get these people to jump through the hoop on matters such as voting in support of Israel and other things like this.

SHOESMITH: Yes. No problem. I never felt I had a problem with the Bureau. And since Malaysia is, as I've already said, pretty far off the scope, a problem with Malaysia seldom approached the point where it got Congressional attention. I recall one occasion. The New York Philharmonic was coming to Malaysia. I think this was in 1985, and it was not handled by the State Dept or USIS. It was privately arranged. In any event, the promoters in Malaysia at one point published the program which the New York Philharmonic was going to play. On the program there was a composition by a musician named Bloch. And the piece was a cello piece, "Shlomo," which was identified as a Hebrew rhapsody, a Hebrew melody. When some of the more extreme Islamic elements saw that in Malaysia, they raised just a terrible fuss. In an interview or a press encounter with the minister of public information this issue was raised. He said that it was the policy of Malaysia not to permit any Jewish work to be performed in Malaysia. In fact, I think that there was no such policy. That might have been their inclination, but, as it happened, they played other compositions by Jews. In any event the minister said that unless the New York Philharmonic took that off the program, they couldn't come. Although the New York Philharmonic at first indicated that they were willing to take that off the program, that got into the press in New York, and there was a big scream. They had to put it back on, and the Malaysian Government was committed to this position and couldn't move. Well, that caused all sorts of hell, and it got people in the State Dept very upset and it got some people in Congress very upset. The Embassy was under pressure to do something about it. We tried, but we finally had to explain that the concert just wasn't going to take place. The Secretary of State sent a personal letter to the prime minister, who happened to be out of the country when this all blew up. To no avail. So that was one of the few times. Now, subsequently, the refugee issue...

Q: Just quickly. I take it that the symphony orchestra didn't come to Malaysia.

SHOESMITH: Yes, it didn't come. It was all too bad. In point of fact, I could never get anybody in the Foreign Ministry, at any rate, to acknowledge that there was such a policy, such as the minister of information had announced. It was an example of how

vulnerable the Malaysian Government is, although, as an Islamic, or the government of a country with a heavy Islamic cast, it's a modern society and takes modern positions. But it's very vulnerable to pressures from extremist, Islamic elements. I mean, Malaysia's position was understood, and the relationship during those years was moving along very nicely, expanding somewhat. The American economic presence and the number of students was rising. We were developing a scientific and technological relationship with Malaysia. It was going on very nicely.

Q: So for essentially a relatively small country, the fact that the students were switching from going to England to going to the United States, in some numbers, this is really a very major change which augurs well for the future.

SHOESMITH: Well, I thought so, although that switch was partly a reflection of the prime minister's pique or his anger at the British. I guess, in 1982 or so, the British raised the tuition rates for overseas students. But that was only part of it. I think there was a recognition that the United States offered a greater breadth and, in some cases, better educational opportunities for the kinds of things that Malaysia was interested in. This effort was concentrated on its students, Malay, rather than Chinese students. In business management, computer sciences, engineering, we offered a greater range of useful educational opportunities. As you suggest, I think, over time, that may already have begun to leaven, somewhat, the sort of philosophical or ideological bias, which was to our disadvantage in Malaysia. I mean this Third World attitude. They are hardly Third World today in economic terms.

Q: You were mentioning the boat people. Was that a factor?

SHOESMITH: Well, it wasn't what I was thinking about, because by the time I left the number of boat people in Malaysia had gone down to something like 8,000. When I arrived, it may have been around 12 or 15,000, but not only were we continuing to take them off, so were the Australians and the Canadians and, to some much smaller extent, the British. By 1986 it was evident that, not only in Western Europe, but in the United States as well, and in Australia, there was growing resistance to continue to take refugees. This whole issue of whether you were a genuine, political refugee or an economic refugee began to bulk larger and larger in the discussions about handling refugees. By the time I left they were down to 8,000 or so. Within a short period of time the numbers began to go up again, reflecting a lowered off take. This continued until 1989, by which time Malaysia may have had 14-16,000, at which point, in 1989, they began to refuse to take any more. The boats would come up on the shore or approach the shore, they would be examined to see the condition of the boat and of the people. They would be given provisions, the boat would be repaired, if necessary, and they would be turned away. Most of them went to Indonesia. That caused quite a bit of anguish in the State Dept, in the White House, and in the Congress. And very bitter exchanges, I understand. In any event, a resolution was introduced in Congress--I've forgotten but I think it was in the Senate--and passed which cut off the only form of government aid or assistance to Malaysia that we had. That is, the IMET, the program I referred to earlier, of a million dollars. That was cut off. There was some talk of removing Malaysia from the list of

countries to which GSP [General and Specialized Preference] tariffs were applied. That didn't pass the House of Representatives. However, I presume that's a threat, although now I understand that the outflow of refugees from Vietnam has fallen off considerably, so presumably there are fewer refugees coming to Malaysia. But I am very sympathetic with the Malaysians' position. When we originally talked about refugees, as I said, in 1979, the deal was, "you give them first asylum and then we'll see that they do not become a permanent charge." In 1989 the Malaysians began to feel that that wasn't happening. All we could promise was that if you continue to take them, we'll work with you to do something about the problem. They could see the handwriting on the wall, just as the British did in Hong Kong. I suspect that if things continue to go well with Cambodia, it may have already happened that Malaysia, and perhaps Indonesia as well, are going to be talking to the Vietnamese about sending these people back, as the British have done and begun to do.

FRANCIS J. TATU
Deputy Chief, Political Section
Kuala Lumpur (1984)

Francis J. Tatu was born in New York in 1929. He served in the US Navy from 1946-1952. Afterwards, he received his bachelor's degree from University of California in 1955. His career includes positions in Hong Kong, Laos, Taiwan, Philippines, Thailand, Washington D.C., Nepal, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei, and Australia. Mr. Tatu was interviewed by Susan Klingaman in October 2000.

Q: Direct transfer to the embassy in Kuala Lumpur, and it says here as Deputy Chief of the Political Section, concurrently counsel to Brunei. That sounds very intriguing

TATU: Well, I never got a trip to Brunei. much.

Q: The embassy in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, I would think, must have been quite large.

TATU: Yes, at the time I got there, though, physically it was a disaster.

Q: What was the problem?

TATU: It was located in an old office building on the top floor with a nonfunctional elevator, or a sometimes functional elevator, just totally crummy. But a new embassy was built, and the time I left it was opened up.

Q: How large was our mission in KL?

TATU: It was not as large, by any means, as Jakarta, but I can't really cite it in terms of figures.

Q: I assume it was the traditional political, economic, admin counselor sections plus what other agencies were there?

TATU: There were a lot of refugees there, because refugee boat people were coming over.

Q: From Vietnam?

TATU: Yes.

Q: Was there a special office there for refugees?

TATU: Yes, detached from the embassy.

Q: Who actually ran that? Was that State Department or INS or a combination?

TATU: I believe it was State.

Q: There was an Office of Refugee Affairs in State at that time.

TATU: That's right.

Q: You were Deputy Chief of the Political Section. The political counselor was who?

TATU: Murray Zinoman. Ronald Palmer. He lives very close here, too. I just realized we're in a cluster.

Q: This is the Southeast Asia enclave in Washington. And the DCM was...?

TATU: Lyle Brecken. Lyle is not too far either.

Q: Lyle Brecken was political/military officer in EUR when I was there. So what was your primary responsibility.

TATU: It was fairly unstructured, the political scene, you know. When I say all this, I wonder what Murray was doing, but to look at the Chinese community particularly, what were the Chinese up to, also the narcotics thing there, human rights, the whole spectrum. I was also consul to Brunei.

Q: I wanted to ask you this. Did you use your Chinese? I know you had Chinese language training.

TATU: Not adequately. Chinese, like the other languages, is a door opener. They are flabbergasted. I'll say this again, modesty aside. I have very good accent and very good presentation, because our tutors were all Beijing language-speakers. I started to say were

all from Peking. So we had that at least attempt to get us to emulate that. When you get out in Southeast Asia, the local Chinese pronunciations are horrible. They can understand you and you acquire great “face” for being so clear, and having the Beijing accent.

Q: You had the high quality...

TATU: So I used it for those purposes, but I couldn't get up and give a speech. But when I graduated from language school, I could.

Q: I would assume that many of the Chinese spoke English, didn't they, particularly in Malaysia? They certainly did in Indonesia.

TATU: But every now and then you'd come into a situation where Chinese was not only handy but necessary.

Q: Were they mainly involved in business?

TATU: Yes, in nefarious business, they were into narcotics, anywhere where you can make a buck. Back on this language thing, though, another anecdote: We had this tremendous house. It was just breathtaking. It had been the CIA station chief's house traditionally, so, of course, there I am again - everybody thinks I'm the station chief. It's on a great promontory, and it had a hill behind it and a gardener who had worked there forever. He was a Tamil, a real little guy with huge arms; we used to call him Popeye. He would go up there on the hill with a power mower and lower it down on a rope to mow the hill, and then pull it back up. So the mower breaks down and we've promised to have somebody come to take it away and repair it. The purpose of this anecdote is to illustrate language difficulties. At about the same time, my wife is doing an article on Salangor Pewter, and the head of Salangor Pewter says, “I will send my car for you.” So as Marian approached the car, a new Mercedes with a liveried chauffeur, she sees the gardener is opening up the trunk attempting to put the lawnmower in it. He thinks the Mercedes has come for the lawnmower. The driver thinks some funny deal that has been worked. The two of them couldn't communicate with one another at all. You run into that in Malaysia much more so than in Indonesia, because Prime Minister Mahathir had some confused policies. It is said that when he came into office Malaysia had the best English-speaking population in Southeast Asia, but he discouraged the use and the study of English. Now he's back on track, having perceived that English is the language of Business.

Q: Well, it sounds like the way English went down in the Philippines for reasons of nationalism, which one can understand to a certain point, but it's too bad they can't elevate their national language while maintaining English as their second international language. So you did have some dealings with the Chinese community. How about Malaysian politicians?

TATU: Yes, the various known politicians. I had a particular in with I guess you'd call him the staff aide to Mahathir and saw him very frequently. I got a lot of information and good leads from him. On the subject of contacts, I might mention that a retired Malaysian

diplomat I had known in Manila, Ivor Kraal, was very helpful. Through him we got to know many middle-class Malaysians.

My prime contact, however was the late Tunku (Prince) Abdul Rahman, who you might call the equivalent of George Washington. Tunku (as is always the reference when speaking of him) was an avid reader. He was having some trouble with his eyesight, and he had read of laser treatment in the U.S. for cataracts. One of his aides contracted the embassy and asked if someone could brief the Tunku's doctor on this procedure. As so often happens when something comes up that doesn't fit in any category, it is referred to the political section. I got some material from the Department, and read up on the laser procedure, and was instructed to visit the Tunku's doctor, a Dr. Singh, and deliver to him what I had developed. To my surprise, the Tunku himself was there. Subsequently the Tunku proceeded to Seattle Washington for the operation, which was a success. But the Tunku seemed to have attributed it to me. Every time we were in the same location at the same time, such as Penang, or Kuching, he would send for me and instruct his staff to see to my needs.

Malaysia didn't look at first like a good assignment but I went there anyway. It was one of those funny assignments, you know, that look bad to promotion panels. My predecessor left prematurely, so I went over to replace him, and it was not a full assignment. because the intended incumbent was already in language training.

CHARLES A. MAST
Economic Counselor
Kuala Lumpur (1984-1987)

Charles A. Mast was born in South Dakota in 1939. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Calvin College in 1963, he received his master's degree from the University of Maryland in 1967. His career has included positions in Kastamanu, Curacao, Teheran, Tabriz, Ankara, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, Dhaka, and Bombay. Mr. Mast was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in February 2001.

Q: Today is the 5th of April, 2001. Chuck, let's talk about you went to Kuala Lumpur, and when?

MAST: I think it was August of 1984.

Q: And you were there how long?

MAST: Three years, until August 1987.

Q: What was your job there?

MAST: I was economic counselor.

Q: Before you went out, what were you told about Malaysia?

MAST: Well, I had visited Malaysia a couple of times before, once while I was in Indonesia from 1981-84, but even more importantly perhaps, earlier, in 1978, I think, when I was working on a trade program for developing countries. I had a chance to get to know a little bit about the embassy. I had given a couple of seminars and called on some Malaysian Government officials at that time.

Q: Who was our ambassador at the time?

MAST: Tom Shoesmith.

Q: Tom Shoesmith, a Far Eastern hand. He was in Japan a lot.

MAST: He had served a lot in Japan. I think he was DCM in Japan before he became Ambassador. I think he was deputy assistant secretary for East Asia. I really enjoyed working for him. He was unflappable and the most knowledgeable on economics of any political officer I served with.

Q: What was sort of the both political and economic situation in 1984 when you arrived out there.

MAST: Well, Mahathir Mohamad was the prime minister, which is not unusual. He still is and was before that, although he was having, as often happens within the UMNO, the main united Malay party, a squabble with his number two. He forced out Musa Hitam, who was his vice president, just as he forced out Anwar Ibrahim not all that long ago.

Q: He doesn't like vice presidents, and his own particularly, I gather.

MAST: That's right. Anybody who is vice president for Mahathir has a particular problem. In order to get the job, he has to be in some ways a sycophant of Mahathir, but also has to make his own way in the party as well, because other people are going to be challenging him for vice-president. The party is quite democratic below the prime minister level, and there is great competition for vice-presidential positions.

Q: In 1984, your main focus was obviously going to be on the economy. What was the economy and how did it look at that point?

MAST: Well, when I went there in 1984, and I think looking back in retrospect, I think it's still true that for an FS-1, Malaysia was one of the best economic counselor positions in the world, and there were several reasons for that. One was that, while it was a Malay-speaking country, there were a lot of Chinese and Indians as well, so that you had that sort of diversity of population, as well as an English-Speaking country, so that documents that came out from the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance, were going to be in English. They were going to be very well done, because the people were highly educated,

a real meritocracy in the upper levels of the government. Also, Malaysia had a wide range of economic resources and economic problems, and we had a wide range of interactions with them. For example, they were a relatively large oil and gas producer, Exxon and Shell were there, for example, so that gave us that side of the equation. They were large in the commodities area - rubber and palm oil, tin - so this gave us the whole commodities sweep that we had a chance to interact with. They were a major trading country, in commodities but also increasingly in manufactured goods. There was a lot of Japanese investment. Matsushita, for example, had six plants in Malaysia. And there was a lot of American investment, particularly in semiconductors and radios, peripherals, of that type, so that we got a lot of experience in trade policy and investment policy. Citibank and AIG also had large banking and insurance interests there. So it had the broad range of interest.

Q: Where was their port?

MAST: They had a couple of ports. One of the ports was at Johor Baharu in the south, another at Penang in the north. The major port was Port Kelang, which was the port really of Kuala Lumpur, although Kuala Lumpur was about 35 or 40 miles from the sea.

Q: Was Singapore a -

MAST: And Singapore, of course, was also a large port for Malaysia.

Q: I wondered whether they could bring things in essentially duty-free.

MAST: Singapore was a very efficient port and many shippers to and from Malaysia preferred to use it. Malaysia ran a large service deficit, however, in its balance of payments, so they tried to encourage shippers to use Malaysian ports. They encouraged businessmen to set up their own insurance and banking and shipping and air services in order to shut out Singapore to a certain extent.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Malaysian bureaucracy?

MAST: I really enjoyed it. It was probably the best experience of my life in terms of interacting with foreign bureaucracies, not that the Malaysians couldn't be a little prickly and couldn't be a little tough at times, but one of the things that I enjoyed the most is that there are always several layers of Malaysian bureaucracy. Whether that was in the trade ministry, Trade and Investment, or whether it was the Central Bank or whether it was in Finance or Transportation, I had several levels I could deal with. And their own bureaucracy was open, something like ours, so that if you dealt with the deputy office director, you were pretty sure that the deputy secretary general was actually going to be briefed in person or with a memo as to what you had had to say. I really enjoyed that, and it gave me a lot of flexibility as well. Some times as counselor, rather than try to go up in the bureaucracy and work on his nickel, so to speak, I would go down, and go to a deputy director-general or somebody who was actually dealing with the problem. They were often flattered to be called by the US economic counselor. I really enjoyed working with them, particularly the Trade and Investment bureaucracy.

Q: Obviously, one lives and dies in the economic world by data. How was the data?

MAST: The data there was pretty good. Both the Central Bank and the Ministry of Finance would do - one in the spring and one in the fall, fortunately - a major economic analytical survey of the country. It was historical - what had happened - but also looked ahead as to what they projected would happen, so that we always had a lot of information, a lot of their own analysis that we could use to do our own projections, as well for an economic trends report. And they were pretty good, actually, though probably a little bit overly optimistic.

Q: What were American interests at the time?

MAST: We had a number of them. As I said, Exxon had major investments there in the oil and gas sector. Motorola had as many as 10,000 employees in two or three plants. Intel, National Semiconductor, RCA, Texas Instruments all had large plants there, so it didn't take long to get 40 or 50 thousand people working in American plants. Of course, rubber was a very important concern of ours. We bought a lot of rubber. We were members of the International Rubber Organization. Timber, which I haven't mentioned before, but Malaysia had major timber interests, and we were purchasing timber and plywood, things of that kind, hardwood particularly. Also in the palm oil sector, while we bought palm oil, probably the chief US interest - and our agricultural attaché spent a lot of time on that - had to do with the competition that palm oil posed for US soybean oil exports.

Q: Are they essentially interchangeable for their use?

MAST: More or less. I think soybean oil is generally a healthier oil than palm oil, although you'll get an argument from the Malaysians about that.

Q: During this time, you mentioned maybe there were 50,000 people working for American firms. Probably into the next decade it became rather popular in the United States to take a look at a lot of these overseas producers and looking, are they using child labor or are they paying good wages? Part of it was inspired by American concerns of losing jobs, but others were sort of in the human rights thing. Were we looking at that at the time?

MAST: Not particularly in Malaysia. I got into concerns with that in Bangladesh, as you can imagine, and also we had to a certain extent earlier in Indonesia. But there were a couple of things that happened. First of all, in the electronics area, these were pretty much high-tech jobs, and so their people are in rooms that are absolutely spotless, so it's healthy in that sense to work - although I suppose there were some acid-etching and things like that for semiconductors. People were relatively well paid. In that sector, however, we did have some problems. A lot of this took place in a Duty-Free Zone, and Malaysian law did not permit union organization in the Duty-Free Zone. Malaysia had quite well established labor unions involved in a lot of association with US unions, and Malaysian unions

wanted to unionize free-trade zones. Obviously American unions wanted the free-trade zones unionized. So we did have some union - I don't know if I'd say pressure, but a considerable amount of union interest on unionization issues. It wasn't so much that they would argue that working standards and wages were substandard. And in the textile and apparel area, too, generally Malaysian plants made higher, top-of-the-line shirts and so forth. They were not making the cheap stuff, so that usually their wages and working conditions were one or two steps above Indonesia or Bangladesh, for example. So we had very little problem in that area.

Q: Why would there be an exclusion of unions in the free zone?

MAST: That's not so unusual in developing countries. It often happens because, of course, the overseas firms prefer to have a minimum of problems when they're going to invest in a developing country. It was true in Bangladesh also. It was true in Indonesia. Of course, Indonesia did not have a democratic labor union like Malaysia or even, to a certain extent, like Bangladesh did.

Q: Well, now, as you were working with it during this time, later - I'm not sure what happened in Malaysia, but certainly Thailand, Japan, South Korea, and all that really found that they had overextended their bank loans and that there was too much cronyism and all that. Was this an issue, or were we looking at this?

MAST: There were waves of this sort of thing that would come through. For example, when I got to Malaysia in 1984, the economy was booming - real estate particularly. Everybody was building large, new apartments and large, new office buildings, particularly in downtown Kuala Lumpur and other cities, and that clearly overextended. You had a boom-and-bust cycle, and by 1986, there was actually no growth; in fact, growth was slightly negative. Now a number of other things happened at the same time. Commodity prices were down around the world, so they got hit with a double or triple whammy. Malaysia as a primary commodity producer was not unaccustomed to going through these periodic upheavals. The one you're talking about with Thailand and Indonesia did not hit Malaysia quite that hard. There was a lot of cronyism, but because of the fact that the overall economy was probably a little better run and they were a little more diversified, as I mentioned earlier, all of these - from oil and gas to commodities to manufacturing to textiles, services - they tended to be able to ride these kind of crises out probably a little easier.

Q: Where did both the technical staff - I'm talking about the engineers and all that, but also the bureaucrats who were trained in economics - where were they getting their training? Were they going to Europe? Were they going to the United States?

MAST: The people that I would deal with by and large were Malaysian-educated, University of Malaya in Kuala Lumpur. Some had had graduate training in London. That was not unusual. The London School of Economics or the Imperial College, or sometimes Cambridge or Oxford. And increasingly people were going to the United States; however, that tended to be the people who were in their teens and 20s in the 1980s. By the time we

left in 1987, I think Malaysia was number three or number four on the US foreign student list. A lot of them also were going to Australia, New Zealand. What happened, of course, was that it primarily was Indians and Chinese that needed to be trained abroad privately because Malaysia had very strong affirmative action programs for Malays, and so they tended to have preferences to university positions and to government scholarships abroad. Some of the Chinese, if they were good enough, could get into the University of Malaya; otherwise, they really had to pay their own way abroad.

Q: *How did the president -*

MAST: Mahathir Mohamad.

Q: *What was his role in the economic world?*

MAST: He was actually the prime minister. They had a sultan, who was in effect the president, but the sultan rotated every five years, and while they had a certain amount of power, it actually was the prime minister who ran the country. He was *very* interested in economic problems, as you can imagine. We considered Malaysia an economic interest post, and I suspect he considered his position an economic interest position. I mean, domestic politics were intensely important. Obviously he had to maintain his position amongst a lot of competitors and a lot of people who wanted the job, but he was very knowledgeable on international economic affairs. However, he tended to be someone who had a powerful chip on his shoulder - sort of the British colonial type of individual - who went around the world and gave these blasts at the United States and Britain for being colonial powers and for how they were exploiting the Third World, proletariat of the world, etc. And the interesting things about Mahathir was that he could give that kind of speech one day, we would have a country team meeting the next day, and my political colleagues would be complaining about how he was lambasting the United States and creating a lot of problems with the State Department. That afternoon, I could go with a major group of American investors to call on Mahathir, and it was great. So he was able to compartmentalize between these anti-colonial speeches he gave to get politicians concerned and to deal realistically with private investors.

Q: *What was the complaint that Mahathir was making about the United Kingdom?*

MAST: It often had to do with commodity prices, that the Anglo-Saxons were exploiting the commodity producers of the world. This was particularly true in the tin area, but also to a certain extent in rubber and timber and palm oil. The Malaysians always wanted, obviously, to manufacture as much of these products that moved downstream as they could, and they felt that the developed countries exploited them, that they refused to permit them to be competitive in the downstream area. This was also true in manufacturing. They wanted to set up their own automobile industry, but they argued that American and Japanese companies were refusing to make the kind of investments and to transfer the kind of technology which would permit them to become competitive.

[Inaudible portion of text]

Mahathir argued the extreme point one day, and then the next day, when he met with foreign investors or had to make decisions on trade policy, for example, he could be realistic and know exactly what the interests of the country were. So he himself, in a sense, admitted that there was validity to both points of view.

Q: What about the neighborhood? What about Thailand and Singapore?

MAST: Well, Malaysia had pretty good relations with most countries. I would say in many cases they had excellent relations with Singapore, but there you had the competition with Lee Kwan Yu, who never really has accepted the fact that he wasn't president of a much larger country than Singapore. He really would have liked to have a much larger stage to play on, and of course the Malaysians were always a little bit concerned that in terms of services or transportation or banking or the stock market, the Singaporeans were getting revenue that the Malaysians should be getting.

Q: Did we ever get in between on that?

MAST: No, we pretty much managed to stay out of that. Occasionally there would be problems with American banks or American firms. I don't remember, though, any serious problems in that area, no.

Q: At this time, were the Malaysians looking at Vietnam to bring them into ASEAN, or how did they feel about Vietnam?

MAST: No, I don't remember very much about that. There was quite a debate going on about how close they should come to China, the PRC, and in fact, I think it was during that time, sort of the mid to late 1980s, that Mahathir led a trade delegation to China. This was quite a major step, because during the 1950s, they had fought a major civil war, where the Communists very clearly supported and subsidized by the Chinese Government.

Q: How were racial relations at this time?

MAST: Well, they ebbed and flowed. In 1969 there were major racial riots in Kuala Lumpur, and Mahathir himself was determined that this would not happen again. So his philosophy was that the Malays have to get an increasingly larger share of the economic pie, but that's only really the second point. The first point is the pie has to get a lot larger very quickly, so that the Chinese particularly, but also the Indians, could also continue to have their share of the pie grow even though overall more of the percentage of the pie will go to the Malays, who were, after all, 45 to 50 percent of the population.

Q: Were there any trade problems that came up? This was mainly during the Reagan Administration, and every once in a while Congress will come up with some law or something that screws everything up for people out in the field.

MAST: Well, there was a rather esoteric one that came up, which of course maybe 10

people in Washington even knew about, and it became a political problem. This had to do with tin. For decades, tin had been part of the national security stockpile, and we would buy x thousand (whatever it was) tons of tin per year. Well, obviously this provided a nice little floor below which the world price of tin could not fall, and regardless of what the demand was, you were always going to have that demand, and other world demand would fluctuate based on that. And we decided somewhere - I don't remember exactly, but somewhere between 1984 and 1987 - that this was ridiculous. We had thousands of tons of tin, more than we were ever going to need for national security concerns, so we would stop buying tin. Well, that really was a problem, because the price of tin plummeted. Basically, other things going on in the world were affecting tin prices as well, as other commodities were being used as substitutes for tin. Tin was no longer needed in certain areas, so the price of tin plummeted, and it was a real problem for the miners in a couple of key constituencies in Malaysia. That became a serious political irritant. There wasn't anything we could do about it, really, just try to manage it.

We also had a problem at the time with palm oil. There were some scientists and pseudo-scientists in the United States that got engaged (probably funded to a certain extent by the soybean industry), in a major campaign placing, large ads in US newspapers, arguing that palm oil was detrimental to one's health. That was also about the time that McDonald's had started buying a lot of palm oil - because it was cheaper - to use for French fries. So that got to be a political problem as well, because the Malaysians insisted it was a "conspiracy by the American Soybean Association," which "used the US Government and the press" to try to stop the exportation of palm oil and drove the price down.

Q: How did that play out?

MAST: It sort of, like many things, gradually dithers away. We had to manage it for a while, and their exports continued to flow. There's a growing market for fat in the world, and the Malaysians were very competitive, so their exports continued to grow.

Q: ASEAN - how did we see ASEAN at this time?

MAST: Well, we were always quite interested in maintaining a relationship with ASEAN, encouraging ASEAN. ASEAN was primarily a political association, although they were so strongly committed to non-interference in each other's internal affairs that many times ASEAN became little more than a discussion club. And one of the things that did happen - and I attended several ASEAN meetings - was that because of that, the ASEANs would gang up on us on economic interests, so that we always had discussions on commodities, or we always had discussions on US protectionism. They always wanted discussions on the new international economic order, which was the big thing at that time, a UN program. On UNCTAD, they would argue with us that we were not supporting UNCTAD. These kind of trade and multilateral issues became a lowest common denominator for them, and so our poor Secretary of State, who really wanted to discuss important, burning political issues of the day - China, and how ASEAN saw that and so forth - would be scolded with this laundry list. It was sort of as if every secretary had to say, "Oh, dear, in order to get the good political and security stuff done, I'm going to have

to sit there and listen to these guys harangue me for an hour or two about this other stuff."

Q: Did you get involved in ASEAN meetings where the Secretary of State would come out?

MAST: Yes, sometimes, although usually there would be a more senior economic DAS, or there would be couple of office directors along, and I would sometimes be working with them in the corridor. ASEAN meetings on economic issues were surprisingly open, however, so I sat through most of these. I sometimes thought the ASEAN Foreign Ministers wanted to be sure their staffs saw them making their esoteric economic points.

RICHARD W. TEARE
Director, Office of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore Affairs
Washington, DC (1989-1992)

Richard W. Teare was born in Ohio in 1937. He received his bachelor's degree from Harvard University in 1948. His career includes positions in Barbados, Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, New Zealand, and Australia. Mr. Teare was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in July 1998.

TEARE: 1989 to 1992, my tour as country director for Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore in the EA/P Bureau.

Q: What was sort of the order? This was the Bush Administration?

TEARE: It was all Bush Administration, right.

Q: Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore and Malaysia...who was the head of East Asian Affairs?

TEARE: It was Richard Solomon.

Q: Whom I've interviewed. He is pretty much a China hand.

TEARE: Yes.

Q: Did you find you were off in left field or something?

TEARE: I would say that we were in the middle or outer orbit, yes, because a lot of his time and attention went to China and then to Japan and Korea. Southeast Asia got less attention although more I suppose than Australia, New Zealand and the Islands. The East Asia Bureau had gone through a number of re-organizations. Holbrooke back in the '70s pumped up the importance of the Islands and created a separate Office of Pacific Island Affairs under Bill Bode apart from Australia and New Zealand. And then later, after the Compacts of Free Association were negotiated with the Marshall Islands and the

Federated States of Micronesia, a third office came in. It was my old negotiating office transmogrified. It was the Office of Freely Associated States Affairs. So at one time there were three offices dealing with the South Pacific. Now they are all combined into one since 1997.

Q: I suppose the best thing to do is to go through these because these are all very separate places really.

TEARE: We saw Indonesia as essentially a constructive actor. Indonesia tended to be looked to by the other countries of Southeast Asia as their natural leader. This was particularly true after Lee Kuan Yew retired.

Q: From Singapore.

TEARE: Of Singapore...moved upstairs to become senior minister in 1990. Suharto, given his style, was never a dynamic leader of ASEAN or anything else. Dr. Mahathir of Malaysia, who is so much in the news right now as he fires and then persecutes his Deputy, former Deputy, I think, began to figure that if Suharto was to leave a vacuum he, Mahathir, ought to step forward as the leader of ASEAN.

We found that in the Desert Shield-Desert Storm period there was considerable ambivalence on the part of the Indonesians in particular, Malaysians also, about supporting us and the coalition and Kuwait against the Iraqi invaders. Even though you might think those countries would have had ample reason to sympathize with Kuwait and with the more moderate Islamic world. We found that was for a couple of reasons at least one was that Saudi Arabia represents something of a bugbear for Indonesia and Malaysia. First of all, over time, the Saudis have tended to look down on Islam as practiced in Southeast Asia as being too relaxed and permissive. The Indonesians and Malaysians are quite conscious of that.

Another reason was that during the Hajj in 1989 or 1990 there had been a tragic accident in which a tunnel collapsed and several hundred pilgrims were killed, buried alive, suffocated. A lot of them were from Indonesia and some were from Malaysia. The Saudi Government had promised consular access to the corpses for Indonesia and Malaysia both and instead buried all the bodies before consular officers from those countries could get to the scene. So there was some animosity.

Also there was a certain amount of republican feeling, anti royal feeling, directed particularly at the Saudis from Indonesia and Malaysia. So it was not all smooth. And I think there was a belief, and this later became evident in the attitude toward Bosnia, particularly in the case of the Malaysians, that the United States was only interested in preserving oil and the flow of oil and was not interested in protecting Moslems per se. Which again, I think, is more a reflection of the Malaysian outlook on things than of anything else.

Q: Did you find yourself in the position of supporting our efforts to drum up support from

Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei, particularly, in our operations against Iraq?

TEARE: Yes we did quite a bit of that. I remember specifically that at one point Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia declined to make himself available for a telephone call from Secretary Baker at which we took some umbrage. At the same time there were some terrorist operations directed against U.S. interests and Malaysia seemed to be a place that Iraqis and others were using as a staging point or base of operations. Specifically in Manila a couple of would-be terrorist bombers blew themselves up and there was I think a Malaysian connection there. I think they had come from Malaysia.

We had the sense the Malaysians were not doing all they could to control the entry and transit of people from the Arab world, although I think the Malaysians did cooperate in a couple of instances when we got them some information. There were also problems in Thailand, as I recall. So it was a fairly difficult period and the Malaysians were usually the last to come around. The Sultan of Brunei, I think, was implicitly in favor of Kuwait and against Iraq, and the Indonesians, I think, came farther faster than the Malaysians did. But it was not automatic or unqualified.

Q: Well then turning to Malaysia which is very much on the front pages today what was the situation when you were there, '89 to '92?

TEARE: Well I have already mentioned some of our set-tos with Dr. Mahathir and his reluctance to get involved in the defense of Kuwait if you will.

I'm not sure whether I mentioned in connection with Australia earlier on that Mahathir seemed to resent the United States influence in economic matters in Asia. After the Australians started APEC in 1989, Mahathir quickly came along with his idea for an East Asian Economic Caucus, EAEC it was called. It would be essentially all of APEC except the United States and Canada or maybe except the U.S., Canada, Australia and New Zealand. It would be Japan and Southeast Asia essentially. That was something we did not want and we opposed it from its inception and continued to do so. I thought we were a little paranoid about it but anyway Mahathir wanted essentially Asia for Asians, white men keep out! That seemed to be his approach to things. And of course in the last few months we have seen his complaining about a conspiracy to devalue his currency by international speculators and it seems to have taken on an anti-Semitic tone, which is truly unfortunate. It shows just how out of it Mahathir is.

Q: How did we see Malaysia on sort of the Asia scene and the world scene?

TEARE: I would say we saw Malaysia as a basically respectable and cooperative member of the international community...a relatively small one with a population of 18 or 20 million. But, and listen this is more my personal view I guess than any United States view, Malaysia is not confident of its own identity. In Indonesia, at least around the old Javanese majority, you have a sense of people who are comfortable in their own skins. They know who they are. They know they have a long ways to go in terms of development and so forth.

In the case of the Malaysians, the ethnic Malays who are a bare majority of the population are not all that secure largely because the Chinese do so much better economically. And the Indians, who are the smallest of the three groups, have done very well in public service and elsewhere. The Malays do not trust the Chinese or the Indians as a broad generalization. They have taken steps, you might call it affirmative action in the extreme, to benefit the ethnic Malays in terms of university places and jobs and scholarships and on and on and on. Help them up economically while at the same time keeping the Chinese 'capped'. So there is a lack of confidence in themselves and their own identity really.

This sometimes translated into rather bizarre behavior. At the same time, however, the Malaysians were not shortsighted. They came around to a little bit of defense cooperation with the United States themselves, again during my watch. Part of it came from a contract that a Malaysian firm won to refurbish the skin of U.S. Air Force C-130s.

Q: That is a transport plane?

TEARE: Yes. They took that contract away from a Korean firm that had held it for several years. Then they realized that along with that came a small U.S. Air Force contingent to monitor the implementation of that contract. The company itself was a joint venture, I think 49 percent Lockheed and 51 percent Malaysian. Anyway, the contract went to Malaysia, the planes started coming in, a small U.S. Air Force contingent arrived to monitor the performance of the contract. We got into negotiations about the privileges and immunities of those people. Again this was a difficult issue for the Malaysians, as it had been for Singaporeans, and again the agreement there is non-published, considered classified. But the point is that we were not going to send American personnel and their dependents into a situation where people might be subject to the death penalty for possession of relatively small amounts of narcotics, marijuana even. Not that we encourage that, but we recognize that the issue could arise and we wanted to make sure that no American teenagers went to the gallows. So we have that worked out.

We did have a case in the narcotics field during my time that was rather troublesome. This was an American with very poor judgment who was normally resident in Thailand. He went on a holiday to Malaysia, maybe only to renew his Thai visa, and mailed himself a small quantity of marijuana that was confiscated by the Malaysian authorities. He was indicted and eventually brought to trial. I've forgotten the numerical limits now but essentially he had more than enough marijuana to put him in jeopardy for the death penalty. Extensive efforts were mounted by his family to defend him including the engagement of Ramsey Clark as legal consultant on the case.

Q: The former Attorney General.

TEARE: Former Attorney General and well-known supporter of far out causes. So Clark made at least one trip to Malaysia and tried to advise the defense team. I don't think the case was resolved before I left but I think what happened was that they determined that

there were two separate amounts of marijuana, neither one of which was over the threshold for the death penalty. But I assume that he was sentenced to quite a lengthy prison term even so. But there was a real prospect for awhile that he would face death.

PAUL M. CLEVELAND
Ambassador
Malaysia (1989-1992)

Paul M. Cleveland was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1931 and raised in New York and Washington, DC. He received a bachelor's degree in English from Yale University in 1953. Afterward, he entered the U.S. Air Force. Mr. Cleveland's Foreign Service career included positions in Australia, Germany, Korea, New Zealand, and Malaysia. He was interviewed by Thomas Stern on October 20, 1995.

Q: Then in 1989 you were assigned to Malaysia as our Ambassador. How did that come about?

CLEVELAND: I think I lucked out as in some ways I had with my Wellington assignment. One day, Larry Eagleburger called me in Wellington to tell me that the administration had selected a woman--a real estate person--from the State of Washington to succeed me as Ambassador to New Zealand. He told me not to worry however, because the Department's new policy was to find good assignments for any career Ambassadors who had been replaced by a political appointee. In fact, he mentioned that Malaysia might be available and asked me whether I would be interested. I agreed and that is how I ended up in Kuala Lumpur. That new policy I think was very helpful to me.

The confirmation process took a little longer this time. I left Wellington towards the end of April 1989 and I didn't get to Kuala Lumpur until October. Most of the time was taken up with the clearance process and some briefings. The confirmation hearings went smoothly and the Senate approval process was accomplished expeditiously.

I had learned something about Malaysia when I served in Indonesia. I had visited the country on a couple of occasions. So I had some familiarity with the Indonesian-Malay culture in general. But that was the extent of my knowledge. In fact, Malaysia was quite different from Indonesia.

In Malaysia, there is a convergence of three cultures: Malay, Chinese and Indian. The Chinese population in Malaysia is quite substantial whereas it was only 5% in Indonesia. As a consequence, the Malays, in contrast to the Indonesians, are less secure and feel more threatened by the Chinese. The Chinese in Malaysia are intelligent, traditionally worked harder than the Malay and therefore did better in school and in business. That was bound to effect the Malay view of the Chinese.

In 1969 there were major communal riots. In response to this perceived threat of Chinese domination, the Malay had promulgated the largest affirmative action program in the world. They had set up a system which made sure that Malays would get their share--if not more--of the opportunities in academia, government, the military and some of the financial centers--the key control spots. The Chinese were left to take over the business community. The affirmative action had worked extremely well over the years, without increasing the tension between the Malay and Chinese communities. The Chinese, despite their losses in some key segments of society, were left with enough of the "pie" to satisfy them. The success of the affirmative action program was undoubtedly due to a rapidly expanding economy, led by trade. As long as the "economic pie" was ever expanding, it could accommodate the needs of the racial communities, even with their growing populations. So the government could afford to discriminate against the Chinese because everybody's economic well-being was improving. It was always said that if the economy were to stagnate or, even worse, to deteriorate, then the tension between the communities would undoubtedly rise again.

The Indians were only 9% of the population. They were probably, as a whole, at the bottom of society. Some Indians had some very highly respected professional positions--lawyers, doctors, etc. But on the other hand, many of them were rubber tappers and poor. Since the Indian portion of the population was relatively small, they did not play a major role in Malaysian society. It was the Malay-Chinese schism that drove politics in Malaysia. In practice, the multi-racial society worked reasonably well because of the economic growth and the affirmative action program promulgated by the government. I think it is still working well.

When I went to Malaysia, our relationship with that country was reasonably good. The trade relations were good. The Malaysian had fewer trade restrictions--tariff and non-tariff barriers--than almost any country in the Far East. We only had a few complaints about import restrictions--chocolate, chickens and some other agricultural products. But by and large, we were satisfied with Malaysian trade policies. In addition, Malaysia was quite open to foreign investment--quite different than Korea, for example, which was highly restrictive on foreign investment. Malaysians welcomed our technology and as a result became the third largest exporter in the world of computer chips. American firms like Intel drove this growth when they decided to build plants in Malaysia. Although the chips were designed in the US, they were produced in Malaysia. So our economic relations were quite satisfactory and my marching orders were to keep them so.

The biggest US investor was EXXON--known as ESSO in Malaysia. It had very large oil fields that it was exploiting. ESSO also found major gas reserves which they were bringing up. There were other US investments--e.g. Mattel--in Malaysia. It became obvious to me after a few months in Kuala Lumpur that the trade and investment aspects of the Malaysia-US relations was really the major area to work on; the political side, which I will discuss later, was just not fertile ground to plow. I began by vowing not to become a "salesman", as the Scandinavian ambassadors were for their fishing and timber products. "That was not my bag," I said. It didn't take me long however before I decided that I indeed would become a "salesman" for American products. I had in the past spent

66%-70% of my time on political and security issues--as I had done in Korea. That changed dramatically in Malaysia; in fact, I spent two-thirds of my time on commercial matters--promoting US commercial interests in Malaysia. The Cold War had passed. It was clear that our diplomatic focus around the world would have to adjust to that fact and in Southeast Asia, it was the economic/commercial interests that had to become the priority focus of my attention. Of course, there were always political/security issues, but they were no longer the time consumers that they had been. I should say that this change of emphasis was all at my initiative; Washington hadn't caught up with the new environment in which its Ambassadors in Southeast Asia were operating. I rewrote our "Goals and Objectives" statement which was the fundamental operating guideline for my Country Team. We used to have two staff meetings each week on a variety of subjects; I changed one to focus entirely on commercial issues. I personally spent more and more time with the Economic and Commercial Counselors--to the chagrin of the Political Section. As time went on, I asked our political analysts to write more and more about the connections between Malaysian government and business, including for example the fact that the ruling party's leadership was part of interlocking directorships that ran many business enterprises. We tried to examine how Malaysian business was run, how it worked, and how it related to the political leadership.

So we shifted the focus of the Embassy's work. I spent a lot of time with American businessman. I saw every businessman who came to Kuala Lumpur who wanted to see me. I spent a lot of time with the ABC (the American Business Community--now known as the American Chamber of Commerce). When my tour ended, the ABC gave me a commemorative plaque for my efforts on behalf of American business in Malaysia as Honorary Chairman of the ABC board. It was clear that the Embassy had dramatically changed from a time honored multi-purpose organization into one which gave the highest priority to commercial work. We pushed all the trade issues as much as we could. As I said, there weren't many barriers but we pushed to eliminate the few that were standing. We worked assiduously on that--every day in every way.

One day I was in Singapore visiting Bob Orr, our Ambassador there. He had been the Governor of Indiana, after a career in business. I thought he was a jewel. We were having breakfast on the back porch of his residence. I said: "Bob, we are wasting our time just sitting out here. We should be traveling back in the US, pushing American business to come and invest here." It was a thought that had just occurred to me on the spur of the moment. But Bob picked up on it immediately and said it was a great idea. He said he was going back to Washington in a few days and he promised to raise the suggestion there. Orr did just that and got Deputy Secretary Eagleburger's support, as well as Under Secretary Bob Zellick's. The EA Bureau said it thought it was a great idea, but didn't come through with any money or support. I think the Deputy Secretary and the Under Secretary did genuinely support the idea, but the Bureau just gave it lip service. But I did get a message from Bob Driscoll, the chairman of the ASEAN Business Council in Washington. He wanted to know what his organization could do to make such a trip through the US successful.

The first Ambassadorial group that was supposed to beat the US business bushes consisted of Orr, John Monjo--from Indonesia--and myself. Monjo wanted a larger group, however, so we expanded it to include all the US Ambassadors to the ASEAN countries, and included our Charge' in Brunei. In the Spring of 1992, we took our commercial counselors and some representatives of relevant Washington agencies (EX-IM, OPIC, etc) and hit the US road. We visited seven cities. We started in Portland where we had 350 businessmen attend our conference. Chuck Knight, the Chairman of NIKE, was instrumental in making the Portland conference a success. In fact, NIKE financed the whole conference--at its college campus south of Portland. Driscoll traveled with us; he introduced us. Then we each gave short presentations. In the afternoon, the businessmen came to talk to the Ambassadors from the countries in which they were interested. After Portland we went to Chicago, Atlanta, Houston, Detroit and several other cities in Michigan, and then Washington and New York. It was a great success. CNN gave us some time on its "Moneyline" show with Fred Dobbs. I think this tour did make a difference.

When we got to Washington, we were already pretty well known. So when we met with the bureaucracy there, our meeting was attended by 150 senior officials--deputy assistant secretaries and up. That gave us an opportunity to report on what we had found across the country, what the problems and issues were and what the possible solutions were.

Our message across the US was that Southeast Asia was the fastest growing part of the globe. The American business community had for too long neglected this growing potential market; it had been too slow and too loath to go to places like East Asia. The Japanese and other Asians were entering the American market. If the trade imbalances were not rectified soon through some aggressive American business activity in Southeast Asia we would lose a golden opportunity that might never be recoverable. It was clear that the Japanese, for example, would be competitive in the US and in East Asia, whereas the Americans would only be competitive in the US. Under such circumstances, we would lose. Our argument might have been somewhat overstated, but there was considerable truth to it. I think we did bring that message home and it did begin to sink in.

There was another serendipitous plus. We had a USIA man with us and he wrote stories about our sales pitch. The results were evident; I got 25 favorable press stories in the Malaysian press in the course of the two weeks I was on the road. The USIA man just kept writing and the media in Southeast Asia just picked them up and ran them--verbatim. The stories didn't vary very much one from the other, but the Malaysian press ran them. This was an entirely new effort; no American Ambassadors had ever done what we were doing. We got more press attention on this commercial effort than we had ever had before on any issue. They really gave us a lot of coverage and all favorable. They were mystified that a group of American Ambassadors would be in the United States pushing programs that benefitted the Southeast Asia countries. In fact, this particular tour gave rise to subsequent traveling "shows" put on by the ASEAN Ambassadors in Washington, also sponsored by the US-ASEAN Business Council. I have to give great credit to Driscoll not only for the support he gave our group, but his subsequent efforts as

well. He managed to get free air fares for us, free rooms at hotels, dinners sponsored by major corporations, etc. Flour in Houston took us around in helicopters and huge Cadillac limousines. Some of the support we got was incredible. It was a great success and that program continues to the day.

This is not to say that the day after I returned to Kuala Lumpur I was swamped with new American businessmen wanting to seek opportunities in Malaysia. But we did see some evidence of success, although a casual relationship is always hard to establish in a situation such as this. But I have no question that our trip, coming at a propitious moment, did have an impact on American attitudes about doing business in Southeast Asia. It was my sense, and that of my colleagues, that the Japanese were beating our pants off in Southeast Asia because our business community had not made an effort. At the same time, the trade imbalance issue was getting attention in the US; the importance of trade to our economic well being was being increasingly recognized. President Bush went to Singapore and Japan pushing car sales at that time--he did well in one place and not so well in the other. But by 1992, the idea of a President going out to be a salesman for US products was no longer met with raised eyebrows; the country was beginning to understand the importance of trade and exports. So our trip was well timed. It may also have been one of the first efforts by the US diplomatic corps to see that US interest lay in the commercial side and that the Foreign Service would have to adapt to that.

I want to emphasize the "beginning" aspect of the Department's interest in commercial work. There was no question that the leadership understood what was going on. The EA Bureau was a little slow on the uptake. But I do believe that the EA Bureau also eventually got the message. When we came to Washington, we spent most of our time with Eagleburger and Zellick. I think Eagleburger was genuinely impressed; he was amazed by the reception we had gotten and the interest we had attracted. Zellick was also very supportive.

I think it is fair to say--and my later assignment confirmed my views--that the Department of State, as an institution, has never been interested in commercial work. It is true that in the more recent past, the Department has tried to be more involved in commercial work. On the other hands, I think it has been the custom and not the exception to find Embassies rather than the Department working hard on commercial issues. Many are doing a very effective work; they are on top of issues and are helping in pushing US business trying to win contracts for US companies. Many of these Embassies are getting increasingly more effective support from the country desks in Washington. I am sure that more and more Ambassadors found that with the end of the Cold War, the US could best influence events in their countries through economic/commercial channels. Improvements in US commercial activities were the main challenge left for US Ambassadors and their staffs. In addition, commercial work in the field is kind of fun. You can go see a cabinet minister and maybe come away with a \$100 million contract. That is very satisfying. But I must note that the Department itself has had a more difficult time changing its focus. It is still wedded to political and politico/military issues with which it feels more comfortable, but I think over the years, it has shown some shift in its perceptions of the importance of various bilateral issues.

On the military side while I was in Malaysia, there was an ongoing negotiation on a "Status of Forces" agreement. There had been an increasing relationship between the military of both countries. It was never a major program, but it was of some importance to both sides. We never had many US military personnel in country at any one time. But we used to hold joint exercises and bring small groups of special forces into the country. We brought naval forces into Lumut and Penang harbors. We also considered deploying some aircraft on a temporary basis. So our presence was never large, but we would on occasions have some military in country on a temporary basis. We did have one military group permanently stationed in Malaysia--probably a dozen officers and families. It was responsible for inspection of US military aircraft being repaired AIROD--a Malaysian government repair facility. Some of our C-130s were sent there for maintenance and repair.

The most interesting aspect of the SOFA negotiations was fulfilling our objective of protecting our military from the draconian anti-drug laws that were in effect in Malaysia and Singapore. We were negotiating SOFAs with both states simultaneously. Our concern was that both countries made minimal possession of any drugs a major crime which had the death penalty as a possible punishment. We were worried more about the children of our military personnel than we were of the uniformed personnel themselves. Kids have been known to exercise very poor judgment, even in schools and we were anxious to protect against the unacceptable punishments that the Malaysian or Singaporean authorities might mete out under their laws. We finally developed language which gave us an escape and made it clear that the Malaysian would treat any American military and his family in accordance with "the mutual interest" of the two sides or words to that effect. The Singapore government would not agree to such a clause and negotiated a much more restrictive SOFA. The Malaysians were not happy when they found out that they had not been accorded the same jurisdiction as had Singapore. It never became a significant issue, but there were some tense moments in that SOFA negotiation. Fortunately, we never had the need to test the language of the Malaysian SOFA.

The political relationship between the US and Malaysia was not as good as the economic or military ones. In my view, this was due primarily to the fact that Prime Minister Mahathir had not been invited to the White House by President Bush and he then reacted in a querulous, petty fashion. Reagan had extended such an invitation. But Mahathir had only briefly met with Bush and he then reacted in a querulous, petty fashion during a Boston University graduation ceremony, when his son was graduating and Bush had given the commencement address. He then had a twenty minute meeting with the President in "the locker room" as Mahathir described it. Bush had to rush off to entertain Mitterrand. That left a bad taste in Mahathir's mouth. So he was upset by his perception of the way Bush was treating him. On several occasions we pointed out to Washington what was bugging Mahathir. Of course, there is always great competition among the leaders of all countries to receive an invitation to the White House. Our President just doesn't have enough time for all of them. In addition, Mahathir was not highly regarded in Washington, particularly in light of his anti-Western statements. He took direct aim at

Australians. He also said some things about the US which were not well received in Washington.

In addition, Secretary of State James Baker did not have a very high regard for Mahathir. The question of the EAEG (East Asian Economic Group which later became the East Asian Economic Caucus) arose. Mahathir thought that APEC needed a counterbalance. APEC was an organization which the US had nourished and supported for many years. Mahathir wanted an organization for Asian countries only. That was unwelcome to us because we were afraid that the second organization would divide the Asia-Pacific area into separate blocks, thereby weakening the Pan Pacific structure we were trying to establish. It would have meant that the Asians would be in one block and the rest of the Pacific nations in another.

While I agreed on that point, my view was quite different than that espoused by the Department on how we should proceed. We did agree that the Malaysian proposal was a bad one; so we had no disagreement with Washington on the objectives. What we in the Embassy in Kuala Lumpur did disagree on were the tactics on EAEG. We did not believe that a frontal attack was the best approach. If we were to openly oppose the idea, it would force the proud Mahathir to dig in his heels and defend his idea vigorously. It was the advice of other Asian countries that the US not oppose the idea outright. Low key, indirect opposition was a better approach, we wrote. The Department at first just told us politely that it was not convinced by our rationale and asked that we not comment in any way on the Mahathir idea.

We then suggested in a message that the EAEG be turned into a caucus as a part of APEC. It seemed logical that the Asians would meet separately, but as part of an overall Asian Pacific (APEC) forum. That got a rapid and very forceful negative response from Washington. It was suggested that I just shut up about this issue.

Then, unbeknown to me, Dick Solomon--probably at the request of Bob Zellick or the Secretary--asked Mike Armacost, our Ambassador in Tokyo, to go to an Asian Society meeting in Bali and speak against EAEG. There, Mahathir gave a blistering anti-American speech showing his irritation with our negative position on his idea--the EAEG. That was a major error on the Prime Minister's part. He alienated the US businessmen in the audience, but more important he alienated President Suharto. He knew that Suharto of Indonesia--the host country--did not favor EAEG, nor was he in favor of alienating the US. In fact, Suharto was upset that Mahathir would use a venue in his country to support an idea he opposed and to his "friend"--the US. Furthermore, both Suharto and Mahathir were competing for the mantle as spokesman for Southeast Asia which had been worn by Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore. Naturally, Suharto was angry about the speech. The next day, Armacost gave a speech in which he outright rejected the concept of an EAEG. I understand that all the Asian countries just shook their heads at this debate. The Japanese Ambassador--a brilliant man--in Kuala Lumpur had told me repeatedly that the US should just stay out of the EAEG debate and leave it to the Asians themselves; they would kill the idea softly. One day the Ambassador said to me: "Leave EAEG alone. We Asians will lead it into an honorable cul-de-sac." I think that was a

great line, but we nevertheless chose to oppose EAEG openly and forcefully, thereby embarrassing and angering Mahathir. Fortunately, Indonesia and Japan shared our basic opposition to EAEG; neither country wanted to alienate its strongest ally and friend. They managed to quietly downplay EAEG.

After making this speech, Mike Armacost called me from Tokyo and apologized. He told me that he had given it under instructions. I appreciated the call. But by that time, the damage was done and I had to live with this US tactic. I think that the Asians would have sidetracked the idea without us, possibly more quickly and with less anger had we not intervened. In any case, EAEG did not endear Mahathir to Baker who had reservations about the Malaysian Prime Minister for other reasons as well. But the Bali conference and its aftermath certainly killed any chance of Mahathir being invited to the White House and with that went any hope of our having much influence in Malaysia on political issues. In fact, it became US policy to disregard Mahathir as much as possible and to oppose him openly whenever the opportunity arose. My advice was different; I thought that had we invited Mahathir to Washington and played to his ego a little, that we could have at least neutralized him if not actually won him over. I think that was the best course, but the administration refused to do that. The Clinton administration, on the other hand, did invite Mahathir to lunch and now has a solid friend in Southeast Asia. The Malaysians showed their gratitude by buying F-18s for a sizeable amount of money.

It was not all our fault. Mahathir had a very prickly personality to go along with his perceived neglect. He was a difficult character to get along with. He complained a lot publically and I thought took every conceivable occasion to make his unhappiness known. Baker had come to Kuala Lumpur in 1991 for a APEC Ministerial meeting. He paid a courtesy call on Mahathir. I heard that he later told some people in Tokyo that he felt that he had been insulted by Mahathir because the Prime Minister had received him wearing a bush jacket--that was not an appropriate attire. I think Baker's views are clearly shown in his book; he was not very kind to Mahathir in that.

One real insult showing how bad Mahathir could be was his refusal to take a phone call from the President when Bush visited Singapore in the Spring of 1992. Bush had asked me about Mahathir and concluded from my comments that Mahathir was a "proud man." I agreed. Bush then tried to appease Mahathir by telephoning him from his plane. When Mahathir refused to talk, the Americans were dumbfounded. I took some pleasure in saying to a chagrined Foreign Ministry official that: "Even Saddam Hussein would take a call from the President of the United States."

I only had one private meeting with Mahathir during my tour; otherwise he would not see me. That meeting didn't take place until I had been in Kuala Lumpur for several months. I finally got in to see him because I was about to return to the US for consultations and I thought that I should at least be able to report that I had seen the Prime Minister privately. The meeting was a dud; he just sat there and said virtually nothing. I would ask questions and get monosyllabic answers. I thought that Mahathir acted rather immaturely. He was just mad because his personal vanity had been wounded.

I may have exacerbated the problem myself. I tried to be helpful at one time early on in my tour, when we were restricting financial flows around the world of Iraqi funds. I sent letters to the six or seven pertinent Cabinet ministers of Malaysia, informing them of our action, asking some questions about the status of the funds and offering my assistance if they needed it. The Malaysians somehow interpreted this as an effort on my part to undermine their government. I think they found it inappropriate for me to be in contact with ministries other than the Foreign Ministry on this subject, although on many other matters I dealt directly with the pertinent minister; indeed I was expected to do so. In this case however, they wished that I had sent only one letter to the Foreign Minister who then would have contacted his Cabinet colleagues. I guess, in an effort to be efficient, I took the wrong course; in retrospect it would obviously have been better for me to write only to the Foreign Minister. I am still not sure why they took such umbrage at this, but they did. My letters came up in a Cabinet meeting, I was told, and then I was called in by the Director for American Affairs at the Foreign Ministry to be lectured about my "serious error in protocol." But that was the one exception to what was otherwise a professional relationship with the Malaysian bureaucracy.

In 1991, when Iraq invaded Kuwait, Baker went to visit many of the countries that had Security Council membership that year. He couldn't squeeze Malaysia in on his trip but wanted to see the Foreign Minister Hassan in Los Angeles. The Foreign Minister refused to go to LA to see Baker. So President Bush called Mahathir when the latter was in Tokyo. That call was enough to get the Foreign Minister to go to LA to see Baker. There were four countries that were not supporting our position in the Security Council; Malaysia was one of them. When the vote came up, Cuba and Yemen voted against us, but Malaysia was persuaded and voted with us after Bush's call, the Baker-Hassan meeting and some excellent work by Tom Pickering, our Ambassador to the UN. The Embassy was also involved, but primarily as a supporting player to the actions of others.

The UN vote was a tough decision for Mahathir; he had a lot of opposition among radical Muslims. In fact, there was a lot of support for Iraq as the Gulf War developed. We had the only real riots in front of the Embassy in my time--a couple of hundred people who were hopping mad. These were Muslim radicals showing their support for Saddam Hussein and their opposition to our bombing of their "brothers." So Mahathir had his domestic problems. The Chancery was given some very heavy protection by the Malaysians because we were concerned that some real "bomb throwers" might have infiltrated from outside Malaysia. It was the only time in my career I felt personally threatened. Happily, Carter was in the US. We took a lot of security precautions like barricades in front of doors, etc. Fortunately, no one was hurt and the Gulf War came to an end rather rapidly.

As for other threats, there had been a Communist threat in Malaysia, but by the time I got there, that had pretty well evaporated. There were a few communist terrorists in the jungles, but they were not a threat except perhaps to themselves and no one was really concerned.

I got a good reception in Kuala Lumpur after my trade mission trip through the US. The Trade Minister seemed a little mystified by what I had done; no American Ambassador--nor any other Ambassador for that matter--had ever traveled through his own country publicizing economic opportunities in his host country with such fanfare. These opportunities were in the interest of both Malaysia and the US. Our approach was new and I think the Malaysians were taken by surprise. As I mentioned earlier, our road show did get wide attention in the Malaysian press which I think further increased the government's curiosity. Given Mahathir's personality and view about the US, it was probably hard for any Cabinet officer to be outright pleased by my efforts, but I am sure they did not go unnoticed. Despite my support for increased Malaysian economic growth, Mahathir's attitude toward the US never improved in my time. He never acknowledged that we had tried to help Malaysia.

As I said, Mahathir's attitude toward the US never changed until the Clinton administration took office and then (my guess is) only because he was extended an invitation to the White House for lunch and Mahathir felt that he had finally gotten the respect that was due him. But during my tour, the Department and the NSC had firmly opposed any step toward Mahathir. As far as Bush's Washington was concerned, Mahathir was just an annoyance. And that made my job in Kuala Lumpur difficult.

DAVID G. BROWN

**Director, Office of Indonesia, Malaysia, Brunei and Singapore Affairs
Washington DC (1992-1993)**

David G. Brown was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1940. He graduated from Princeton University in 1964 entered the Foreign Service. His assignments include Taipei, Saigon, Yokohama, Tokyo, Vienna, Beijing, Oslo, and Hong Kong. Before retirement in 1996, he served as Director of the Office of Korean Affairs. Mr. Brown was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 28, 2003.

Q: It also was a new administration coming in which all can run amuck for a while until they settle down and are able to be responsible.

BROWN: Right. So, we had that and the other thing that was interesting was concerned Malaysia where we had had very bad relations under Bush and Baker at the end of the Bush presidency. Malaysia sent out some fairly clear signals that Prime Minister Mahathir wanted to have better relations with the U.S. We worked quite hard at bringing that about. Mahathir was a very complex individual whose rhetoric was often critical of the United States, but who on a practical level, both facilitated American investment in his country and also quietly kept a good working relationship with the U.S. military. We saw the basis for being able to cooperate with him on certain things while sort of looking the other way his rhetoric, which he calmed down in this period. I think we made substantial progress and the focus of it was in trying to persuade the Malaysians to buy

advanced military aircraft from the U.S. They were in the market for a modern jet to strengthen their air force and were looking at French, Russian and American planes. So, we made a huge push on it and in the end Mahathir decided to split the business between the Russians and the Americans and bought some MIGs and some F18s.

Q: You say Mahathir was a complex person. What was, where was his anti-American rhetoric coming from?

BROWN: I think it was in part a reflection of his personality. He was at times an abrasive, straight talking individual. He was also playing to his domestic audiences in Malaysia that are predominantly Muslim and often critical of the U.S. I can't remember just what the rhetoric was, but before I came on the job Mahathir had gone to the UN and given a vitriolic speech attacking the American role in the world. That was what really poisoned his relations with the Bush administration.

THOMAS R. CARMICHAEL
Press Attaché
Kuala Lumpur (1995-1997)

Mr. Carmichael was born in Iowa and raised in Illinois and Florida. He was educated at the University of Florida and Florida State University. In 1984 Mr. Carmichael joined the USIA Foreign Service and served variously as Cultural Affairs Officer and Press Officer in Madrid, Le Paz, Poznan, Kuala Lumpur, Ulaanbaatar and Hanoi. He also served several tours at USIA Headquarters and the State Department in Washington, DC. Mr. Carmichael was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.

CARMICHAEL: Then I went to Kuala Lumpur as the information officer, the press officer. So I had a year of training in Malay and area studies and I ended up going there.

Q: So you were there from when to when?

CARMICHAEL: I guess that would have been about '95 to '97.

Q: What was the situation in Malaysia?

CARMICHAEL: I became the press attaché just as the North Koreans were meeting with us and others in our K.L. embassy to talk about the nuclear program in North Korea and addressing the issue of what we could do to keep them from going nuclear. So I walked into that one – intense international attention. That was probably the most international coverage there at any time, and I walked into that as the former press attaché was on his way out. That was the setting.

In terms of press attaché work, it was great, because right off the bat I got to learn all the

players, got to meet CNN people that I would be working with later on during Presidential and Secretary of State visits. Malaysia then was our sixth largest trading partner, depending upon how you messed with the numbers, so we wanted to make clear that in fact we had a good relationship with the Malaysians – the government and the people. We had this very, very good business relationship, some good exchanges with the Malaysians but Prime Minister Mahathir was constantly giving us heck about everything -- about being imperialism, etc. and that was a time when there was this big question about human rights and whether human rights was applicable to the Asian context. Mahathir's point was that we were looking at these issues from an entirely Western view. According to him, Asian culture was not so obsessive with political freedom and human rights. Asians needed a more authoritative government than we have in the West. This was clearly a self-serving reading of things.

Q: What was, you might say, the attitude of you all at the embassy towards Mahathir?

CARMICHAEL: Well, you know. He's the leader of the country and you're respectful to him in print and all that, but you just can't take some of the things he says. And you can't get too upset about it when he is directing some pettiness at America, misspeaking and that sort of thing. The things that would aggravate you and drove you crazy, such as when he got into some anti-Semitic comments, you could release a statement, and, of course, the political section and Ambassador would express views forcefully directly to the government, rather than actually build up Mahathir's image with a public back and forth.

Q: I am probably phrasing this wrong but did you almost deal with him as, not as a nut case but I mean, just always like that and sort of dismiss it and sort of deal with it at a lower level with more rational people or what?

CARMICHAEL: We can deal with the more rational people, you know. There were certain things in the press which simply weren't going to be said but in terms of their foreign affairs, as I understand it, there would be problems, but there are problems a lot of different places. We had a good economic, social relationship with the government. He had a more difficult image than the rest of the government. Again, we had things that Malaysians wanted; such as technology, including our educational technology, and that meant a lot. They had a respect for our society.

The thing is though, you gotta remember that beyond Mahathir and the moderates ...and he had his own detractors among these Muslims -- were very conservative Muslims. Mahathir had his own political situation which he had to handle -- and that included resorting to some of his statements about the U.S., etcetera. He had his own problems that he had to work with too. In retrospect, I see that our approach in public affairs to engaging conservative Muslims however did not fully recognize the necessity to maintain energy in our exchanges with the conservatives --- working and working and working, despite their continued rejection of our efforts. We should not have accepted over the long term their constant "no." We should have kept doggedly working and watching them as closely as we did the moderates with whom we could do a lot of interesting things.

Q: Were you feeling an overall oppression of fundamentalist Islam?

CARMICHAEL: Yes. Even if you'd go up to what they called the "fundamentalist states" near Thailand – that assessment would probably be excessive. Even then they had lines at grocery stores for men and women, you'd notice sometimes one sex being in the wrong line, there wasn't going to be a fuss made about it.

But we want to be positive, we want to go out, but we'd find there's a limit to how much we can work with a Muslim newspaper, a Malay language paper as opposed to the Chinese papers or the English language papers. They would generally be run by a Malay. When you couldn't work with a Malay paper, that's not something which you should accept. You continue working with the Malay-language paper, and, I think, we just, we found them too difficult to work with, to place articles, or even have a dialogue with editors. It was immediately more productive working with Chinese and English-language press, and maybe that wasn't in the long term the right posture.

Q: How did the Malay government deal with newspapers? Were they under pretty heavy constraints?

CARMICHAEL: There were constraints. They were private newspapers, but there was government control over the newspapers. There were certain things they simply wouldn't print, certain issues that just would never come up. And certain things when we talked to the Malay press and or any press, the journalists would say, "We're not going to cover that event, issue, or program, because we can't print anything." What's the sense of showing up for something if, you know, they couldn't turn that story in?

They had, I thought, within those constraints a very active, very good press that I could work with well. We had, for instance, an official that came over working on getting Malaysian support for our work in Bosnia, financial support for aid, I believe. The newspapers got right on that and worked with me to cover the visit and the issue pretty closely. In terms of educational exchanges, I could get them, you know, the English language papers, to work very closely with me on putting out some good messages about the United States. They had no problem with that.

Q: There were a lot of Malays going to the United States, weren't there?

CARMICHAEL: Yes, yes. Many of them were just leaving, some going to Australia, for instance, or the United States. There were a good 20 programs where an American university partnered with a Malaysian university, and provided the second two years of their education for a college degree, so students might have some classes in Malaysia for the first two years and then they could go to the United States and finish up their degree. There were U.S. professors and administrators on these programs who came over to Malaysia. They had money to do that. There were a lot of Chinese. I am making a distinction between the Chinese Malaysians and the Malay Malaysians. A lot of Chinese Malaysians at that time would go outside the country for their education and study in Singapore, Australia, the United States, Great Britain; because they were not given equal

opportunities with the Malays in their native country. There was an affirmative action program for majority Malays in Malaysia. In terms of housing, some of them got first choice of housing areas. There were whole subdivisions where only Malay could buy. They also had preferential treatment for university acceptance, they had preferential treatment in jobs as well. The ethnic Chinese might be good Malaysians, but if they wanted more advancement, they would sometimes have to leave and go elsewhere for their education and for their job.

I knew an ethnic Chinese newscaster who I enjoyed working with at one of the private stations in Kuala Lumpur. He eventually went down to Singapore where he could advance.

Q: Were things as happens when you've got this type of situation, where the Chinese basically said, "OK, you're the entrepreneurial class. You go run the businesses and the government is run by Malays?"

CARMICHAEL: That was basically one of the things that you looked at and how true that was in terms of how much influence the very wealthy Chinese could have on the government. In general, however, the Chinese were relegated more to the economic sphere than the political sphere. But that doesn't mean that all the Malays were able to harness the government for their benefit, nor does it mean all the Chinese were well-off either. There were a lot of, there were poor Chinese obviously, and some Malays lived in pretty nasty conditions in the cities as well. But that was the bargain. The Malays said, "Give us the government, and you can do the economic stuff."

Q: Did Singapore play much of a role or influence or was it sort of an escape valve for the Chinese or what?

CARMICHAEL: Actually, Singapore served as sort of a thorn in Mahathir's side, because one thing you didn't want to say publicly was compare Malaysia with Singapore -- particularly if they came off second, which they often did in terms of governmental efficiencies and entrepreneurial spirit, you know, moving their people upward. Anything such as public health, you name it. These were the things that worried Mahathir, things that Mahathir always had to keep an eye on, because if they weren't doing as well as Singapore, Malaysians might have found his leadership at fault and lacking.

Q: What about the sort of Borneo part of Malaysia? Did that play much of a role?

CARMICHAEL: In internal politics, yes, but I really, not that much that I can recall. We had some exchanges with their educational institutions, but at the time, Sarawak and Sabah, the two provinces on Borneo, simply didn't have the educational infrastructure that could support exchanges that we, that USIA, were interested in.

Q: Did you get down there at all?

CARMICHAEL: Yes, I visited Sabah and Sarawak, and went to the different universities.

They couldn't be my main focus. I would get down there. Because I was the press officer, I would meet with some of the newspapers down there, but the big newspapers that we watched most closely were in the capital, in Kuala Lumpur.

Q: While you were there, did Mahathir get into any real face off with the United States or not? I was wondering if there were any incidents or something came out that caused him to sound off or something.

CARMICHAEL: He was always saying something, but it was mostly routine aggravation. After all, our mission's premise was that the U.S. government had a better relationship with Malaysia than the Mahathir government admitted. The big blow-up really came just after I left just after they arrested Anwar Ibrahim, the deputy prime minister, on trumped up charges. Just about a month after I left Kuala Lumpur, there was an APEC conference, and Vice President Gore at a public event said very bluntly that Malaysia needed openness and freedom, referring obviously to Anwar's arrest. That really got the Malaysians ticked off. I was kind of happy not to have been there for the mess, to tell you the truth.

However, some interesting things happened. There was a very popular live TV audience participation program every Sunday night, and I would often go to it and sit in the studio audience. It was one of these panel shows with its studio audience asking questions at the end of the panel discussion. For one of the panels, the program had booked an American Fulbright lecturer and Malaysia's secretary of defense on the same panel. They were talking about security and the secretary of defense said they had purchased U.S. fighter jets for the task of patrolling for smugglers along the coast. The Fulbrighter, who was a defense expert, said, "Fighter planes are not used for anti-smuggling efforts. What is this really about?" It really put the Secretary of Defense on the defense, so I heard some aggravation from one of our defense officers, simply because I didn't tell him there would be an American Fulbrighter, and an American might be putting this question to the secretary. My feeling was that a secretary of defense should be able to answer a question like that. Don't blame the questioner.

Q: Where did you go after this?

CARMICHAEL: I was there for two years, and USIA was going to downsize our post there. That meant rather than having an information officer, a cultural affairs officer and a public affairs officer and a deputy public affairs officer. Typically the public affairs officer takes the press responsibilities, if there are only two people at post, so the public affairs officer would have taken my press portfolio, and I would have been, I would get the cultural portfolio -- or leave. I felt it would be better career wise to leave, and USIA was really looking for somebody up in Ulaanbaatar, so I bid on that post.

MARIE THERESE HUHTALA
Ambassador

Malaysia (2001-2004)

Ambassador Huhtala was born and raised in California and Graduated from Santa Clara University. Joining the Foreign Service in 1972, she studied Thai and Chinese languages and became a specialist in East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Her overseas postings include Paris, Quebec, Hong Kong and Chiang Mai (Thailand). In Washington, she dealt primarily with East Asia and Pacific Affairs. From 2001 to 2004 she served as US ambassador to Malaysia and, from 2004 to 2005, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs. Ambassador Huhtala is a graduate of the National War College and the State Department's Senior Seminar. Ambassador Huhtala was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: How did you get Malaysia?

HUHTALA: How did I get Malaysia?

Q: Malaysia is one of those places that have been off and on the White House list as a place where sometimes they put people.

HUHTALA: Very rarely actually, there have been very few political appointees there.

Q: More in Singapore?

HUHTALA: Singapore almost always. My name was put on a list by my home bureau, EAP, in the summer of 2000 but I really didn't expect to get the nomination. In fact it was kind of cute, when I was asked if I would be interested, I said, "Let me talk to my husband" who was not in Bangkok at the time. Called him up that night and he was certainly willing to support it. Then I went back to the Bureau and said, "Yes, I'm very interested." They said, "Fine, we'll put you on the list." I said, "Well, what does one do to advance one's candidacy?" The answer was nothing, it was poor form to do anything but just sit back and "enjoy the process." I took that as a sign that I'd been put on the list but I wouldn't necessarily get the call. Then that September I was back in Washington on R & R or something, and I was floored when I got a phone call from Skip Boyce, the Deputy Assistant Secretary, telling me that the D Committee in State had selected me and my name would be going over to the White House. It then took many, many months for a decision because this was right before the contested presidential election of 2000 and there was a delay before the transition team for the new Bush Administration even went to the White House. The wheels ground very, very slowly and I didn't get the paperwork to fill out until the following April. Up until that point I thought the post might go to a friend of the President or a political appointee of some sort. So it was kind of a thrill when it all came together.

Q: How did your hearing go or preparations?

HUHTALA: This was funny. I had made plans to finish my tour in Bangkok and leave the last week of July, 2001. My airline reservation to depart post was for Thursday the 26th. I knew that there would be an August recess in the Congress and I would have that time to start getting ready for the hearings and get myself completely briefed up on our relations with Malaysia, because up until then I'd been pretty much focused on Thailand. I thought I would have a confirmation hearing in September.

Well on Monday night, July 23rd, we got home from a farewell dinner to find messages all over the house, telling me to call Washington. I called right away and found out the Senate Foreign Relations Committee was scheduling a hearing for EAP nominees on Wednesday July 25 and they wanted me to come back in time for that. I said, "But I'm in Bangkok." Yes, they knew that. I said, "I don't even know if I can get a flight. My goodness, it takes 24 hours to get there. If I leave tomorrow morning I would just make it in time." They said, "Yes, that's what we want you to do." Because I was expressing these doubts they got the impression in Washington that I was unwilling to come back and unwilling to cooperate. The Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs called me and we had a very unpleasant conversation – he was a former Marine officer and not very sympathetic. I said, "I will try, I will try."

For the next hour I tried to get through to somebody in the embassy to arrange a flight out, but it was just a string of errors. I couldn't reach the GSO in charge of travel, as somebody was using the Internet on his phone line. Finally I got in touch with the Administrative Counselor, who in turn had to call in someone from the American Express office. Meanwhile in Washington, the word went out that the nominee for Malaysia was being "uncooperative." The next phone call I got was from the PDAS in EAP (Christopher La Fleur) saying, "Marie, Rich Armitage [the Deputy Secretary] is trying to call me about you and before I return his call I'd like to hear your side of the story." So I explained what was going on. But sometime after midnight it became clear that my husband and I were going to get seats on the morning flight home; I still don't know how they did that because normally the flights are all over-booked in summer.

I stayed up all that night, drafting my confirmation statement and sending it back to the Malaysia desk (thank goodness I had a State Department Open Net terminal at my residence), making other arrangements, and packing my bags. Fortunately we had already packed out and I had tickets for the 26th in hand. So in the end we were able to leave the following morning, flew for 24 hours, and got into Washington, where I found a three-inch thick briefing book waiting for me at the hotel. I remember I fell asleep trying to read it. The next morning I had my hearing.

Q: Did they ask any questions?

HUHTALA: Of course they did. John Kerry was the Senator presiding. I went up with three other nominees, for posts in South Korea, Singapore and Australia. Senator Kerry spent 15 minutes on each of us, grilling us about U.S. relations with that country. There were representatives from the Malaysian embassy in the room too. Then after he'd grilled all four of us he went back and he said, "Now I've got some general questions. Are any

of you doing or do you have any thoughts on how to confront transnational issues? Fortunately that's one thing we did an awful lot of in Thailand, on things such as counter narcotics, AIDS, and trafficking in persons. So while the other three nominees were sort of scratching their heads I jumped in with the first response on that question; then they of course had things to say about it too. It was a very in-depth hearing. I can only figure that I was able to survive it because I had been reading all of the cable traffic about Malaysia for the previous year. I had only the briefest consultations with the Desk, literally a half hour that morning, during which I received their assurance that our policy towards Malaysia was basically trouble-free except for the controversy over Anwar Ibrahim. So I was able to just go on that. It was a wing and a prayer. It was amazing.

Q: In a way it was probably a hell of a lot better that spending months polishing up on everything you had to do.

HUHTALA: True. That's quite true. Still it was just a little bit more pressure than I had hoped for!

Q: I remember, I've only sat in on one hearing. I just thought I'd go and listen to a hearing and somebody was up to go to Thailand and one senator said, "That's the place where the white elephants come from isn't it?" Yes senator and that was it.

HUHTALA: That was it? Wow, well not with John Kerry.

Q: This was way back.

HUHTALA: Of course Senator Kerry had a lot of experience in Asia and particularly Southeast Asia, not just Vietnam. I've mentioned him before in this interview. And of course I had met him before. He had really good questions for us all. There was nothing pro-forma about that hearing.

Q: First place, you were in Malaysia from when to when?

HUHTALA: As it turned out I arrived on September 30, 2001. My swearing in had been scheduled for September 11, of all days. Of course it didn't happen that day as we all know. My whole term in office was really sort of under the shadow of what happened on the awful day and the threat of terrorism. I served in Malaysia from September 30, 2001 to the very end of May, 2004.

Q: As you prepared to go out there how did we see our relations? What were you going to be carrying in your portfolio, your attaché case?

HUHTALA: There was this large outstanding issue of the treatment by the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad of his Deputy Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who had mounted a political challenge to him, only to be arrested and put on trial for sodomy and corruption. There were two separate trials, both widely viewed as rigged; it was a real perversion of justice in Malaysia, which was unfortunate because as a former British

colony it had inherited a very good court system and pretty good human rights situation. So this was a huge issue, especially after the U.S. referred to Anwar as a prisoner of conscience, or political prisoner, in our annual human rights report. This caused a lot of friction in the relationship.

That issue aside, relations were pretty good. We had very large U.S. investment there, a lot of American companies doing business. It was a rapidly developing state, one of the best economies in the whole region. Before the 9/11 attacks, I really thought that the bulk of my duties there were going to center around protecting American businesses and promoting trade and getting better access to Malaysian markets. Of course that changed dramatically on September 11. In fact, the events of September 11 brought about a temporary rapprochement between the Mahathir government and the United States. The prime minister actually came to the embassy, before my arrival, to sign the condolence book and have tea with the chargé d'affaires. This was quite a gesture coming from a man who had been a scathing critic of the United States over the years. He condemned the 9/11 attacks and promised to cooperate with us on fighting terrorism, which was all to the good. As a result President Bush called him to thank him for his support and then they met at an APEC meeting in Shanghai in October of that year. Relations were warming as we began to cooperate together on counter terrorism. And for the bulk of my term Malaysia was a good partner in fighting terrorism.

Q: When you went to Malaysia what sort of an embassy was it? What was there?

HUHTALA: It's considered a medium-size embassy. There were about 80 or 90 Americans, six to eight agencies I think, and another 120 local staff. Although Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, the local employees at the embassy are overwhelmingly Chinese Malaysians. In Malaysia as a whole the Chinese represent about 25% of the population, Malays about 60%, Indians about 10% and the rest are native peoples and expats. According to the Malaysian constitution, all Malays are Muslim by definition, and they enjoy considerable advantages under a system of reverse discrimination favoring the majority Malays. Everything in Malaysia is based on race; political parties, companies, schools, all are segregated along racial lines. As a result, well-educated Chinese have a very hard time getting jobs in the government or civil service, which meant we were able to draw on a pool of excellent applicants to work for us in the embassy. Our professional staff were largely Chinese. Our drivers, guards, etc. were largely Indians. We had to work hard to get a few Malays into key positions. One of the best recent hires that we had was a young Malay college graduate that we put to work in the public affairs section, who took some grief from his friends for working for the Americans actually. He gave us a wonderful window into what was happening in Malay society he created a Malaysian language version of the embassy website and that kind of thing. We also had an outstanding Indian Malaysian working in the political section; he had been a key aide to one of the major Indian politicians for a number of years so he knew everybody in parliament. He really knew the lay of the land in terms of the political situation. But primarily our local staff were Chinese.

Q: Who is your DCM?

HUHTALA: When I got there my DCM was Bob Reis; a year later he departed and Bob Pollard took over as DCM.

Q: How did you work with your DCM having just been a DCM in a very large embassy? How did you find turning this over to somebody else?

HUHTALA: It took me a little bit of time. I think I recognized early on that just as I had no longer been able to be a political officer when I was in Bangkok, I couldn't be a DCM while I was in Kuala Lumpur. I made a conscious effort to delegate as much of the management as possible to him. Of course the first DCM had been there a couple of years already and so he knew the ropes and all I really had to do was just stay out of his way. When the new DCM came it was his first job as a DCM and I found that I needed to give him a little bit of guidance on how to be an effective manager. Not that he was unable to do it, I just had a wealth of experience to share. I appreciated having a DCM in place to do all of those things that I'd been doing in Bangkok because my tasks were very different as Ambassador. I did a whole lot more of what I loosely call representation, in other words, demarches to make, speeches to give, travel around the country, entertaining, being entertained, receiving visitors, briefing delegations, giving interviews to the press. I was very grateful that I didn't have to also make sure that the Mission Program Plan was put together correctly or write a dozen EER's (employee evaluation reports) for senior officers of the embassy. I was quite happy to hand over the reins.

Q: Let's talk a bit about the job of ambassador. How did you see it, you watched Will Itoh was it,

HUHTALA: And Dick Hecklinger.

Q: In Malaysia what was sort of the major thing you were doing?

HUHTALA: As I say our whole mission had been transformed by the new war on terrorism so the primary thing I was doing was trying to win the support of the Malaysian government and people for what we saw as a global war on terrorism. This was not easy in a majority Muslim country where the first burst of sympathy for the United States quickly died in the face of our invasion of Afghanistan, which began one week after I arrived in the country. There were a lot of negative press articles and bad feelings about the women and children and other civilians who were caught in the crossfire during that conflict in Afghanistan. And that was nothing compared to the ill will that arose later on as we began the march towards invading Iraq. The Prime Minister himself was whipping up anti-American emotions on a daily basis, accusing the United States of wanting to colonize the world, keeping third world countries down, exploiting their economies. He accused us of being anti-Muslim and accused us of supporting Israel to the point where we had lost all credibility in the Muslim world. It's kind of hard to fight against this kind of constant rhetoric.

I mentioned that we had arranged a meeting for President Bush and Prime Minister

Mohammed in Shanghai in October 2002. We went further than that, because Malaysia was cooperating with us on counter terrorism, efforts like freezing terrorist assets, so he received an invitation to meet with President Bush in the Oval Office in May 2002. This was the first time in quite a few years that this cantankerous prime minister had been invited to Washington. He even got to stay in Blair House, meet with Congressional leaders and was honored at a dinner hosted by American business leaders. It was to be a very important visit. However, the night before I was to depart on that visit (I would meet the Malaysian delegation in Washington), Mahathir addressed a crowd of supporters at a political rally up country, in the Malaysian language, and said something dreadful about Israel. It was one of his customary rants; the man was a terrible anti-Semite and routinely accused the Israelis of being terrorists. This was picked up by FBIS, and Washington leaders got wind of it within eight hours. Condoleezza Rice who was the National Security Advisor at the time, was prepared to call off the whole visit because of that. We really had to scramble to save the visit. It involved getting back to the prime minister (who was surprised that we were monitoring something he said in Malaysia, in a remote state) and get him to “clarify” the intent of what he was saying. It was a close call. He almost blew the whole visit.

In retrospect, of course, I think we should have gone with our original instincts. Mahathir made a speech to the Organization of Islamic Conference in October 2003, right before he left office, which offended the entire West, stating that Jews rule the world and the mission of all good Muslims is to fight the Jews. It demonstrated the deep-seated hatred he had always held for the Jewish people. Indeed, there have never been diplomatic relations between Israel and Malaysia, and the small Jewish community that once lived in colonial Malaya has relocated to Singapore.

Q: Where did you see, I'm going to come back to the role of the ambassador but, while we are on this, where did you see, how do you call him, Prime Minister Mohammed?

HUHTALA: Mr. Prime Minister, usually. Sometimes I would follow Malaysian custom and use his honorific title, at the time it was “Dato Seri.” (He was later granted a higher title, “Tun.”) The Malaysians have titles similar to British knighthoods bestowed by their King and Sultans; as there are nine royal families (who take turns occupying the national throne), there's a huge proliferation of titles.

Q: Where was he coming from? Was he a demigod, was this a deep belief?

HUHTALA: He had been in office for over 20 years at that point. He finally retired while I was there so I saw the changing of the guard. Where was he coming from? He was very strongly nationalistic and very anti-American. Ten years earlier, in the early '90s, he had tried to rally the other countries of Asia to form an East Asian economic caucus as a bloc that would exclude the United States. We countered with the proposal of putting together APEC, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, which includes as many countries of the Pacific rim as wish to apply. Even then, even ten years earlier, he had been a thorn in our side.

I did a lot of thinking and reading about Mahathir, and of course I met him on many occasions. I think a lot of his orientation came from the colonial experience. He grew up and came to adulthood during the last years of British rule. Although he is a well educated man (he's a medical doctor), he did not get his education in United Kingdom like so many of the Malaysian upper class. Instead he was educated in Singapore. He came from a poor family, and he's also part Indian. There were thus a lot reasons to make him feel insecure and resentful.

Then he was made very angry by the reaction that he inspired when he sacked his deputy prime minister and put him in jail on those scurrilous charges, using a series of court cases that were really rigged. For instance, in one of these trials, the deputy prime minister, Anwar Ibrahim, was being accused of having had homosexual relations with an individual. (Homosexuality, or "sodomy," is illegal in Malaysia.) Because this was a court case they had to specify the date and the place of the alleged encounter, and they named a date and a building in which it supposedly took place. When the defense countered that that building had not yet been built on that date, the judge let the prosecutors amend the charges, just like that. It was just so blatantly rigged, it became a true embarrassment. What had really happened was that the deputy prime minister had challenged the prime minister politically, calling on him to step down, and this was the reaction. Mahathir's decision was to just squash him. And when Anwar was put into jail he was beaten very badly by the chief of police with his hands shackled behind his back. He was beaten so badly that he had permanent damage to his back, to his spine.

This drew international condemnation, especially because Anwar had been well known in capitals around the world, including Washington. I had to walk the line between making sure people did not think that we were supporting Anwar's political platform – which we were not – but taking serious exception to the way he had been treated. Mahathir interpreted this as outright political support for Anwar and his political of reform, or "Reformasi." We did not take a position on the internal politics of Malaysia but we have always condemned this huge violation of human rights.

Q: Could you get a dialog on the human rights?

HUHTALA: It was very tough. Every year when the human rights report came out of Washington I would be called into the foreign ministry to receive a protest. The first year this happened, the director general who had called me in said, "This report is full of inaccuracies." I said, "Fine, please clarify. Here's the report, please give us all the information you can and if there are inaccuracies we'll get it cleared up." They did that, actually. The second year we were able to clean it up greatly because there were in fact, misstatements in it. You know, our human rights reports are based on a lot of NGO reports as well as embassy reporting, and mistakes happen. So we were able to clean up a lot of the inaccuracies. But of course we never made the Malaysians happy because we retained the central points, including criticism of Anwar's treatment and the government's affirmative action policies towards the majority Malay Muslims, or "Bumiputras,"

Q: Did you ever have one on one with the prime minister?

HUHTALA: No, never just the two of us in a room. I did get in to see him fairly regularly, for example, when there were visitors from Washington. The U.S. Trade Representative, Robert Zoellick, came for a visit the first month I was there, so I met Mahathir early on. He invited me to a state dinner that he was giving for the Lao prime minister and we had a chance to talk then. In the first flush of our cooperation after 9/11 there was a big meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce over lunch. Mahathir addressed the meeting, promising protection for U.S. investors, took questions for a long time, and then we all posed for pictures afterwards. Throughout my term I had numerous occasions to see the man and kind of take his measure. The whole society, the whole political class, was horribly sycophantic towards him. He seemed to be the only one who was expressing any original opinions; everybody else in that country, especially the Malays, were simply echoing whatever Mahathir had to say. It was kind of frustrating to chip through that.

Q: On the Muslim side, how Muslim was he and the country and did this reflect on the role of women on your ability to work at all?

HUHTALA: First let me talk about religion there. The ruling party, called UMNO (United Malay National Organization,) had been in power since independence in 1957, so it had a very firm grip on the body politic. There was a lot of corruption in the party and a lot of crony relationships as well. The opposition party was called PAS (a Malay acronym) had become a party of conservative, religious Islamists. They were not the Taliban, not anything like that, but they were using religion as a political tool. Before 9/11 in an attempt to disarm the opposition Mahathir had declared that Malaysia was an Islamic state because the majority of its people, around 60%, were Muslim. The opposition party, on the other hand, wanted a true Islamic state run by Sharia law. Mahathir's rather sophist failed to take the wind out of the opposition's sails, but from that point on there was a real effort by both parties to demonstrate that they were the better Muslims. Both sides were vying to be seen as more correct or closer to a true understanding of what it is to be Muslim. At the same time, the country as a whole had been moving in the direction of much more religious observation and expression than in the past. I remember that 20 or 30 years prior to this you rarely saw the women in Malaysia wear headscarves, for instance, and you rarely saw outward displays of religion. Now both were quite evident. I believe this is part of changes that occurred throughout the Muslim world after the Iranian revolution of 1979, which led to greatly enhanced consciousness of Islamic thought and practice. In the case of Malaysia, a secular multi-ethnic state was becoming increasingly Islamic, to the growing alarm of Chinese and Indian Malaysians.

Q: Were they Sunnis or Shiites?

HUHTALA: They were Sunni Muslims. Shiite practice was not tolerated in Malaysia. By the time I there were a lot of women wearing headscarves, not all, but a lot of them were doing so. Many more who were not wearing the headscarf were wearing the traditional

Malay dress which is long, billowy and loose, down to the ground. They made these dresses and headscarves out of beautiful fabrics (much more colorful than those worn in the Middle East), but it was a very traditional kind of clothing. As a woman ambassador. I was careful to wear long sleeves and to keep my skirts below my knee, though of course I always wore western dress and never donned a headscarf.

The interesting thing was that despite the outward dress, women in Malaysia were actually quite liberated. The Attorney General and the Solicitor General were both women. There were several very powerful cabinet members who were women and Supreme Court judges, and prominent women in government and business. I realized that the Islamic dress in Malaysia enabled women to go out into the market place and into government and have professional careers without somehow signaling that they were loose women or anything like that. That took me a couple of years to figure out.

I myself never had any problem being a woman ambassador in this Muslim society. It absolutely was not an issue. In fact I think being a woman made it a little bit easier to do my job. Before I left Bangkok I had lunch with a Thai diplomat, a woman, who had been ambassador to Malaysia up until quite recently. I asked her what it was like to be a female ambassador in that country. She said, "Well, if you have any kind of an agenda you want to pursue it's an advantage because you will get more attention." Of course after 9/11 I had a huge agenda, and I used it to great effect I think. I was able to get lots and lots of press interviews, speeches, TV appearances; I gave a press conference the day I arrived in the country and the attention never let up. People ask me this often, "Was it difficult to be a woman in that situation?" My answer is no.

Q: I'm surprised that there wasn't a problem with the Muslim community about attacking Afghanistan because I would have thought the Taliban was such an awful ogre or not? Maybe they weren't.

HUHTALA: No, they were not unhappy to see the Taliban fall, but their press focused relentlessly on the plight of civilian casualties, what we called collateral damage. The Taliban would take a school and camouflage it and our forces wouldn't realize it was a school, we'd think it was a military target, so we'd hit it, and children would die. Pictures of dead babies in gruesome color would be on the front page of the newspaper. Malaysians are very emotional. Their emotions were being whipped up and they were really responding. We had a big demonstration outside the embassy about ten days into the Afghanistan event. Police came out with water cannons and got rid of them and that's the last big demonstration we had for a long time, but we knew the feelings were there.

Q: How about, going back to the role of the ambassador you say you did a lot of public appearances. How did this work there and how effective was this?

HUHTALA: I always got a lot of press when I gave a speech or I went out some place. I traveled to virtually all 13 of the states of Malaysia, I just missed one. Every time I'd go we would have the trip carefully planned so that it would include the following elements. First there would be a call on the Chief Minister or Menteri Besar, an elected official who

was the equivalent to our state governors and who represented the governing coalition. I would also call on the Sultan of the state if there was one. Nine of the 13 states had hereditary royal families; in the other four states a royal governor would be appointed by the King for this largely ceremonial post. Malaysia has nine royal families, and the national throne rotates among them for five-year intervals, so many of the Sultans I called on had already been King; many others would get their turn eventually. So I would start by calling on the chief executive and the ruler of the state. Usually there was also a state economic development council that I would meet with to receive a briefing.

Then I made a special point of visiting American companies in the area. In almost every state there were a lot of them. I would hold some kind of press conference everywhere I went and I'd usually get a chance to visit some of the tourist attractions and markets. I also cut the ribbon on several "American Corners" being set up in regional libraries. These travels were very effective in projecting a positive view of America in the hinterland. It turned out that my predecessors had not been doing that. When I went out to the beautiful state of Sabah, which is on the island of Borneo, they really made a big deal about my visit because they hadn't seen an American ambassador there in over ten years. That was a very effective way to kind of get the word out and to explain our policies and to put a human face on what America was doing around the world. As is typically the case, I encountered a lot less opposition to what we were doing out in the provinces than I did in the capital.

Q: Do you feel a lot of that came from you might say the personal prejudice of the prime minister?

HUHTALA: Yes.

Q: And everybody was following his.

HUHTALA: Everybody was following his line very sycophantically. But I have to say also that there was a sort of deep-seated unease with what the United States was doing. It grew worse as my tour went on and was related to American efforts to crack down on terrorism and invade Iraq. This reaction went beyond what the prime minister had to say.

Q: What about the media there?

HUHTALA: It was tightly controlled by the government. The newspapers and the television stations all had to renew their licenses on a yearly basis. If they crossed the line and didn't support what the government was doing they would not have their licenses renewed. This had happened in the past. There was however, one Internet-based news organ called Malaysiakini. Its servers were mostly located in the United States so it was able to operate pretty freely and was frequently critical of the government. For Mahathir this was a dilemma because he wanted to promote the country as a continuing site for high-tech investment, which had been coming into the country increasingly. A lot of the most advanced IT companies in the world have set up manufacturing operations in Malaysia, including American companies like Motorola, Agilent, Hewlett Packard, Dell,

Intel, and many others. He didn't want to shut off this image of Malaysia as a natural place for the Internet, e-marketing, even film editing. At the same time he took a lot of issue with what Malaysiakini was saying. At one point the police raided their offices and carted away their local servers briefly. I gave Malaysiakini a lot of interviews, as you might imagine.

Q: How did this ethnic balance go 30% Chinese? Were they the people who did the business and commerce?

HUHTALA: Largely. The way the system was set up there, any public corporation had to have a certain number of Malay directors in order to be listed on the stock exchange. So you would see these token Malays on the company masthead though the rest of the company was Chinese Malaysians. A lot of the real intellectual work was done by the Chinese. I think, despite all the protestations of racial harmony, that there were a lot of racial tensions in Malaysia. They had experienced dreadful race riots in '69 I think it was. After that they put the policy of preferment for the Malays in place. What this did is it really marginalized a lot of their best talent, the Chinese. For instance, many bright Chinese kids who were straight "A" students couldn't get into the national universities because places were reserved for the Malays. The Chinese had to go overseas for their university studies.

Q: I was wondering whether the Chinese influence there I would think there would be or maybe there couldn't be, but seepage towards Singapore or towards the United States or towards China, I don't know.

HUHTALA: Singapore of course was carved out of Malaysia in 1963 and it was sort of like a mirror image of Malaysia, a primarily Chinese society with very few Malays. The Chinese Malaysians often had relatives in Singapore, and many of them emigrated as well. There was a lot of rivalry between the two countries, too, and often sounded like sibling rivalry. And there seemed to be a brain drain going on among the Chinese; a lot of them had family in the United States or in Britain or other places, and young people who went overseas to study often remained there. At the same time Malaysia's trade with China, the emerging giant, was very important to them and the Chinese Malaysians had a natural lead in that direction. Many Malaysian Chinese, whose native language was Cantonese or Hakka, were learning Mandarin at that time. The Chinese were very successful in the business sector, but much less so in government, where they were largely frozen out, and I observed a fair amount of tensions between Chinese and Malays.

Also the young people, those who are now in their '20s and '30s are not inter-marrying with Malays, though many of the older generation had entered into mixed marriages. This seemed to me to be another indicator of ethnic balkanization.

Part of this was due to the fact that the Malays had tightened up the religious laws so that today if a Muslim Malaysian marries a non-Muslim, the non-Muslim (man or woman) must convert to Islam. That wasn't true in the past. That naturally has discouraged a lot of mixed marriages. Also according to the Malaysian constitution, every Malay is a Muslim.

If a Malay wants to change his religion he is considered apostate and forced to go to re-education camp. Thus it is extraordinarily difficult for them to change their religion. When we pointed that out in the context of our Religious Freedom Report, the Malaysian government got very upset. Malaysia has long trumpeted the fact that they allow every religion (except Judaism, of course) to be practiced freely, and for that reason they think they have religious freedom. But if you can't change your religion, that is not religious freedom at all.

Q: We are moving into an era of worldwide technical ability, people who are adept at dealing with the new world of communication and electronics and all that. So many people have gone to India and to China and Japan and all, I would think that by sticking one to the Muslim religion is an inhibitor. Putting Malays in preference to the Chinese that in the long run this is going to work to the detriment of Malaysia as far as moving ahead.

HUHTALA: Yes, I think that case can certainly be made but they didn't see it that way while I was there. The preferment of Malays was seen as a way to avoid a recurrence of the kind of ethnic strife that they had had in '69, where several thousand people were murdered in one day and it was truly dreadful. It was interpreted to have occurred because Malays felt economically disadvantaged compared to the Chinese. Now you can say there were probably reasons for that, as Chinese traditionally work very hard, and Malays often don't.

Q: No, but as I say, one can look at this and understand it but it does appear that Malaysia may find itself falling behind compared to say, Singapore. No matter how you slice it the Chinese hard work, drive for education and all is a tremendous asset.

HUHTALA: Of course it is. No, I've been talking mostly about the Mahathir era because I was there for the last years of that. It may be changing now that he has moved on.

Q: How did you find our information service in our building public diplomacy work in the country? You could have interviews, you got to get stuff, but if the press was subservient to the prime minister and he's unhappy with this I would think.

HUHTALA: It was very frustrating. I'll give you two examples. One was when I was making a visit to Sabah state in Borneo, I was giving a press conference at the end of a whole day of meetings and the local television station's video camera was on. While I was answering questions like, "How did you like our state? Don't you think it's safe here? Isn't it beautiful?" the camera's little red light remained on. But when the question of Iraq came up and I started to explain our concern about possible weapons of mass destruction there, the light on the camera went out. They didn't even waste any videotape on it because they knew were not going to run that part of the interview.

Then on a different occasion I had a TV interview taped in my office. I thought the interview went very well. I was able to explain our policy, what we were doing, why we were doing it. I was able to lay it all out. Then afterwards they asked me to sit at my desk

for some atmosphere shots, so I did that, and then the reporter and I were chatted for a few minutes with the sound turned off but the camera still running. That evening when I turned on the news, I saw about ten seconds of me talking and trying to explain what was going on, followed by the atmosphere shots with a voice over-saying something like, "Although the Ambassador says that America is doing this for the right reasons, in fact they are aggressively targeting Iraq to get access to oil." I was furious. So I told my press officer that from then on I would do no more taped interviews. I still wanted to get our message out, so the solution was to drive way outside of town and make a live appearance on the evening news show. That way everything I had to say was carried live. It was so hard to present our case for going after those WMDs (which I, like most officials, did believe existed in Iraq before the invasion). Those were the lengths I had to go to – live TV, interviews with Malaysiakini, and of course speeches, where the people in the room would hear what I had to say but it wouldn't get any farther than that.

Q: Did you get any feel for reaching to students, and where were the students on the issue?

HUHTALA: Oh, this was frustrating too. We tried repeatedly to get me opportunities to speak to students. I had a good Public Affairs Section and they were delighted that their Ambassador was so involved in outreach. They were very activist. Finally I had an invitation to speak to the students at the University of Malaysia, in April of 2003. After the U.S. invaded Iraq in March, the trustees or the administration withdrew the invitation. They said they were sure that their students would not want to be "confused" by hearing from the American Ambassador. Oh man, I was furious, I couldn't believe that. What about academic freedom? University students in Malaysia are not exactly independent thinkers. They pretty much follow the line they're supposed to be following. About six months later I got an opportunity to speak at a different university, but that was to graduate students and it was an international crowd. Again, I got very hostile questions but that was fine with me. I didn't mind taking hostile questions because I had learned in that context to let them vent their emotions and then reply logically to the points that they made. I usually scored some points, and I did it respectfully. Whether I changed minds, it's harder to tell.

Q: Did you see a line between the Malays and the Chinese and how they approached things or were they different?

HUHTALA: Well, you know it's interesting. I never got into a lot of political discussions with the Chinese. I think they just kept their heads down. The Indians, however, were quite vocal, and remember they were only 10% of the population.

Q: But they talk for 15 minutes.

HUHTALA: No, it's not that. They fell into very a interesting demographic niche. They were disproportionately represented at the bottom levels and at the top levels of the income distribution. The vast majority of guards and drivers are Indians and janitors and that sort of thing, and a huge number of lawyers and doctors are Indians as well. There

was nothing really in between, for example in the government. Some of these Indian intellectuals, while basically very pro-American, much more so than the Malays, nevertheless would rake me over the coals at some of my appearances because they too were very distressed by the direction they perceived American policy was going. It's no secret that our image around the world was very negative at that point.

Q: This raises a question and I'll let you play with it however you want. I've been doing these oral histories for 20 years and there have been various administrations in the United States and foreign policy and I found a good solid split but I've never seen almost unanimity of the retirees with the thrust certainly of the first four years of the Bush administration when you were doing this. Not only the going into Iraq because it is felt this is going to be more difficult than one might think and did it make sense. Afghanistan, no doubt about that, that was well justified. But also there seems to be a tendency to do things unilaterally and all. Are you, as the ambassador, and obviously you're going to say what the administration, I mean that's what you are paid for. At the same time did you find yourself either having your own doubts or concerns about keeping your troops in line?

HUHTALA: There was sort of a gradual evolution of the policy and people's feelings about it within the embassy and outside. In the first days and months after 9/11 I think there was a pretty united front. I think we all felt that toppling the Taliban was a very good thing. Even in Malaysia where they were moaning about the collateral damage. When those images got on TV of men and women liberated from the shackles of the Taliban and dancing in the streets, criticism of our invasion stopped right away. It just stopped. That was not so difficult really to talk about.

But then as 2003 advanced and it became increasingly clear that we were moving towards war in Iraq I began to get into some really tight spots because it was hard to justify. There was one very elite conference held on the resort island of Pangkor Laut in September of 2003. I was invited to be on the first panel, which was supposed to be about change. This was a conference about peace on earth, literally. Prime Minister Mahathir was there, most of the cabinet was there, and a lot of Malaysian intellectuals.

On my panel was Steve Forbes, the former presidential candidate and right-wing Republican. He got up for his turn to speak and instead of talking about the assigned topic he said, "I just want to tell you that the U.S. is definitely going to invade Iraq and when we do we are going to bring democracy and justice to that region, we are going to transform the whole Middle East, and it will be a better place." Well, of course the room erupted in anger because while the Bush Administration was widely assumed to be planning an invasion of Iraq, it had not announced it yet and the President had not yet made his speech to the UN outlining ways Iraq could head it off. Forbes also said, "We're going to go into Iraq because of what happened in 9/11. We can't let Iraq's interference and their help in 9/11 to go unpunished." Again the room erupted, and the attendees were furious the whole rest of the weekend. The whole conference became a discussion of how bad the United States was and why our policies were all wrong.

I pulled Steve Forbes aside at the coffee break and I said, "What are you talking about? There is no evidence linking Saddam Hussein to 9/11." He said, basically, "It doesn't matter. The meaning of 9/11 is that the U.S. is justified in doing whatever we can to prevent ever being hit like that again." I was flabbergasted, really flabbergasted. A week later President Bush went to the United Nations and makes the case for going into Iraq because Iraq's defiance of a long string of UN resolutions calling for weapons inspections. Then, not long after that, Colin Powell made his presentation to the United Nations with all of that evidence about weapons of mass destruction. Even though I'd been so shocked by what Steve Forbes had had to say, I really trusted Colin Powell. I'm a great admirer of his, still am. When he put his personal prestige on the line and made that case that Saddam Hussein was going after weapons of mass destruction I believed him.

Q: I believed him too.

HUHTALA: I used Powell's arguments over and over again to explain to Malaysians why we had to go in. If there was any possibility that Saddam was going to unleash biological warfare or nuclear war or anything like that we had to go in. It was true after all that Saddam had gassed his own people. I had all of those arguments and I believed in them. I tell you, when that fell apart, when it became evident after the invasion that there were no weapons found, I had a lot of problems with that myself and so did my staff. We spoke frankly about it inside the embassy. We maintained the U.S. Government line outside of course, as you have to do, but I was not comfortable with it. At that point I was getting a lot of reaction from Malaysians along the line of, "We like you very much, Ambassador, but we really hate your President. Don't you really feel differently?" They were probing, they were trying to get me to say publicly that I disagreed. No ambassador is ever going to say that, and I of course did not do so.

Finally, in 2004, the Abu Ghraib scandal broke, which was I found profoundly shocking. When photographs turned up in the press of American troops humiliating and torturing Iraqi prisoners and leading them on leashes I was just horrified. I braced myself for really vitriolic attacks but the odd thing was, none came. This was March of 2004, I was in my final months in office there and I think my Malaysian contacts and friends had just decided that there was no point even talking to me about it. That was really disheartening.

Q: Did anything come up? We tend to focus, and maybe where you were being connected to the Muslim world, was completely on Iraq and Afghanistan but you know we were doing other things particularly in the early part of the Bush administration by sort of disregarding our NATO allies as not agreeing to international court jurisdiction and anti-missile and things. There is a general sort of we can do it alone feeling. Maybe you could say the Bush one administration now we're only a year into the Bush two administration but there is an earth change.

HUHTALA: But you know what, I saw some of those tendencies in the Clinton Administration too. I remember Madeline Albright getting up and saying that we were the "indispensable nation." I thought comments like that were really arrogant and not helpful at all. This has been I think a straight-line trend in American foreign policy since

World War II, which you don't really notice unless you're living and working overseas. You don't see how arrogant we are becoming, how careless of the thoughts and opinions of the rest of the world. That is a most unfortunate trend. I have always seen a big part of my role as a diplomat based overseas to constantly reflect back to Washington what people are thinking, how they are reacting to us. Give them a reality check. I don't know how many times the message has gotten through, frankly, but I tried.

I have to talk too about the security situation there. During the time I was in Malaysia we found out about the existence of an offshoot or a brother organization to Al Qaeda named Jemaah Islamiya (JI). Actually it had been formed in Malaysia among Indonesian radicals who had fled Indonesia and were living in Malaysia. They also had training camps in southern Philippines. They were carrying out terrorist attacks, starting with of the nightclubs in Bali in October 2002. Then there was a bombing of the J.W. Marriott Hotel in Jakarta and then a little bit later at the Australian embassy in Jakarta and then another bombing in Bali.

We were very, very concerned about that because we knew that JI was present in at least four countries in Southeast Asia, including Malaysia. In fact the Malaysians arrested the first 15 or so members. It was very shocking because these were not unemployed rebel rousers, they were college professors. They were employees of multi-national corporations. They were educated people who were involved in this. We knew that we had a very serious threat to our embassy and to our presence there in Malaysia.

On the one-year anniversary of 9/11 we received a specific and alarming threat of a potential truck bomb being aimed at my embassy. My regional security officer called the chief of police that morning of September 10. He told the police, "We need more protection here." Only he didn't get through to the chief directly, he was working through channels. Nothing happened, nothing happened. So about three o'clock in the afternoon I said, "All right, I will call the chief of police myself." I had met him, of course. I got right through to him and told him about our problem. "Oh Ambassador, really? I didn't know that," he said. "We'll send somebody over right away. Of course, we want to protect you." But at five o'clock there was still nobody there. So I said, "That's it. We close the embassy." That got their attention. The embassy stayed closed for four or five days. When we reopened we had armed guards from the police, and we have them to this day as far as I know. We also got them to close off a lane of traffic because the Embassy faces one of the major thoroughfares in downtown Kuala Lumpur. We just were not secure. To live under this constant threat of attack was worrisome, to put it mildly. Because I was a high profile ambassador and a woman, I judged it was really important to have a bodyguard. (The male ambassador in Bangkok had a bodyguard.) I ask for permission to have one in Kuala Lumpur. It took a long time to get Washington's approval, actually. They were not going to spring for it, but we finally worked something out.

Q: How did that work out?

HUHTALA: In the short term, while Washington was making up its mind, we had a big,

burly Indian guard on our own staff serve as my bodyguard. He was great. But Washington said, "No, that's not allowed. You can't do that. It has to be someone from the local police." We finally got the agreement of the police. They didn't want to give it at first because they said if they provided a bodyguard to the American Ambassador they would have to give one to every other ambassador in town. That's nonsense. Nobody is as prominent ever as the American Ambassador. And I really felt that being a woman I had a bulls-eye on my head; it's the down side of all that helpful media attention. The Malaysian police finally agreed to assign bodyguards to me. It was a hassle, of course; I didn't enjoy having a bodyguard. But I felt it was important.

Q: No, no, nobody likes these guys hanging around.

HUHTALA: Exactly. I couldn't go anywhere without him and I also had the armored vehicle. Actually, all this took a bigger toll on my husband than on me because he was worried about me. We both found when we finished that assignment and came back here suddenly we were sleeping a whole lot better.

Q: How did you find American firms treated there? What was sort of the American presence there?

HUHTALA: They had a very good experience. In '72, Andy Grove of Intel came to Penang in Malaysia and set up his first overseas operation for Intel. They're there to this day along with Compaq and Dell and Motorola and all the big names.

Q: These are big electronic firms.

HUHTALA: Huge electronics and computers, IT firms. We also had heavy investment in the resource sector, oil and gas. GE was there in a very big way. Our American companies are so beloved there. I was so proud of them. They almost had no ex-pat managers, maybe one ex-pat per company. It was all run by local staff. Again, a lot of them were Chinese. There also were Malays and Indians. Our companies were hiring, promoting and training employees based on merit and not based on who your connections were, so they had a very happy workforce. I toured many factories while I was there. They were good operators and they always had projects to benefit the local community, like school lunch programs or school building or whatever. There was a lot of that kind of thing going on. They were very much appreciated.

Q: Was there any, we'd gone through a period of maybe a decade before or so of the Nike thing and where there was concern over basically exploiting the.

HUHTALA: No, we had nothing like that, absolutely not. Our companies always paid the going wage. One of the things that the employees really appreciated was the amount of training they got. You come in just to put widgets together but pretty soon you're learning a lot of other skills. Ours were the only companies that had a high proportion of women in the executive offices. When I would meet with the whole board of directors there would often be a couple of women in the room as well, serving in jobs like Director

of Human Resources.

Q: You talk about the government controlling sources but with the Internet for example you were there, the Internet was in full bloom by then. How about the average Malays or Malaysian of whatever stripe, could they sit down and tickle the keys or have news from everywhere?

HUHTALA: Yes, increasingly they could. In fact they even had some wi-fi spots in downtown Kuala Lumpur.

Q: Wi-fi meaning?

HUHTALA: Wireless internet. Some of the coffee shops, Starbucks and others, you could just take your laptop and get online using a wireless connection. Remember a lot of that equipment was manufactured in Malaysia, so it was readily available. Dell was the biggest maker of laptops in the world, and all of its laptop computers were made in Malaysia. It was pretty pervasive.

Q: Were you seeing this having an impact on how the government could operate?

HUHTALA: Yes, sure. It always was a place just swarming with rumors, and now a lot of the rumors were being put into to e-mails. It's a more efficient way of getting the word out. Also they were very big into the text messaging on their cell phones, as is true in most of Southeast Asia, so a lot of rumors went around that way. That made it harder for the government to control information.

Q: Was America still, I mean you have the two things, the official thing and all that and you have people watching American TV or films and all this, were the younger generation pretty well plugged into what was happening?

HUHTALA: Like in many places around the world the American movies and television shows that got promoted were generally of the more inane or violent nature. It was hard for the really good films to get out. We had a cable TV operation owned by a Malaysian crony of the PM's. It had HBO and Cinemax, and there were also American movies that played in the local theatres, but not always the really good movies. I remember, there was a lot of censorship there. "Sex and the City" would show on HBO but only after 11 o'clock at night, and it would still be blacked out occasionally in places. If you remember that movie, "American Beauty," that came out a few years ago, a complex film with scenes hinting at incest and homosexuality. They cut it so much that when it ran on HBO it only lasted about 45 minutes. It was ridiculous. I couldn't believe how fast that thing went by!

Q: What about NGOs, were there many NGOs?

HUHTALA: There were some. Not as many as in Thailand, and they were under a tighter leash. The human rights NGOs had a hard time doing anything. There was a UNHCR

(UN High Commissioner for Refugees) office there and they were frequently squeezed by the government. It was hard for them to operate freely. There was one very bold woman named Zainah Anwar, U.S. educated and well plugged-in. She ran a terrific NGO called Sisters in Islam. It not only provided protection and help for women but it also was engaged in very interesting intellectual work. She took apart a lot of the assertions that people were making about Islam and proved them wrong by quoting the Koran. She showed, for example, that in the Koran it never said that women had to cover their heads; it just said Mohammed's wives should cover their heads. She kept pointing out things like that that were being used to keep women down in that society. She got a mixed reaction, of course. That was very interesting.

Q: What about relationships that you would think of, Thailand, Indonesia and I suppose Brunei and Singapore? How did they get along?

HUHTALA: Relatively well. Brunei is a sultanate that should have been in the Malay federation but never opted in. I noticed when the new Malaysian king was crowned in 2002, the Sultan of Brunei attended the ceremonies with the Sultans of Johor, Negeri Sembilan, and Selangor. He was just part of the family in a way.

There was a lot of tension between Singapore and Malaysia, a lot of built-in rivalry there. Some of it went back to hard feelings about the separation in '63 and some of it was based on economic competition. The fact that the Singaporeans were much more willing to cooperate with the U.S. militarily than Malaysians didn't help either. Singapore built a whole new dock capable of handling a U.S. carrier battle group, for instance.

Q: Basically taking over from the Philippines.

HUHTALA: Not to that extent, but in certain ways it is and we have a US Navy logistical base there as well. Singapore's economy is 100% trade-based; it's a city-state and they have an agricultural sector. Malaysia is much more diversified. Malaysia typically does a little better than Singapore. But Singapore negotiated a bilateral free trade agreement with the United States which got Malaysia all upset. Now they're talking about eventually having one with us as well. For years the two countries have been haggling about building a new connection between them to replace the aging causeway. The Malaysians wanted a high arched bridge so that container ships could pass under it and dock at the new Malaysian port on the coast facing Singapore; the Singaporeans would not agree. At one point Malaysia said it would build a high bridge on its own, spanning half the strait, which could swoop down and connect to a low causeway on the Singaporean side of the water if necessary!

Q: Did they play much of a role in ASEAN and all that?

HUHTALA: Yes, they did. As a founding member Malaysia was one of the leaders of ASEAN. The prime minister and others spoke out very courageously against what was going on in Burma. Prime Minister Mahathir made an official visit to Burma while I was there and had hoped meet with Aung San Suu Kyi, but the Burmese authorities did not

allow it. He was quite upset about that. Again, he was seen as a kind of cantankerous and difficult leader in the region but a leader nevertheless. The huge economic success that Malaysia had experienced in the previous 40 years gave him a lot of credibility. A lot of countries would like to do as well as Malaysia. It had a GDP of I think \$4,000 per capita, one of the highest in the region, and a very high growth rate. It was doing very well.

Q: How did you find they were doing technologically wise? Were they developing MIT's or Cal Techs or that equivalent?

HUHTALA: No. Education was a problem because they did not have really freedom of free thought, freedom of exploration. They didn't have the kind of intellectual freedom that you need in order to produce first-rate scientists, for instance. Of course the universities were mostly Malay. By the time I got there education, even down to the primary and secondary level was very specialized. Chinese kids went to Chinese school, Indian kids went to Tamil school, Malays went to Malay school. When they got to high school they were suppose to mix it up but by that time all their friends were members of their own racial group so they failed to integrate with others. It was not very healthy.

Q: Indians were Tamil?

HUHTALA: Mostly they were Tamil. So that was not healthy. They lifted the racial restrictions on university places while I was there so it was no longer impossible for bright Chinese kids to get into university. The authorities said all students were going to be getting in based on merit, but I wasn't there long enough to see it really pan out.

Q: Of course you have something that happened in California where Berkley is turned into a Chinese university by the Chinese Americans.

HUHTALA: Although they said the university admissions were going to be based just on merit very few additional Chinese got in. This is related to a big problem on our side. One of the biggest challenges that we faced was U.S. visa policies in the wake of 9/11. Right after, the attacks, in November of 2001, the State Dept. put new procedures in place requiring special clearances for people who came from a list of 20 or so countries. They all happened to be Muslim countries, and Malaysia was on the list. We were supposed to request special clearances from Washington for each and every visa. In the past, special clearance requests were processed in such a way that if the post hadn't heard back from Washington within three weeks it was OK to issue. But this time they quickly got backlogged in Washington and told us we could not issue until we got positive authorization.

By spring and summer of 2003 we had backlogs of thousands and thousands of student visas, many of them Chinese-Malaysian kids bound for places like Harvard and Yale, who could not get their visas. They qualified in every other respect, but they didn't have those special clearances in time. It was a train wreck. This shows you how much lingering admiration for the United States was still there. People wanted to send their kids to school in the United States. There also was a Malaysian government scholarship

program for Malay kids who had been selected at the age of 13 and carefully nurtured and brought through their educational system so that they would be ready for America's best universities. Those people weren't getting their visas on time.

I was called in by several government ministers to explain the situation. They felt Malaysians were being unfairly treated, that they were all under suspicion of being terrorists. The public relations impact was disastrous, and it was very hard to call Washington's attention to the issue. The same thing was happening throughout the Muslim world, but the effects were really bad in Malaysia because we had traditionally had such a high volume of student visas and such low refusal rates.

I was one of the first ambassadors who raised the alarm. I managed to do it when Secretary Powell made an official visit in the summer of 2003. One of the perks of being an ambassador is riding in the car with the Secretary en route to official meetings. I took that opportunity to tell him about our visa train wreck, and he promised to look into it. That led to the eventual solution back in Washington. It took about six months to resolve because it had to do with interagency communications. At one point clearance requests had been going from State to the CIA, which didn't have time to answer the mail. That was discontinued, but the FBI still had to clear on these individuals and letting more foreigners into the country was not their highest priority, shall we say. Finally Maura Harty, the Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs in State worked with her opposite number in the FBI to find a good effective way to get these things done and to answer the mail. But in the meantime, it was a public relations nightmare out at post.

Q: Oh yeah, and well it was not only that, but it was a financial nightmare for the universities. Also quite frankly, probably looking at this, not one of, but maybe the greatest weapon we've had and that is the fact that the United States is an absorptive country for people coming. They love it when they come.

HUHTALA: Really it's a battle of ideas, it always is, and one of the best ways to propagate your ideas is to get people to study on your soil.

Q: And take a look at it.

HUHTALA: Exactly, and dispel the myths and preconceptions that they've grown up with. So the visa stoppage was very counter productive.

Q: Did you have Malaysian hands, were Malaysian and Indonesian similar or the same language?

HUHTALA: The languages are very similar. Several of the people in my embassy had served in Indonesia so they were able to convert their Indonesian into Malaysian pretty easily. But the countries are quite different actually. It's funny, they're both Muslim but Malaysia was much more closed-minded, following prescribed trains of thought, whereas in Indonesia you had real creative, intellectual discussion and argument. Of course the Indonesian experience had been completely different. It had been relieved of its

dictatorship in 1998 and it was developing into a real democracy, but the process was rather chaotic.

Q: What about a change in government while you were there? How did that come about and what did it mean?

HUHTALA: Prime Minister Mahathir shocked the nation at an UMNO party convention in June 2002, when he told them at the end of their big annual meeting that he was going to resign. All the cabinet members and party leaders were thunderstruck, as they'd had no advance warning. He just got up to the podium and said, "I've decided to resign," and started to cry. Party leaders rushed the podium and dragged him away into another room and got him to reconsider because, you know, all their rice bowls were in his hands. Eventually he returned to the podium and announced that he still intended to retire, but only after a transition period of 15 months. Have you ever heard of such a long transition period? During that time the deputy prime minister, Abdullah Badawi, was in line to become the next prime minister but he had to mind his p's and q's very carefully. He could never say anything controversial, never give any hint that he would do things differently from the old man. It was a very strange period.

Q: Were you there during that?

HUHTALA: I was, I was there that whole time.

Q: Well who did you see?

HUHTALA: Everyone stayed in place. All the ministers kept their portfolios. I would go see the deputy prime minister sometimes in his capacity as minister of the interior, responsible for counter terrorism, and I would take visitors to see him as well. It was a period of great tension in the period leading up to the changeover. Finally on October 31, 2003, they had an official ceremony in which Mahathir stepped down and Abdullah was sworn in. We were watching it on television in my office and we broke out the champagne. All the American embassy employees came up and shared a toast. (I didn't want to offend the Malaysians on our staff, so we didn't tell them about it.) Then we quickly had to hide all the glasses because the embassy children were coming around to Trick or Treat.

But just before this, Mahathir threw a final bomb in the tent before leaving. Malaysia had become chair of the Organization of Islamic Conference, the OIC. (Malaysia also was chair of the Non-Aligned Movement that year.) Mahathir used these positions to continue his vilification of the U.S. and the West. In February 2003 when Malaysia hosted a summit meeting of NAM leaders, Mahathir gave a blistering speech accusing the United States of trying to conquer the world. It was dreadful. So were bracing ourselves for the OIC plenary meeting in mid-October. Sure enough, this time he made a speech and said the Jews were trying to rule the world and the United States was helping them. And all the people in power in the United States were Jews. It was just dreadful anti-Semitic crap. This caused huge anger in this country and around the world. On that note, he left office.

His poor successor, Abdullah Badawi, had to figure out some way to counteract that. In fact, he is a very different type of person, much more tolerant and less doctrinaire. He immediately began talking about religious tolerance and reaching out to other groups. He could not directly repudiate Mahathir, but he sent a clear signal that things were going to be different.

Badawi has a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural background. He is a Malay born in Malaysia but his mother was a Muslim from China. His wife Endon (who passed away earlier this year), was half Japanese and half Malay. And he comes from the island of Penang, which is the only state in Malaysia that has a Chinese majority population and a Chinese chief minister; it's also where a huge amount of American investment is located. Unlike Mahathir, Badawi is also a religious scholar, having studied Islam formally at university; this gave him greater confidence and authority when dealing with the Islamic opposition party. So he had a lot of the right instincts from the beginning. But asserted his own influence and put his own touch on politics rather tentatively, and was perceived to be weak because he was not as ruthless as his predecessor. Meanwhile Mahathir was complaining more and more loudly from the side; it was clear he was furious that his successor wasn't following his line anymore.

Q: What happened to the former deputy prime minister? Is he still in jail?

HUHTALA: Actually he was released, but not until I got back to Washington. A Malaysian court finally found its scruples, its gumption, and granted the appeal of one of his two convictions. Remember he had undergone two trials, with consecutive sentences. He had served the first sentence and was beginning the second sentence when the appeal came through. This never would have happened while Mahathir was in office. It was widely interpreted that Badawi had given a signal that it would be okay to release him, especially since Anwar badly needed a back operation following the physical abuse he suffered in prison. He refused treatment before his release because he didn't want to go under the knife of any surgeon in Malaysia. After his release he went to Germany for his operation.

Q: What was happening, on Borneo, was that a different cast or how did things?

HUHTALA: Sabah and Sarawak, the two states on the island of Borneo, are quite different from the states on the peninsula. They are not majority Malay, and not even majority Muslims. I think the mix there is about a third Muslim, a third Christian, a third other religions. There are a lot of Chinese there and a lot of indigenous people.

Q: Dayaks?

HUHTALA: Dayaks, yes. I loved going there because it was less intellectually oppressive. People were freer to speak their minds. We had a few American investments there. And there were many beautiful places for eco-tourism. We had some fabulous trips. The U.S. had a security warning, a travel advisory in place for the northeastern part

of Sabah because in the year 2000 or 2001, (while I was still in Bangkok) some Muslim terrorists from the Abu Sayaff Group had come down from the Philippines and raided a resort on Easter Sunday; they kidnapped a bunch of tourists, including several Americans. So it was not really safe in that area. This was a point of friction. The Malaysians got upset every year when we renewed our travel advisory. But conditions did not warrant lifting it.

Q: What about the Philippines? Did they play any role there at all?

HUHTALA: They did in Sabah. There were a lot of Philippine workers there, most of them illegally. Also one of the Filipino Sultans, the Sultan of Sulu, had an ancestral claim to Sabah which he would not renounce. For this reason the Malaysians refused permission for a Philippine Consulate in Sabah, which would have been helpful.

Q: Brunei, did that play any role or did they just sit back and count their money?

HUHTALA: They had a dispute going with the Malaysians over some gas in the South China Sea, but basically relations were fine.

Q: With Indonesia the whole issue was “Konfrontasi”?

HUHTALA: That was 30 years earlier.

Q: So I mean there were no particular repercussions in the matter?

HUHTALA: Indonesia was of course and still is, in a period of consolidation after the fall of Suharto, and they were still kind of inwardly focused. Indonesia had been the natural leader of ASEAN but had not played that role since Suharto fell. Thailand’s Prime Minister Thaksin thought that maybe he could play that role, but he was not universally accepted. It hasn’t really been resolved yet.

Q: Was Vietnam at all powerful, could you see it?

HUHTALA: It was an emerging power within ASEAN and seen as such. Vietnam’s relations with Malaysia were quite correct. They exchanged ambassadors and tourists. It wasn’t yet a very substantial relationship; there wasn’t a lot of investment.

Q: You and your embassy staff, how was living in Malaysia?

HUHTALA: It was a beautiful place to live in. Everyone below the level of political counselor loved it. Those of us who had to deal with the ministries experienced a lot of frustration, particularly with officials from the ministry of foreign affairs. They’re notoriously difficult to deal with.

Q: Is it they’re difficult or is it just that they’re not very apt?

HUHTALA: It's both. They're not the swiftest bureaucrats in the world, but also they have a real chip on their shoulder towards the United States. We had silly things happening, for example, the director general who covers relations with the United States wouldn't deal with our political counselor. He thought his rank was too high, he should really only talk to the ambassador. Well I usually talked to his superiors so occasionally he would deal with the DCM. I mean, it was just silly, silly stuff like that. But the living was great. We had a wonderful school, good shopping. We were right near the Petronas Towers and at the base of those twin towers is a big shopping mall and also a beautiful philharmonic hall.

Q: What about those twin towers? Are they the tallest building in the world?

HUHTALA: They were while I was there, yes. They've been overtaken now.

Q: Weren't people nervous about them being a target for terrorism?

HUHTALA: Yes, in fact they had a bomb scare right after 9/11 and people walked down 40 flights to evacuate. They had pretty tight security there. I was up to the top several times. Where the bridge is you can get tickets, anybody can, and go up and take a look there. Through our police contacts I once had a chance to go to the very, very top, which is awesome. From there you can see the entire valley, it's quite beautiful, but also you're up so high you can see and feel the towers swaying. It's a little bit unnerving.

Q: Thanks.

HUHTALA: Yeah, exactly.

Q: Like one of those things that, we're going to let you go into our mine or something like that.

HUHTALA: I know, I don't care to go down into mines. We did have one big issue with the Malaysians in my last six months. This was very unfortunate. The new Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, had a son who was a partner in a manufacturing company called Scope. They produced precision industrial drilling equipment. Unbeknownst to the prime minister (and probably unbeknownst to the son), the factory was also producing centrifuge parts for nuclear proliferation. This was discovered by the United States when we seized a ship on the shores of Italy, which was tied directly to the Libyan nuclear program. It also had been supported by A. Q. Khan, the notorious Pakistani proliferators. I believed what happened was that a Sri Lankan individual named B.S. Tahir, married to a Malaysian, was active in the company and he's the one who had apparently introduced the centrifuge designs. I don't think that the son of the prime minister had anything to do with it or even knew about it. In typical Malaysian fashion he was there because of his father's position.

When this was discovered and became public, a big scandal ensued. We found out that Malaysia had no system of export control which might have caught that kind of thing in a

timely fashion. It became a really, really difficult issue. I came back to Washington for consultation about it. We pressed the Badawi government very hard to arrest the Sri Lankan, Tahir, and to cooperate with authorities in tracing the Khan network's activities. That was one thing we wanted them to do, and they eventually did. The other thing was they need to do was to put in place a system of export controls, which the folks in the foreign affairs ministry and the trade ministry have always viewed as a foreign plot to inhibit trade, to keep them from prospering. I kept making the argument that this would protect them from further embarrassments like this; of course Malaysia didn't want to be known as a nuclear proliferator. If they were seen to be such that would be the end of all kinds of contracts and American investment, and there were serious sanctions for that kind of thing. By the time I left post they were beginning slowly to come around to the realization that they were going to have to go down that path. We were offering training to get them started. I told them, "It's a very complex subject, our own companies have a lot of difficulty with it, but we have a lot of experience here, we can show you how this is done." When I left they were at least thinking about it seriously.

Q: Was this pronounced, this problem in the Malay press?

HUHTALA: It did finally come out in the press. At first it was all very, very secretive but then it all got leaked.

Q: Is there anything else we should discuss?

HUHTALA: We had a very interesting consular case. An American woman came to the embassy and told us her ex-husband, a Saudi, was keeping her children against their will in Saudi Arabia, but the family planned to come to Malaysia for vacation. She asked our help in getting her children (of whom she had custody according to a U.S. court) away from their father and back to the U.S. This was a very delicate issue, of course, but we agreed to do whatever we could. We contacted Washington and confirmed her story, then worked out a way for her to bring her kids to the embassy for safety. As it turned out, only one child, a 16-year-old daughter, agreed to leave with her. The two came to the embassy at night, and I witnessed a very touching reunion between mother and daughter who had not seen each other for five years. We issued the daughter a passport, and used an embassy driver to take them down to Singapore. The consular officer persuaded the Malaysian border guard to let the couple cross even though the daughter's passport lacked an entry stamp, and our colleagues on the other side were waiting with a van to take them to the airport. They flew back to the U.S. that very morning.

I mention this because the issue of international child abduction has gained tremendous attention in recent years, and occasionally parents accuse the U.S. Government of being insensitive to their plight. In this case we went to great lengths to reunite this family, and I was very proud of our staff for their efforts.

Also, there were developments on the personal front. Eino was once again spending most of his time with me at post, which was a great help. (As ambassador, you can be very alone and you really need some moral support!) In September 2002 we returned to the

U.S. on R&R and had the great joy of being present when our daughter Karen gave birth to her first child, Allison.

But on October 25, 2002, when we were back at post, we received notification that our son Jorma was missing in action. A graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Jorma was living his lifelong dream as a fighter pilot. During training exercises at Hill AFB in Utah, his F-16 became involved in a mid-air collision. We returned immediately to the U.S. for his memorial service at Hill, funeral in Reston and burial at Arlington National Cemetery.

It was a huge tragedy for us. I was very touched to see a big bus from the State Dept. pull up for the burial service; we deeply appreciated the support of our colleagues and friends. And many, many Malaysians from all walks of life, including Mahathir and other leaders, expressed their condolences as well.

I went back to post to finish my assignment. Though it was difficult at first, it never occurred to me to request curtailment. I later found out, though, that the Department leadership was prepared to grant a curtailment if I wanted one.

End of reader