

MALTA

COUNTRY READER TABLE OF CONTENTS

Julius W. Walker, Jr.	1958-1961	Consular Officer, Valetta
George Feldman	1965-1967	Ambassador, Malta
Mabel Murphy Smythe	1967-1969	Wife of U.S. Ambassador to Malta
Chester E. Beaman	1967-1970	Deputy Chief of Mission, Valetta
Robert P. Smith	1974-1976	Ambassador, Malta
L. Bruce Laingen	1977-1979	Ambassador, Malta
Gary L. Matthews	1985-1987	Ambassador, Malta
Howard H. Lange	1989-1992	Deputy Chief of Mission, Valetta

JULIUS W. WALKER, JR. **Consular Officer** **Valetta (1958-1961)**

Ambassador Julius W. Walker, Jr. was born February 21, 1927 in Plainview, Texas. After serving in the United States Marine Corps, he received his bachelor's degree from The University of Texas. His career has included positions in Malta, Burundi, Chad, England, Liberia and Upper Volta. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: *Well, then we move to Valletta, Malta. This was from 1958-61.*

WALKER: The job in Valletta was totally different. It was a two officer consulate prior to independence. The officer in charge was Russell L. Riley. He thought up and developed the Fulbright program, working closely with Senator Fulbright. He was a hell for leather, hard working, tough bureaucrat who had been integrated into the Foreign Service at the FSO-2 level. He knew nothing about overseas work, but he did know that if there was information available on how to do a job he could figure it out. He had tremendous confidence in himself and it was not misplaced. He was a wonderful guy, from Missouri. He is still alive and lives in California.

Here we were, two brand new Foreign Service officers trying to run a post. It had been inspected not too long before we got there and the inspectors found all sorts of things wrong. Russ was

determined everything would be cleaned up and straightened out on our watch. Then we were governed by the Foreign Service Regulations (FSR) which were kept in loose leaf binders. We literally wore out the backs of one set of binders because we didn't go to the john without checking the FSR to see whether or not we could. We did everything we could to get that place running correctly. And we did. So much so that when the inspectors came there was little of substance they could find to tic us on.

It was a great way for a junior Foreign Service officer to learn the ropes. I went there to do consular work, administrative work, commercial work and to back up the consul general. In effect I worked across the board. I did political reports, economic reports, the whole works. At that point there was a NATO headquarters there--Headquarters Allied Forces Mediterranean (HAFMED). The US contingent at HAFMED headed by an admiral with about a dozen officers from all branches of the Service. It was a wonderful community. Russ saw it his duty to relate to the British and to the Allied Forces. He said, "I want you and Savannah to concentrate on the Maltese." Well, this was wonderful because they were terrific people and we got along well with them. But our contacts inevitably overlapped because we were always invited to US and HAFMED parties and I did a lot of backup for Russ. He, of course, did most of the official things with the Maltese and local government.

This was after Suez, of course, and we were still suffering some of the pangs of that unpleasantness. You see, the U.S. consulate had been kept completely incommunicado by the British for two weeks during the Suez buildup. The British did not allow the consulate to send any messages during that time. They could only send through the local Cable and Wireless transmitter, a government institution, so their cable traffic was completely controlled. The consulate had no radio or other independent means of communication. They couldn't report the buildup of British forces in Malta prior to the invasion.

There was a soreness in our relationship as a result of that. One night the Lt. Governor invited Savannah and me to his home for dinner, with a large number of Brits. He showed a movie "The Mouse That Roared." It was about a small country that got the atomic bomb and forced the United States into submission. It was really clever, quite cute. We were the only Americans and although we knew nothing of the film, we saw immediately it was a spoof on the United States. There was an embarrassed silence for a while until something caused us to laugh. Then everybody relaxed and decided they could laugh too. We enjoyed the film greatly. But they were worried as to how we would react.

Back to the assignment. We didn't have august personages through there while I was there. However, before we arrived -- on the watch of Peter Walker (a friend who retired from the Service early because of illness) Secretary Dulles was in the area and had to stop in Malta. The story was still going around about the dinner party that was arranged at the last minute. Dulles only sent word a few hours before that he was coming and stressed this was just a stop over and not to do anything. Nevertheless, the British Governor insisted that he give a dinner for him. The dinner was arranged at the Governor's Palace, a beautiful mansion built by the Knights of St. John in the center of the island and used as the Governor's summer home. They invited all the island's important people but they needed an extra man at the last minute. An American Fulbright professor at the University of Malta was invited. After dinner, at the customary time

the Governor arose and toasted the President and everybody drank. As the others were sitting down Dulles was standing, waiting to give the toast to the Queen. The professor at the end of the table, below the salt as the British would say, which meant he was seated as far down in protocol as he could go, jumped up and said, "Ladies and Gentleman, the Queen." There was a stunned silence. Then everyone got up and toasted the Queen. They sat down and in a few minutes the Governor's wife invited the ladies to join her. As the men were regrouping, the way they do at formal British dinners, the man came up and said, "Mr. Secretary, I wasn't certain whether you knew the protocol for something like this. If I did anything out of order, I am very sorry." Whereupon Dulles looked at him and with voice shaking with rage said, "You should be young man. You should be." Yet another insight on Foster Dulles and the tribulations of secretaries of state....

Q: ...What was our feeling while you were there? It was not too much later that the British pulled out and Malta as a strategic area just sort of dissolved. American concern later was only that the Soviets not get in that, but not that we wanted to do anything with them. But how did we feel at the time?

WALKER: Well, the official feeling almost seemed to be that we would be happy if it would go away. When I came back in 1961, I spoke to the British Desk because we reported directly to them. Malta was not part of the Mediterranean area, it was a British possession. I began telling them what was needed to get ready for Independence. They said, "Oh, we plan to close the consulate." And I said, "You will never close there. It's foolish to think that way. You may have to close something, you can't close that one." But the official attitude was--Let's don't be bothered. And there wasn't much bother.

There was a period in the mid-sixties when the US was trying anything to keep Malta from moving to the Soviets. We bowed a good bit to Mintoff and gave the Maltese assistance and help. But it didn't do much good. Malta stayed pretty much on its own course. Mintoff snuggled up to the Libyans and stayed close to them. And this is strange, because the Maltese do not consider themselves as having anything to do with Africa. They consider themselves European. Their interest in Africa is marginal. There are colonies of Maltese who live in North Africa, Tunis, Alexandria, etc., but they look upon themselves as Europeans who live in Africa, and have no real ties to Africa other than that. All this in spite of the fact that Malta was occupied for two centuries by Arabs and many Maltese names come from Arabic. One of my best friends there is Maurice Caruana Curran. Caruana is a derivative of Qairouan, the city in Tunisia from whence the Arabic invasion of Malta took place.

As to the relationship between the United States and Malta ...the Maltese really loved the United States. It was a tremendous feeling, there was tremendous regard and respect for the US. So many Maltese immigrated to the United States. When I was in Malta there were more Maltese living in Detroit than there were in Malta. There were only 330,000 Maltese in Malta. The Maltese colony in Detroit was said to be larger than that.

Q: You weren't at least within our own circles going around saying that this was a strategic spot and we have to keep this and all that?

WALKER: Well, I think our feeling was that it wasn't a strategic spot but it was one we wouldn't want to fall into other hands. The strategic emphasis of Malta today has gone from a positive one that it was 50 to 100 years ago to a negative one. You wouldn't want someone who was inimical to our interests to have control of it. At the same time, it isn't really needed because ships now can go around the world without refueling.

There is a wonderful shipyard there and it was used by a few American ships while I was there. I payrolled an American submarine that was in for repairs. It was there for five or six weeks. What the Maltese hoped was that after Independence the shipyard would become a major drawing port for ships plying the Mediterranean, and it has. They modernized the yard and improved it. But it doesn't have the strategic importance it once had. Air power is too important now. You have submarines that can go underwater for weeks on end or ships that can go around the globe without ever going into port, so it is not as important militarily as it once was.

GEORGE FELDMAN
Ambassador
Malta (1965-1967)

Ambassador George Feldman began his career in international relations in 1965 after working at the Federal Trade Commission and in the private sector. He served as ambassador to Malta and Luxembourg. Ambassador Feldman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1988.

Q: What was the situation in Malta when you arrived?

FELDMAN: The British were just about to pull out. The economic situation was terrible, and the merchants were suffering. The British had literally given them the golden handshake after being in there officially since 1812 and even before then. They had the dockyards there, but there was no work or very little work, hardly any. Not much going on. A beautiful place, a lovely place, the people, almost an ideal situation. The mother was a matriarch, and they were very religious.

Q: You were saying the Maltese were suffering economically.

FELDMAN: Oh, they were really in bad shape.

Q: Why were the British pulling out after so many years?

FELDMAN: As you know, they pulled out of many places, and this was part of a policy. I think it was a mistake, but I think it began with Attlee, really, when he was elected. They pulled out of Singapore, they pulled out of a number of other places.

Q: Before you actually went to Malta, did you have any policy instructions of what you were to be trying to do when you got to Malta?

FELDMAN: I did. I had several meetings with the Secretary of State.

Q: This would have been Rusk.

FELDMAN: Rusk, the Secretary of State. Also, we arranged a meeting with the British ambassador, who was--I'll think of his name. During the course of the conversation with the British ambassador, Rusk emphasized that he wanted me to remember it was a British show, and we should go along with that.

When we talked about conditions in Malta at the time, they were pretty shabby. But that was a great challenge. Incidentally, I'm a little ahead of myself, because I remember when I came up for confirmation in the Senate, John McCormack came over and made a little presentation. I had the whole history of the thing, did my homework, in another words. I had it on cards, but I didn't need them, and it's a good thing. George Ball, who was then Under Secretary of State, commented on the fact that he'd never seen anybody as well prepared. In fact, one of the questions that Senator Pell asked me, if I'd read The Great Siege, which is the book on Malta. So we discussed that a little bit. So I had a lot of fun.

Then I got to Malta. The British governor general was Dorman. I forget his first name now, a fine man. His wife, Lady Dorman, was not so--she was all right. The prime minister wasn't there at the time; he was in England. When he came back, I'd been there about five or six days, and the foreign minister, Amato Cauci, called me and asked me to come down to meet the prime minister when he got off the plane. The whole group was going down, the ministers and whatnot. So I went down with my wife. My deputy at the time was named Jack Conroy. [Brief interruption. Tape recorder turned off]

Q: You were talking about your deputy, Jack Conroy.

FELDMAN: Yes. The foreign minister asked me to come up to the plane to meet the prime minister, George Borg Olivier, when he got off the plane, as he came down. We met, and then going back in my car, my wife started to cry. I said, "What's going on, dear?"

She said, "Mr. Conroy gave me more hell in front of all these people because I was there. He said, 'What right have you got to be here?'" So he was driving in back of me, and I stopped the car and stopped him.

I said, "Don't ever, ever do a thing like this again to my wife or anybody else I'm involved with. You won't be here any length of time at all." I said, "You don't know how tempted I am to give you a good, sound thrashing, because I can kill you." I had been tipped off in advance that sometimes the Department will get somebody like that as your deputy in order to make it so miserable for you that you won't stay. They did that, for example, I'm told by Doherty, when he went to Jamaica. He told me the story himself. Another one was Kennedy appointed a classmate of his to New Zealand, a classmate at Harvard to New Zealand; he lasted about four months or so. The same thing with the one that went to what is now Sri Lanka.

Q: Ceylon.

FELDMAN: Yes. So I was tipped off in advance. He ran into the wrong guy. [Laughter] And he wasn't worth the powder to blow him to hell. Here were the Maltese and here were the British, and I like the British, too, as much as he did. In fact, I'm sort of an Anglophile, in a way. In any event, I don't think he had anything to do with the Maltese at all. There was a British club there, and he'd spend his time there. He was absolutely useless.

Q: How about the rest of the staff?

FELDMAN: The rest of the staff were great. John Grimes--I don't know whether you've ever met John.

Q: No.

FELDMAN: He came to me as a vice consul. He'd been in Glasgow as a vice consul. Before that, he'd been a courier, a graduate of Notre Dame, from Alabama. He and his wife did a magnificent job with the labor group and all that sort of thing and the Mintoff group. He was brilliant. His reports were letter perfect. You know, I was supposed to be a good writer, a pretty good writer, because I've written several books and all that sort of thing. He just was great and did a great job with the people that I couldn't spend as much time as I wanted to, although I did.

Q: How did you divide up your time? I gather there were basically three elements: one, there was the British element, which was moving out; you had the Mintoff, which is the opposition group, which at least at that time had the reputation for being anti-Western; and then you had the Borg Olivier group, which was the Nationalist Party. How did you divide all this?

FELDMAN: Whenever we had parties--and we had a lot of them, because my wife loved to give parties, to begin with--we wouldn't just have one group or another; we fixed them. I had Attard Kingswell, who was head of the General Workers Union, who was married to one of Mintoff's sisters, I would have others from that group, mix them up. They were all Maltese, as far as we were concerned. And it worked.

Q: How were your relations, say, with Mintoff at that time?

FELDMAN: I made it a business to go down to Peter's Cove and swim with him.

Q: What was behind his anti-Western attitude? Was this a political move, or was this something he really felt?

FELDMAN: No, Mintoff is an enigma, in a way. He wanted to get in power, and he felt he couldn't get in through the other groups, so I guess he became extreme the other way. I used to go to his home often. We went up swimming, and he had a little shack. I used to use that to change clothes and so on. We were very cordial. We used to walk through the woods and so on, and we would argue. I'd differ with him and all that sort of thing, but we would get along. We'd get along very well. I made it a point to. The prime minister knew that we saw each other, but Mintoff would always try to get me to find out what the prime minister was going to do. I'd say,

"I don't tell him anything that we discuss, and I won't tell you anything that I discuss with him."
The only residence he ever came to was ours.

Q: Did you see an opportunity for the United States to step in as the British pulled out, in order to keep this small but very strategic nation, an island, from becoming as neutral as it has become?

FELDMAN: The best way to explain that is this. Admiral Thach, who was then the Commander of the Atlantic Fleet, in London, his deputy was a very able, very high class admiral, Arnie Schwede, I think it is. In any event, they had the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean, and they realized that here was Malta, with perfect deep-water harbors to take the carriers and all the groups that go with them, and if it were possible, to get them to use Malta. The British weren't too happy about that. I remember we had some sessions with them. Admiral McNitt was there when one of them tried to throw monkey wrenches into it. I remember at the end of it, they were up in Naples at the time the Sixth Fleet was, and they wanted to come down to Malta. And in the wintertime, Naples didn't compare with Malta. So I remember when they got through knocking everything, I said, "Tell me, are things better down here than they are in Naples?"

And he said, "Yes."

I said, "Well, what the hell are we wasting our time for?"

And then what happened was this. There was the question of us selling the Maltese on the idea. So I was sent for by Arnie Schwede and Admiral Thach. I remember we met, and there was a commander--I think his name was Kennedy, too, I'm not sure. But in any event, he gave us a briefing and all that. Would there be a possibility of getting the Sixth Fleet to be able to go into Malta on periodic visits? I knew the economic conditions in Malta, particularly with the merchants in the latter. So I said, "Now, supposing you had four visits a year. How many men would that involve?" Because you had that whole armada and whole entourage of ships coming in. He told me how many were involved, and it was considerable. I said, "Is there any way of translating that into dollars and cents as to how much they would be spending, for example, when they got in there?" He said he'd come up with a figure, which they did, and it involved about \$4 million a year or more. So I said, "Let me go back and see what I can do."

I didn't go to the prime minister directly. I went to the chief justice, the head of the supreme court, Sir Anthony Mamo. I said, "You know, I'm worried about the merchants. I'm worried about what's going on here. I want to bring some industry here." I said, "Right now I'm trying to get Bluebell to come here, the people who make Wrangler jeans." Funny thing. What happened was, Marion and I were at Twenty One in New York.

Q: This is a supper club.

FELDMAN: Yes. Krindler came over and brought with him the head of the company. They had a branch in Belgium, and they thought maybe they might get the Mediterranean market, the North African-Mediterranean market if they went up to a place like Malta. I sold them on the

idea, in any event. I remember Wiley Ward came over. To make a long story short, they started a pilot plant with 40 machines and went up to 4,000 machines.

Q: Good heavens!

FELDMAN: It was the biggest industry there, the biggest taxpayer there. So that was one of the things that developed as they went on.

But before that, however, the Sixth Fleet thing came in. When I came back, I got a hold of Tony Mamo, and I said, "You know, I don't know if I can do this. I have no idea whether it can be done, but I'm worried about that." I told him what I was doing in connection with bringing the Wrangler jean company to the island, and I was working on another company manufacturing books. After that, I got General Instruments to come in and change their plant from Taiwan to Malta and so on. You saw the letter in which he said I was a one-man aid.

Q: Yes.

FELDMAN: All right. This is all before then. I said to him, "I don't know if it can be done, but there's no reason in the world why it shouldn't be done. If I could bring them in, it would revive-- in fact, make Valletta prosperous." I said, "Do you think it's worth a try?"

He said, "Oh, definitely. Definitely."

I said, "How do you think the prime minister's going to react?"

He said, "I'll talk with him." Well, he talked to George Borg Olivier, and he didn't have to report back, because Olivier already called me up and asked me to see what I could do.

I said, "I'll go to the headquarters of the Atlantic Fleet in London. I'll try to make an appointment with the head of the fleet. If I don't succeed there, I'm going to go to Washington and see the President."

So to make a long story short, I went back there. Thach was ready to come back with me. I said, "Oh, no, no, no. We've got to write the kind of agreement that gives us, you know, because the British aren't too happy about this. They had their cake and they ate it, and they still want it." So I said, "I'll let you know."

I came back, I saw the prime minister, and I said, "I talked with Admiral Thach and with Admiral Schwede, and they're considering it." Then I got pressure from both sides. [Laughter] We brought them together and had a very good agreement. It didn't cost us a nickel.

Q: You left Malta just when Mintoff took over, is that right?

FELDMAN: No. What happened was that we brought the Sixth Fleet in, and everything was just perfect. It couldn't have been better. Then the other things began to fall into place. Then we got very, very close to the prime minister. In fact, when he came over here to the States, our people

at Wheelus Field wanted something from Malta and we got that. We got everything that the Department wanted.

When I left Malta to go to Luxembourg, they appointed in my place a black chap who had been ambassador to Syria. What was his name? He turned out to be a disaster. He was a tap dancer, and even on the floor of the Parliament, a couple of speeches were made, one by Mintoff and some of the others, considering him a joke and all that sort of thing. Smythe, his name was. His wife wasn't with him, and he was complaining about the residence and whatnot. He said it was cold and he had to use papers to keep the wind from coming in. Actually, first I brought the Sheraton Hotel there that had a big pool there and all that sort of thing, but the biggest one was the Hilton.

Q: Oh, yes. So you were instrumental in bringing both the Sheraton and the Hilton to Malta.

FELDMAN: That had some interesting problems, too. I'll never forget Kurt Strong was the head of the Hilton at the time. What was the fellow's name from Dallas, Texas? His father-in-law owned the whatchamacallit in Los Angeles, the Biltmore in Los Angeles. He also had this big hotel in Nassau. I forget the name of that one. And the hotel in Dallas. Jordan was his name, his son-in-law. They came, and we were putting up this Hilton. They had one in Hong Kong, too, by the way. They had dug down, because it was all rock, and they had to blast. It was quite a job, but the location was beautiful. Things were going along pretty good, except one of the bureaucrats in the Ministry of Industry decided to change the contract that we entered into, that was presented. There was no reason in the world for this. Maybe he had his hand out. So Jordan came, and he was very unhappy. He was about to say to hell with it. He dug down, it cost him money, but this kind of treatment was not right. So what I did was, I had Jordan and his wife stay with us at the residence. Then I had a luncheon for the foreign minister and this guy that was giving trouble. When lunch was over, I said, "I don't know who's doing this, but here's an agreement. Here's money that's been invested already, and now somebody in your department wants to change this agreement. I get the impression that somebody maybe wants to get paid off." The Minister of Industry was a very able politician, by the way.

He said, "You must be wrong. Nobody in my department would do a thing like that."

I said, "Well, I'm glad to hear you say that. But what about changing this agreement?"

"Oh," he said, "this agreement is going to be fulfilled to the T. Every I is going to be dotted and will stand, and every T that's crossed is going to stand." So that was the end of that. [Laughter] So I had a lot of fun.

Marion, on the other hand, she got very active and did a great job. For example, their insane asylum was a snakepit. It was terrible, awful. She went to work to get the prime minister to get somebody from England that was competent to come in and run the thing. In addition to that, she raised money to build a wing and all that sort of thing. She got very active. Also, I chartered a yacht there. I got a hell of a buy. This British woman who owned it, her parents had a couple of the big breweries in England, and she was married to a kind of ne'er-do-well, and they broke up. She had the yacht there, so she chartered it to me. I chartered it for a year. What Marion used to

do is take the kids from the orphanage out. I used it on weekends at the time. That let us get on it on weekends. I remember Admiral--what was his name? He was in charge of the Sixth Fleet at the time, a wonderful guy, he used to come on board every Sunday and all that sort of thing. So we had a good time with that.

MABEL MURPHY SMYTHE
Wife of U.S. Ambassador to Malta
Malta (1967-1969)

Ambassador Smythe was raised in Georgia, and earned her B.A. in economics and sociology from Mount Holyoke College, her M.A. from Northwestern University, and her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. After having worked around the world on numerous professional exchanges and while her husband was Ambassador to Syria and Malta, she was appointed Ambassador to Cameroon in 1977. She was interviewed by Ruth Stutts Njiri in 1981.

Q: You've mentioned the warm feeling that the people in Syria and Malta felt toward your husband. Did he have special access to the heads of state in these two areas?

SMYTHE: Well, I suppose one would have to say so in many ways. In Malta, of course, here was a peaceful situation. Malta was on excellent terms with the United States at the time we were there. The two major... officially the head of state was the Governor-General, whom he had already met in Sierra Leone when he was Governor-General of Sierra Leone and -- I'll think of his name in a minute --- his name was Sir what, Dorman? Robert Dorman? Maurice Dorman, I believe; Sir Maurice Dorman. The Prime Minister, George Borg-Olivier, was the other. Both were cordial.

Sir Maurice and Lady Monica Dorman had had a long and illustrious career in Sierra Leone. And when they came to Malta and realized that they would be working with Hugh, whom they had met in Sierra Leone, they became cordial friends and he frequently enjoyed their company in informal ways. For instance, Lady Dorman loved to dance with him; he was a good dancer. And when there was a ball, she looked forward to a turn on the floor with him.

In the case of Syria, the chief of state was a more remote person and there was more difficulty about it. Before I leave Malta, I should mention also that the chief Maltese person was the Prime Minister, George Borg-Olivier. We had a cordial relationship. Pam (daughter) knew his children; visited back and forth with them. He died about six months ago, I believe, six months ago. But while we were in Malta, we always had a cordial and warm relationship with him, and he was a very easy person to know.

Q: Your husband was in Syria from October 1965 to June 1967 and then he went to Malta in December of 1967. Was there anything unusual about his serving these two places at that particular time?

SMYTHE: Not really- ah...well, I should say he was the first black ambassador to serve in the Middle East, and I am hard put to think of a subsequent black appointee. He may have been the only one to serve in the Middle East up to this point. And so that was unusual. He also was interested with a very ticklish kind of situation that required a deft hand to manage.

When Hugh went to Malta, there had been a couple of other people before who had served in Europe. Malta was officially part of the European area even though one could make a case for its being something a little different, a little more remote, because it was almost as close to North Africa as it was to Italy. It was only about sixty miles, as I remember, from Sicily; a hundred and eighty to Tunisia, I believe; and a little farther, a longer distance from Libya. We had a good many wives of the Libyan oil workers who were resident in Malta, where their children could get schooling and they could have a more relaxed life. Life in the Arab countries was not very easy for American women at that time.

He had a very good relationship with all of the American community. He tried to invite the wives, include them in a number of things. There were two hundred of them, so that made quite an addition, but every now and then there were affairs that could be large and where they could be invited.

I remember one time when the John F. Kennedy aircraft carrier was making its maiden voyage. It was to stop at Malta, and the commander wanted to have a special celebration. So they were going to put on a very well-rehearsed program of music and military drills and so on, and a reception with dancing. So the Navy sent word that it would be much appreciated if Hugh could find six hundred dancing partners for the men from the ship. Well, that is not an easy thing in a good Catholic country where girls are sequestered before marriage (laughs) ... but his relationships came in ... (laughs) ... were an advantage there. He called in one of the leaders of the oil wives and asked if she would organize them and ask them to form a kind of hospitality committee, invite all the wives to attend the affair and they could be dancing partners even though most of them would be older than the sailors. And if they had teenage daughters, they might bring them along.

He called the mother superior of the convent school -- there was a teachers college run by Catholic nuns and the mother superior was a very good friend of his. And he asked her if she would like to take her student body to the affair and let them enjoy the show. He had, of course, informed the commandant that the boys were to be on their very best behavior and to be most formal and careful with the young ladies, because his credibility hung in the balance.

Well, between the wives and the student body, plus all the foreign, the foreign community that spoke English -- there were a lot of English-speaking people who were in Malta and some of them had daughters the right age -- and young wives of the community could also be dancing partners to some of the people aboard. Hugh got his six hundred dancing partners and it was a gala affair that was talked about for months afterwards ... (laughs) ... as one of the biggest things that had happened in Malta.

And he was a creative kind of person in working out solutions to difficult problems. In thinking of, of what Malta was like at that time and the great care that people took in guarding their

daughters from exposure before marriage, one could see that this would be very tough. But if you put the right chaperones in place, you could do it; and he did.

I remember on another occasion there was an exhibit of pictures of the astronauts who walked on the moon for the first time. Neil Armstrong, I remember, stepped on the moon while I was in Malta one summer; this was the summer of 1969, I think. And we were awakened at 5:30 in the morning for a statement on this grand occasion to be broadcast and to be published in the local newspaper. And it hadn't yet taken place. We sat before the television set and about six o'clock Malta time, six or six-thirty in the morning, it happened. But it was a stunning kind of thing to have happened.

The person in diplomatic service always has an advantage if there is something pleasant that can be shared with other people. And this kind of scientific feat was so mind-boggling that it captured the imagination of the whole world. And for a long time there was a great deal of discussion of it: photographs from it were on display at the Cultural Center; and a good deal of discussion of the whole issue of the exploration of space got a great deal of attention.

Well, he found ways of using this for entree into various places. He always tried to think, what could I do with the resources I have? Because he was ambassador in Malta at a time we were cutting the budget, and the budget for educational and cultural affairs had been cut by something like a third in one year. So he was trying to think of ways in which we could go beyond this and have an impact even though our money was not as plentiful as we would like.

When a space exhibit was made available, and it was made available around the world, right after the moon landing, he invited a great many people in Malta to come and see what was being shown, and explained about our space exploration. And one group of people who came represented the Maltese National Commission for UNESCO. Well, I was at that time a member of the National Commission for UNESCO in the United States. It was the one commission I did not have to resign when I went abroad as the wife of an ambassador.

So he arranged for me to give a tea for the Maltese National Commission and make available to them some additional information of the space exploration, and we had a chance to compare notes as to how we were teaching our various constituencies about the meeting of UNESCO and making it worthwhile.

Again, it didn't take a great deal of extra money, but when people landed in the, when sailors landed on our shores -- and ships were always coming into Malta because it was a rallying point for the Sixth Fleet, our Mediterranean fleet -- Hugh got to know the naval commanders very well. One of them later became the Chief of Naval Operations, later on.

But when the sailors would come in, he would look for projects that they could help with. I remember there was a camp for poor children in Malta and the sailors came in, painted the whole place, repaired the swings, put up book shelves, donated books to the book shelves and otherwise made the camps a more habitable place.

I remember on the day of dedication there were some sailors representing their ship to receive the thanks of the Ambassador and the director of the summer camp. And that day we were being served a collation during the ceremonies and something happened to the stove. It was one of these old cast-iron stoves, wood burning stoves.

Well, the sailors arranged to have that stove repaired ...(laughs)... The ships that put in had repair services and even a small foundry on board so that they could repair almost anything that needed parts. They repaired the parts of the stove and got it in running order again, and the children came to spend their two weeks in camp before going and giving another group a chance at a two-weeks visit.

Those sailors also provided music for special events at the Embassy residence and that sort of thing. Making bricks without straw was one of Hugh's specialties when the budget was low.

Ambassador Smythe was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin in 1986.

SMYTHE: It was a couple of months before they decided where he was to go next, and that was Malta. Pam and I were going to stay in New York while he went on to start with Malta, because this was going to be an election year. We weren't sure how long he would be there. So I finished up the school year while he did his first five months in Malta; then I joined him.

Q: What were you doing back here?

SMYTHE: I headed the New Lincoln School.

Q: You were on a leave of absence, I suppose, when he was in Syria?

SMYTHE: When he was in Syria, I took a two-year leave. He didn't know about Malta until a little late, so I started the year. He wasn't to go until the end of December. I think he had Christmas in New York and then he went to Malta. We remained in New York that year, in a funny kind of situation. We weren't sure whether we were going or staying, so we left the tenants in our apartment, because a friend of ours was going to be away. He was the executive secretary of the Japan Society, and he had to go to Japan to change his office over. He was going to be at the Japanese office, and so we sublet his apartment. That was 1968, until the spring of '69. Then Hugh came back from Malta. We stayed in the apartment of this acquaintance until June or July or August, something like that, and then we went to our own apartment and the tenants went to an apartment of their own.

Hugh was to be in Malta--this was '68--another year, but Nixon had already been elected, so there was no point in his going back to Malta on a long-term basis. So we just went over there for the summer again, in the summer of '69, and took part in his farewells to the diplomatic corps. He came back and that was the end of diplomacy for a while.

CHESTER E. BEAMAN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Valetta (1967-1970)

Chester E. Beaman was born in Indiana in 1916. He received his bachelor's degree from Depauw University in 1938. His career includes positions in London, Wales, Cairo, Port Said, Philippines, Syria, and Malta. Mr. Stuart was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in September 1999.

BEAMAN: ...I was assigned as DCM. Kresse was administrative officer. So, there were three of us moving in, which constituted half the embassy's U.S. personnel. As soon as I got there, and he had made his call on the prime minister. I asked him, "Have you made arrangements to talk to the leader of the opposition, Mr. Mintoff, after talking to the government officials?" "No. Mintoff is in Australia or someplace." Well, Mintoff came back from Australia very shortly. By that time, I was in the hospital with a very bad gall bladder affliction. I could have died because it was breaking apart. I was out for about three weeks. When officers would come from the embassy, I would say, "Has the ambassador made arrangements to call on Mr. Mintoff?" No, he hadn't. When I got out of the hospital, this was the first thing and the most important thing that I worked on. It took me six months to get Mintoff and the ambassador to meet and get acquainted with one another.

Q: Could you explain something about Mintoff? He is the only person from Malta whose name sort of still reverberates down the diplomatic corridor. Could you explain what his background was?

BEAMAN: George Borg Olivier was the prime minister. He was the Nationalist Party. Mintoff actually became head of the Labor Party by easing out a man, Anton Buttigieg, who had been a longtime activist. Mintoff's background was Slavic. His family came from someplace in the Balkans. Mintoff was a person who had very strong feelings like the ambassador. That is the reason that they did not get along. Mintoff did not like the Church. That was very obvious in talking to him. There were times that I had big parties, and I invited Mintoff along with George Borg Olivier. The prime minister would come but Mintoff never did. I spoke to Labor people about this and they said, "Oh, don't worry about that. He won't even come to some of our parties. He doesn't like big parties. He thinks it's consuming booze and talking about things that are not important." He came into power after I left. What I'm saying is building up to that.

Anyway, we finally did get them together about June of 1968. I was with him. Mintoff's first comments after the "Hello" type of thing was, "I see you've been visiting a lot of priests." That was true. Then Mintoff offered a drink. The ambassador said, "Oh, I don't drink." They ended up drinking milk because Mintoff didn't drink alcohol either. So we did finally get them together, but it resulted in no continuing conversation. The ambassador never tried after that. In fact, he didn't talk much to any Labor Party people. I was the one who handled that, not because he directed me to, but because I decided I had to. Somebody had to talk to the Labor Party. The ambassador was very disturbed that I had not been there the first three weeks of the first month of his assignment. He wanted me there to help him. Later, he complained to the inspectors about

this, which I didn't know at the time. I found it out later after he left. Kressie and I and the other officers really tried to lead him along to do appropriate things. He did go on a schedule of visiting every parish in Malta because the parish priests do represent sort of a local government. The national government was a Parliament meeting at night part-time. He always had to have me or the next ranking officer, Harry Glazer, along. Harry or I had to write up these visits, which really were not the kind of material that we ordinarily reported on. We kept making that point to the ambassador, but he kept insisting. Farther down the line after he had left, we stopped. Washington said they didn't want that type of reporting, but they didn't tell him. They waited until he left, and they told me.

The other early crisis was that he took a dislike to the naval attaché there. He wrote a very harsh letter about Commander Richmond that he wanted me to review. I read it and said, "You shouldn't send this in. This man has a career just like a lot of people. Why don't you just say something to the effect that you feel you could operate better if you had your own choice of a naval attaché?" Whatever he wrote I never knew because he never cleared it with me afterwards. He did get rid of Richmond, and then Commander Freeman came in.

State Department inspectors came in the summer of 1968, after we had been there about six months. The ambassador had a long list of comments for the inspectors, ranging from not enough light bulbs at the residence to the fact that I was not there at the beginning to help him. He also wanted a white ambassadorial limousine. The Department finally relented and sent one. It stood out from Malta's usually dark cars. A crisis, at least in my mind, occurred about the time the inspectors had finished. The ambassador had been talking to a man who wanted to bring in an American airline (not among the big airlines). Harry Glazer, the economic officer, and I reasoned that this American was sort of a schemer. He talked only to the ambassador, not to Harry, not to me. The Maltese government was not wanting to grant the request. One day the ambassador rushed through the connecting door to my office and said, "Listen in on the phone. I'm going to make a call." He called the prime minister's secretary, George Borge (The PM was George Borg Olivier; his secretary was George Borg), and the ambassador was pressuring to get approval for this airline. The secretary was saying, "Well, no. The cabinet does not want to approve it." Then the ambassador said, "The government can go to Hell." That shocked me through and through. I didn't know what to do. The inspectors were still over at the Hilton Hotel writing their report. I went there and talked to Mr. Freer, who was the chief inspector. He admitted that was very bad, but then said, "What are you going to do about it?" So, I said, "Well, I'm going to Parliament tonight, and I'm going to see George Borg, the prime minister's secretary, and in some way I am going to apologize, saying his outburst was because the ambassador was concerned about various and sundry things, so he lost his temper." The inspectors felt that might be a good idea. George Borg later said, "Oh, we understand. Don't worry about it." Nevertheless, I continued to worry about the incident.

Then the final thing was that he was going to be replaced. Nixon had come in to replace Johnson. So, early in 1969, it was known that Ambassador Smythe would be replaced, but he didn't want to leave. Washington kept on his channel, asking him, "When are you scheduled? We want you to talk to Ambassador Pritzlaff, your successor." He kept putting it off. In fact, the Malta diplomatic corps wanted to have a party for him, but he told me he didn't want a party or anything. So the Department began calling me on my home phone number and pushing me to get

the ambassador on the road. I said, "I can't force him out of here. All I can do is talk." Anyway, I used every idea I could to find out when he was leaving. He wouldn't set a date. But then the Department said, "Ambassador Pritzlaff is coming" and gave a date. He immediately got transportation documents and left. Since he wasn't going to be seeing the new ambassador, he left several pages of 70 numbered paragraphs of things that were wrong. He was alerting the new ambassador. There again, it ranged all the way from not enough light bulbs in the residence to warning him to keep an eye on the British because they were trying to horn in on our trade possibilities. It was sad. He really crept out of town. His diplomatic colleagues wanted to give him a good sendoff, and he didn't want it. They did get to him one day and presented him with a couple of silver cocks, decorative items. There again, one is usually very effusive at a time like that, but he wasn't. He just said, "Thank you" and left. So I was sorry.

I might mention also that Mrs. Smythe-

Q: Mabel Smythe.

BEAMAN: Yes. As I noted, she was a nationally-known educator in special education. I don't know whether she was full-time in Damascus. I wasn't there long enough. In Malta, she only came at the end of summer when school was out. In between times, he would look to my wife to handle what an ambassador's wife would do, which she did willingly, but in any event, it was even to the point of borrowing salt shakers and tableware from us in order to put on a party.

John Pritzlaff came and he was a breath of fresh air, you might say. He was willing to listen to recommendations. He had his own ideas, but he was willing to listen. He was a Goldwater Republican, a businessman from Arizona. He had never been in the Foreign Service. One of the interesting things in the first couple of days was that he called me in and said, "You know, I'm the appointed ambassador here. But if you were appointed, what would you do first?" I said, "Well, call on various government officials, starting with the prime minister, and be sure and call on the leader of the opposition." Even with Ambassador Pritzlaff, it took us a few months to arrange for him to meet Mintoff. He met Mintoff at the latter's farm on the edge of the island where there were swimming facilities. It was in the winter by that time. It was cold. When the ambassador arrived, Mintoff said, "Come on. I'm just going swimming." The ambassador said, "Well, I didn't bring a swimsuit." Mr. Mintoff said, "I have plenty." The ambassador thus went swimming with him, and it was really cold. When he offered the ambassador a drink of brandy, the ambassador told me, "I took it." He made overtures to Mintoff later a few times, trying to get to talk to him. Mintoff did not respond, at least while I was there.

Anyway, one of the first things I did was to invite American businessmen and leading Maltese businessmen to my house, so that the ambassador could meet them without having to worry about the party himself. He could just be there and talk to them, which he did. Thereafter, he pursued a good course of periodically dealing with and inviting various businessmen to the residence.

On my part, under Ambassador Smythe, I started the practice every Wednesday, of having a luncheon for about 12 people. I tried to mix Labor MPs, Nationalist MPs, newspaper people, teachers, and others. That way, I could sit and listen to them and get ideas for reports written on

what they felt on various subjects. I'd throw out a subject or if I didn't, they would start talking about various developments. It was amusing at times. Sometimes, I would have people at my table who had lived on the island and hadn't seen each other for years. I said, "I don't understand. This is a small island. You haven't seen one another for 10 years?" "No." It was proved later to me when everybody left and I was going back to the office. Here were guests out in the street, standing and talking to one another, trying to cover some years of memories.

Q: Let's talk about when you arrived about the state of relations between Malta and the United States. What was our interest at that point?

BEAMAN: One was to try to get American business firms to come in or at least promote commerce, but that wasn't the major task. The previous ambassador, Ambassador Feldman, had assiduously cultivated business people. The rest of the staff and I were trying to develop and to leave a good feeling about the United States. We would explain U.S. events and policies at every possibility. All in all, we had a good number of relationships. The U.S. Navy ships periodically came into port. They would do two things. One, crew members gave blood. Two, they would give books and educational materials to the Maltese. Or they would even come ashore and paint a school for them. The Navy did a very good job there. The feeling was very good, I would say, all the way through, except for one major event.

In the summer of 1970 (I left in December of 1970.), a black Navy sailor had killed a Maltese prostitute. That really started particularly the Labor group of people yelling about the sailors: "See what they do when they come ashore." That was one time that the minister of foreign affairs came to my office and asked that the sailor be turned over for trial. Meanwhile, I had been on the phone and was sending telegrams back to Washington on the whole affair. They sent a Navy lawyer in, not necessarily to defend the fellow, but to just be there and advise us." That was one case where the feeling wasn't so good vis a vis the United States. That was primarily the government and certain anti-U.S. elements, not everybody. Actually, it was one of the friendliest posts where I served.

Q: Had the British navy pulled out of Malta by this time?

BEAMAN: Not at the time I was there. It happened. A few months after I left - I would like to have stayed on another six months because Mintoff came into power in about four months. When Mintoff came in, they started closing down access to the British and the U.S. ships. Malta had a shipyard. Some ships would come in for repair. Others would come in just to service other vessels. Either the British or ourselves would have a vessel that had dentists, doctors, a shipboard PX. Other ships would come in and their crews could get their teeth fixed or whatever. The British were doing the same thing. Right after I left, things began to change, and Navy ships were no longer welcome. Certainly Ambassador Pritzlaff was really trying to do all he could to foster good relations. I think he made a good impression, like Feldman had made.

As far as feelings of the people, I would say, on balance, except for a few things like the murder of the prostitute, they were very friendly. We could talk to government officials easily. It wasn't like in a big country where you had to go through layers of bureaucracy to get to the top people. You'd get right in to them. Quite often in the discussions, certain things would come up. When the new ambassador, Pritzlaff, was coming, I had a talk with Mintoff's chief deputy, a fellow by

the name of Joseph Camilleri. He was the Labour Party's international secretary. I had lunch with him and said, "There have been problems with Mintoff and the ambassador that's leaving. A new one is coming in. We'd like to get off on the proper foot. I understand that on the floor of Parliament, Mintoff called Ambassador Smythe a 'clown.'" He said, "Mintoff was very worked up that day." The episode didn't appear in any English language papers, but it was in the Maltese language paper. We found out about it through our locals. We got on a good standing, at least with Camilleri, who was second in the party. Consequently, that and Ambassador Pritzlaff's manner of operating, I think, improved our relations with the top of the Labor Party. We always had good relations with the subordinates. In fact, I have mementoes that were presented to me by the Maltese Labor Party.

Q: What about Libya? Had Qadhafi gotten in there?

BEAMAN: That happened under Pritzlaff's regime. Qadhafi visited Malta after Mintoff became prime minister. I was later told that at official functions Qadhafi hogged the limelight. Stepping back a little, we had relations with a lot of American engineers who worked in the oil fields in Libya. Their wives lived in Malta. The men would go back and forth. Another thing that Ambassador Smythe wanted my wife to do was keep in touch with these "oil wives," as we called them, which she did. In any event, we had good relations as long as King Idris was ruling Libya there, but as soon as the revolution occurred, we had problems. One thing that helped create a problem were actions that the head of American schools in Libya took after Idris was deposed. A friend of his who was Jewish, a Libyan, came to him and asked for protection. So this superintendent of schools spirited him out of the country. Malta was a place that had a lot of bands and repaired band instruments. The school in Tripoli had contact with these repair firms. The superintendent decided that he would bring over some instruments to be worked on. At the same time, he put this fellow in the box. It was called the "Man in the Box Case." The superintendent got it on an Air Force plane that was going to Malta. The British at the military helped him get the box off, but then they said, "You're going to have to take it from here." He then went out in the road and flagged down an empty Maltese truck that was going by and asked the driver to help him get these band instruments into a repair shop. After they had gone along a while, he told the driver and his assistant to stop. He told them to get out and walk up the road. Well, this looked like a hijacking. They looked back, and he was on the back of the truck opening this box. A man jumped out and ran across the field. Of course, as soon as the superintendent left, they got out of the area. They reported the incident to the police. The police found him. They told us what had happened. Anyway, we told the superintendent what he had done. He had misused a government vehicle, he had spirited a national out of one country and into this country without immigration and commandeered a truck. By dealing with the Maltese, we got them to impose only a fine. He had to come before the court which imposed the fine and turned him loose. We at the embassy paid the fine because I had already been in contact with the embassy in Libya, and they said that they would pay for anything. I had no compunctions about this commitment. The man was free. Then he was put up in a hotel and broke a mirror or something, so the hotel people were angry. The police were in regular contact with Harry Glazer and me. They called and said, "Your man is on the way to the airport." So we rushed to the airport and tried to talk him out of leaving, so that he would go back to the U.S. from Malta. He wouldn't do it. He got on the plane to Italy. There wasn't anything we could do to stop him. But we let the embassy in Rome know about the situation. He was going to some school conference

there, and we told them to try to get him to return to the U.S. The end of the story was that he did go back to the States from Rome. After they had talked to him, and he left the State Department, a State Department security officer tagged him for arrest. He had to have paid another fine. But he brought his congressman into the case to plead for him. He really didn't suffer much except for reimbursing the U.S. government for paying his fines.

Q: How about the Libyan?

BEAMAN: If you mean the "man in the box," he went directly to the airport and caught a plane to Rome. The Libyan chargé, who was normally a friend of mine, was furious. He wanted the Maltese government to send the American back to Libya. We didn't want it. We beat them to the draw by getting him off by paying the fine. The chargé wasn't on very good speaking terms with us after that. We had good rapport with Maltese officials.

Q: You mentioned Ambassador Smythe and Mintoff saying he was a clown. Was there any particular reason for that?

BEAMAN: I don't know precisely why. Mintoff disliked the fact that the ambassador had been visiting priests. Of course, he did visit industries, too, but priests were the primary visits. I don't know what the time sequence was, but the ambassador also took to wearing Nehru jackets. A lot of people who knew better would joke with me, "Who is that over there? Is that the Indian ambassador?" I would say, "You know that's Ambassador Smythe."

Q: This was during the end of the end of the 1960s when the avant garde were wearing these things.

BEAMAN: Right. If he wanted to dress that way, it was all right with me. After all, Shirley Temple Black, when she was ambassador in Ghana wore the local dress. That was one thing. The other was that Mintoff was just angry at various things that the ambassador had done vis a vis the priests or government officials. He may have resented that the ambassador made little attempt to keep in touch with him... I left Malta in December 1970.

ROBERT P. SMITH
Ambassador
Malta (1974-1976)

Ambassador Robert P. Smith entered the Foreign Service in 1955. His Foreign Service assignments included positions in Lebanon, Ghana, South Africa, and Pakistan. Ambassador Smith was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 28, 1989.

SMITH: ...I thoroughly enjoyed the two years in Malta.

Q: You were there 1974 to 1976?

SMITH: 1974 to 1976. A delightful, beautiful, little island. The best living conditions I've had anywhere in the Foreign Service. Beautiful residence, friendly, friendly people. Again, openly avowedly pro-Western and pro-American, except for the government then in power. And Prime Minister Dom Mintoff was a thorn in my side from the very beginning. He was at times anti-Western, anti-British, anti-American, would not let the Sixth Fleet ships call in there even for liberty, et cetera. And he maintained that posture throughout my time.

Q: Could you give an evaluation of him? I mean, sometimes people do this because this is how they feel they're going to make their political points.

SMITH: I think Dom Mintoff honestly saw himself in the role as a bridge builder between East and West. I think he really thought that Malta, small as it is, could best serve the interests of world peace by acting as a bridge between the East and the West following a policy of strict neutrality. Therefore, while he would not let the Sixth Fleet into Malta, neither would he let Soviet warships into Malta. You know, a plague on both your houses.

But in point of fact, he was a classic Fabian socialist out of the trade union movement. He genuinely was anti-capitalist, virulently anti-Tory, in terms of the British and, indeed, he later threw out the RAF and Royal Marines that were there while we were there. I never really questioned his sincerity in all this. It was unfortunate because I think the majority of the Maltese people did not share his views on those subjects. But he was a very effective, strong, political leader, domestically. He did a lot for the common man. And he kept getting reelected until the last general election where his party was thrown out.

I think one of the best jobs in the Foreign Service right now would be the American ambassador in Malta with a nationalist government in power. It would be delightful because my good friends, who were then in opposition, are now in government.

Q: Did we have our eye on Malta as a possible NATO base?

SMITH: No, no.

Q: Had we pretty well written it off?

SMITH: Don't need it. We don't need it anymore because of Sicily, Italy, Greece, and Spain. I don't think there's any thought of that at all. We would have liked, and I tried hard, to get the Sixth Fleet liberty privileges there because it's a delightful liberty spot. When the admiral commanding the Sixth Fleet asked me out for a weekend at sea on the carrier Forrestal, Mintoff wouldn't even let one of our helicopters come in to Malta, land, and pick me up. My British colleague gave me a RAF helicopter to fly me to the carriers and back. But that's water over the dam. It's a delightful little country and a delightful people.

Q: Do we have any particular interests there? Did we have concerns, for example, that the Chinese were sending some people there and Qadhafi was making noises?

SMITH: The Chinese and the Libyans were both active there. My greatest concern while I was there was the Libyans. I met Qadhafi on Malta, as a matter of fact, when he came on a state visit. Yes, we were concerned that Mintoff would go too far into that camp and he did for awhile until he pulled back. The Chinese weren't that much of a problem.

Q: *It was just more a ploy?*

SMITH: Yes. He delighted in playing East against West. His recurring theme with me, personally, throughout my two-year tenure there, was, "Mr. Ambassador, I am the only European head of government that has not had a visit from Henry Kissinger." And he pounded on me for two years to get Henry Kissinger to stop by on a visit. He was getting no U.S. aid, of course. We don't give them any aid; they don't really need it.

Ironically enough, during the last few months of my tenure there, there was a chiefs of mission conference in London which Secretary Kissinger attended and I bearded him about that in Elliot Richardson's residence in London. Elliot was then the ambassador there. I actually got Secretary Kissinger's agreement that on his next trip, barring disaster of some sort, he would find some means of touching down in Malta, if only to have lunch. Ironically enough, I was transferred to Ghana before that ever happened. He never made it. Mintoff will never forgive either one of us, I'm sure. He's an egomaniac. Mintoff thinks he is one of the world's great leaders and he conducts himself that way, unfortunately.

Q: *Well, in a way, his posture was such to gain him some attention.*

SMITH: Oh, yes.

Q: *There might be dedication there and sincerity, but at the same time there is no other way for a very small power to gain attention than to get in between and to be somewhat of a gadfly.*

SMITH: And often to make life miserable for the superpowers, which the Maltese did in one European conference after another. Malta would be the one country objecting. They would get consensus on a course of action and suddenly the Maltese representative would object and throw the whole thing out the window, that sort of thing. So he succeeded, really, in getting everybody mad at him.

Q: *Do we have any desire to give any economic or any other type of assistance?*

SMITH: No.

Q: *Do we just stay out of it?*

SMITH: Yes. We now have a very friendly government in place.

Q: *Did you sort of consider yourself having what amounts to a holding brief, just keeping the flag flying?*

SMITH: Yes, I did.

Q: *Or did we have a policy that we thought we might go with?*

SMITH: Obviously, I was the low man on the totem pole in terms of our European chiefs of mission during those years. I remember my marching orders from Art Hartman when I went out there--Art was then Assistant Secretary for Europe--he said, "Quite frankly, Bob, the way we'll know that you're really doing your job well is if we don't hear from you very often." And I took that quite literally. I didn't do nearly as much reporting there as I did at other posts.

L. BRUCE LAINGEN
Ambassador
Malta (1977-1979)

Ambassador L. Bruce Laingen was born in 1922. His Foreign Service career included positions in Iran, and Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Malta. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 9, 1993.

Q: *Then you went to Malta where you served from 1977-79. How did that appointment come about?*

LAINGEN: It came out of the blue. I had not sought it. I didn't expect it. I hadn't thought much about that place. It came about I suppose largely because one career ambassador had completed a tour there and there was need for a change. I mention career, we had had political appointees in Malta before and we were to have them again in the future. But at that point a career ambassador had completed two years, so part of the process of change was to look around and put someone somewhere. Naturally at that point in my career, as it affects all Foreign Service Officers after x number of years you like to hope that your name is being considered somewhere as an ambassador. I didn't expect mine to be considered with respect to Malta. I remember having some considerable reservations about going there, about accepting it. I didn't think it was a very important place. It isn't a very important place. I guess my ego was not exactly furthered by my being assigned to a place like Malta.

I recall discussing it with Art Hartman in that context. I remember even getting some impression from Phil Habib at the time, who was Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. I recall both of them encouraging me to look at it as a step in a career ladder, reminding me realistically Laingen that you may never get another appointment as ambassador and I had better take it and go with it. And I did.

Malta, after all was not a hardship post. It was a place where I could bring a family and be comfortable. Phil Habib swore me in a ceremony on the eighth floor. I can recall that ceremony for two reasons too in the context of my own sort of ego, if you will. I suppose it also reflected the fact that it was a small country and the ceremony was in the Adams Room and not in the Franklin Room.

Q: These are ceremonial rooms. The Franklin is the big one and the Adams is the smaller one.

LAINGEN: But it was the time when more of those swearing in ceremonies were taking place in the Adams Room than is the case today, where all of them seem to occur in the Franklin Room. It was also the time when money was short so there was no money available for any kind of champagne or wine afterwards. I can recall in my remarks that day after being sworn in, sort of directing a barb at Carol Laise, who was Director General of the Foreign Service at that time and who was present, saying rather facetiously that I regretted the fact that the Department was so poor as to be unable to help me provide any kind of drinks for my guests. I should have reminded myself that I could have put up the money myself, I suppose, but I didn't.

Phil Habib presided at the ceremony and I was reminded of that in the recent death of Phil Habib. Reminded of the enormous respect that I had for him at the time and that I think everyone serving as a career officer in the Department of State had for him.

Q: What were your instructions or goals when you went to Malta?

LAINGEN: I don't recall receiving any written instructions. I recall benefitting from a final reporting message from Bob Smith, who was my predecessor. Our interest in Malta at that time was essentially an interest that has continued throughout this period and to this day, although in the aftermath of the Cold War it matters less. Our interest was to insure that the Soviets did not gain a useful, political, and certainly not a military presence on the islands. Because Malta, whatever its insignificance in terms of its size, nonetheless is an island republic in the midst of the Mediterranean Sea in a kind of strategic choke point, if you will, in that body of water. In historical times it loomed very large. Also in World War II when it held out against massive Italian and German bombing assaults. It was very important then for Allied shipping in the Mediterranean. We continued to feel that way about the place after the war and into the Cold War period, even though, again, in modern times the usefulness of that port, Grand Harbor, and it is a grand harbor, was much less than in earlier times.

Malta could be easily bypassed. But yet it sat there and sits there as a hard piece of rock at that choke point in the Mediterranean. We were and have been successful in insuring that Mintoff, who was the Prime Minister leading a socialist, Labor Party government, kept a degree of neutrality in the Cold War period. He did not align himself with the Soviet Union, although occasionally implying that that was a threat that we ought to consider, never carrying it to the point of doing anything. The Soviets have eventually gained a diplomatic presence, which they didn't have when I was there. Mintoff was a small thorn in the side of the Alliance simply because he had so dramatically denied entry by the Sixth Fleet, ordered the Navy out, in the early years, before I got there. He did his damndest to play the few cards that he had as a small island republic to get everything out of us and other Western allies by posing this kind of threat or warning that if we didn't take care of Malta and provide some degree of assistance, he might turn to the Soviet Bloc.

So that was my principal preoccupation while I was there, trying to deal with this man who was a very difficult political person presiding over a party that was generally assumed to be considerably left of center without being Communist and therefore a potential danger to us.

I had a reasonable personal relationship with Mintoff, but no American Ambassador ever had a comfortable one with him. Indeed, my immediate successor, Joan Clark, was denied any kind of official relationship with him. He refused to have it from that point on, during her time there and continuing for a time afterwards. To this date I am not aware of just what triggered that kind of cut off that began with my departure and continued throughout Joan's time there.

Q: You say you worked to prevent the Soviets from having a foothold there. You are the American Ambassador, how do you work to prevent this?

LAINGEN: We did what we could together with our allies, particularly the British and Italians, to be as forthcoming as possible in small things...trade, investment, and American commercial presence, which is what the Maltese kept bugging us about. Doing what we could to encourage the Italians, who are and were the NATO ally most obviously concerned, next door...Malta is culturally a very Italian place in many respects...to provide assistance to the Maltese. To do things for and with Mintoff that would curb his appetite a little bit in terms of turning to the Soviet Bloc.

We couldn't go in there with the Fleet, we were denied that. We couldn't force American business to go in there. It was damn hard to get any American business to look at the place and it still is. We have a few American industries on the island and we kept pointing to that in conversations with the Maltese about how we did really care about the place. But we had very few tools to work with. We took a lot of this talk from Mintoff as bluster and bluff and negotiating tactics -- that he wasn't really going to turn in any large way to the Soviet Bloc, not least because that would have aroused enough political public opinion in Malta to endanger his own political party's hold on power.

Eventually that did work to our advantage because a year or two after I left, the opposition, Christian Democratic, called Nationalist Party in Malta, did win an election and remains in power to this day.

Q: Were you able to deal beyond Mintoff with his party or the opposition party?

LAINGEN: I had no problems in dealing with the opposition party. I didn't let that affect my attitude. If anything we had too many contacts with the opposition, the Nationalists, and not enough with the Socialists. It was not a situation where the ruling party attempted to tell us, as an American Embassy, who we could see and couldn't see. That didn't happen. There was enough of a democratic process to prevent that from happening.

Q: Was the Soviet fleet there?

LAINGEN: No, it never came. The British came in on one or two occasions. When I was there the British military presence was formally ended. After independence, when the Maltese gained

their independence from the Brits, the arrangements included provisions for the Brits to continue a military presence. In that sense there was that kind of indirect NATO presence, although they were there not as NATO representatives, but as a British military presence as a product of a former colonial relationship. So we had visits from the Ark Royal, a major British aircraft carrier. Within a few weeks after I left (I continued in Malta for a time as the head of a CSEC delegation), the formal break totally in terms of a British military relationship occurred in a rather elaborate ceremony in March, 1979. Earlier we had seen the beginnings of the British military pull out. I recall a visit to the island by Lord Mountbatten when the British Marines on land were formally withdrawn in another elaborate ceremony. I recall watching with fascination this kind of dramatic and royal ending to a couple of hundred years of British political and military presence on the island.

Q: How did you gauge the feeling of the people on the island? With the withdrawal of the British this meant jobs for a very small island.

LAINGEN: There was no difficulty determining the political currents on the island of Malta. It is very open and on public display at all times. The press is free. Political parties are free to badger each other, including physically. A good deal of concern at that time by the opposition party, the Nationalists, was that the governing Labor Party was using its goons, strike squads, to break up political gatherings and that sort of thing. I had very close and friendly relationship with the head of the opposition party.

I did see Mintoff on several occasions. I don't mean to say that anyone got very close to Mintoff, ever. He is not a very easy man to deal with. He did not and does not, even though he is still out of power, divulge his tactics very publicly to you or closely to you. Malta is a kind of microcosm, it is a tiny place. It is 350,000 people, all of them concentrated on two islands, most of them on one. It is an island republic, a country. And yet it is a kind of city state and to most Westerners I suppose they would look at it working as a city council and yet it has all the trappings of a big state. It has a diplomatic service, it has a president, prime minister, palaces, a tiny navy, a small military force, the tradition of Britain and all of the trappings of ceremony that date from that time. It is a heavily Catholic island where the Church looms very large, both culturally, politically and in a religious sense. It is a fascinating microcosm of a larger place.

After having gotten there, I never regretted my assignment as Ambassador. The diplomatic corps was and still is relatively small. I think we had 13 or 14 embassies at that time. I think it has grown now to around 20. Because of the intense politics of the place that was sort of lived every day among the Maltese, because of the continuing feeling that there was a conceivable risk that the Russians might get in there, the diplomatic corps sort of fed on itself, talking a lot. It is a very social island, a lot of parties, particularly on the Nationalist side and the more Western-oriented business community. They love to entertain. They love the diplomatic corps. They like to get them to their dinner parties. They like that to be reported in the newspapers. In that sense it certainly is not a quiet backwater. You can soon develop a very large case of clientitis, I suppose, because you get so involved in their social and political life.

It is small and that affects your attitude eventually. The main island is only about 18-20 miles in length and I can recall how after months of living in a place like that you begin to think, "My

God, am I going to have to drive all the way up to the other end of the island? It is a long way!" And to go to the other island of Gozo it meant taking a ferry. It is also part of the jurisdiction of the American Ambassador to Malta, the island of Gozo, which has about 20,000 people. It is an absolutely beautiful place and a place that culturally is very close to Italy, not least in terms of its fascination and love for opera. I am one of few Ambassadors in the Foreign Service I suppose who can drop a line in a cocktail party to this day to the effect that "My God, when I heard 'La Boheme' in Gozo it was absolutely magnificent." People will say, "Where the hell is Gozo?"

Malta is out in the Mediterranean and you ask most Americans where Malta is and they haven't a clue. I recall telling my mother where I was going and she said, "I know where Malta is, it is about 50 miles south of Sicily," and it is. This reflects the fact that geography in the old days in our country was more important than it is today. People knew then where places were and my mother was a teacher.

Q: Also, too, World War II was a great geography teacher to people. You picked these things up, but I don't think you do now.

LAINGEN: Malta wasn't a decisive battle front of World War II, but most Americans who lived through World War II will recall that Malta was an important place then because it was such a dramatic example of a place that held out against massive German bombardment.

Q: And also the fact that it held out was extremely important for the whole battle of the Mediterranean and the defeat of the Afrika Corps in North Africa.

LAINGEN: That's right. It also is the only country on the globe's surface, certainly for a length of time it was that, a sovereign state run by an order of knights, the Knights of Malta. This began in the 16th century when the Turks tried to take it and failed. It has been a kind of symbol of resistance ever since to outside intervention with among other things some dramatic examples, which the Germans did not destroy, of medieval military fortifications. And, of course, the Knights of Malta remain a sovereign state to this day. There is an Embassy of the Knights of Malta in Malta. The sovereign body today is in Rome.

Q: One thing you haven't mentioned is the Libya connection. Libya at the time is run by an ardent Islamic nationalist, certainly anti-American and anti-West, Muammar Qadhafi. With considerable oil money, Qadhafi has been quite a trouble maker as far as sending either troops, or money or weapons to trouble spots. I would have thought that this would have been a place that he could have bought.

LAINGEN: I didn't mention Qadhafi, and I suppose I should have, because he was symbolic of the Soviet threat. It was he that visibly symbolized the possibility of a Soviet threat to the island given the degree, and it has varied over the last couple decades, of closeness between Qadhafi and Moscow. At that time it was a reasonably close relationship. Yes, that was part of that concern that motivated us all of the time, that the Soviets might gain some entry via the Libyans.

The Libyans and the Maltese have a peculiar relationship. They are relatively close geographically. The two peoples, the Libyans being Arabs and the Maltese having been

influenced over the centuries by an Arab influence as well, have to some degree a cultural relationship, although not much. I mean the Maltese are basically Western European oriented...in style and culture and interests. They don't have much in common with their Libyan neighbors in that respect. I don't recall a single mosque anywhere on the island of Malta. And yet Libya matters. It was there. They had a considerable economic relationship. Oil was a factor.

Qadhafi came to Malta at least once while I was there. I recall the diplomatic corps being lined up at the airport as was the custom to meet heads of state, and being struck by what all Americans are struck by in the case of Qadhafi...his instinct of commanding attention by his dress and his manner. He always wore a military hat, which to me always looked too big and rested on his ears. He was accompanied by his own goon squads shouting and leading demonstrations there at the airport in support of Qadhafi. Qadhafi and Mintoff are two rascals, if you will, of similar persuasion. I can see that they had a lot in common in terms of political instinct and political skills. But the Maltese as a group and certainly the opposition party in Malta had nothing of any kind in common with Qadhafi.

I also remember dealing with the Libyan Embassy in Malta, particularly the Libyan Ambassador who was someone whose son was studying at the University of Idaho and whose natural instincts were Western oriented but was carrying out his responsibilities as the Libyan Ambassador, presumably loyally. I wonder what has happened to that man because I find it difficult to see how such a person would forever be inclined to stick with what has happened in Libya.

Q: When Qadhafi visited was there a concern that he might come up with some horrendous offer of money that just might upset everything?

LAINGEN: There was a concern that he would come up with offers that would include a military relationship of some kind. And he had some success in that sense. Whether it was while I was there or shortly after I left I have forgotten, but Mintoff did come to an understanding with Qadhafi that saw a military training mission on the island. The possibility of that was a concern that I felt throughout the period and affected a lot of the things that we did with respect to Malta. We weren't able to offer much to counter that because of the absence of a NATO relationship. We had provided in the past and since that time we have provided a couple of them -- some used naval yard craft for their small navy. It was part of the effort to deter Mintoff from carrying this too far. But mainly we relied on the Italians to offer military training and assistance enough to counter the Libyan presence. We were simply not in a position to do that ourselves and they were reluctant to accept it lest it violate their (Mintoff's) professed neutrality.

Q: You left Malta when?

LAINGEN: I left Malta in January, 1979. I regret the fact that I was ordered to leave in January for family reasons. Looking back on it, it is an example, I think, of the Department of State sometimes forgetting that transfer orders can affect a family's educational interests and needs. I had to pull my family out in the middle of an academic year in a place where our interests it seemed to me didn't require that kind of dramatic sudden change. I wonder to this day why the Department felt it necessary to move me five months ahead of the time when I could have been moved more easily later with less disruption of my family's academic requirements.

GARY L. MATTHEWS
Ambassador
Malta (1985-1987)

Gary L. Matthews was born in Missouri in 1938. He graduated from Drury College in 1960, Oklahoma State University in 1961, and Columbia University in 1969. He served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1955-1958 and joined the Foreign Service in 1961. His career included positions in Germany, Poland, Vietnam, Malta, and Washington, DC. Mr. Matthews was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1996.

Q: How did it come about that you got Malta? And then could you talk a bit about preparation for going out there?

MATTHEWS: The ambassadorial selection process is indeed virtually impossible to describe. The reason I knew a little bit more about it than the ordinary Foreign Service officer is, I had staffed the ambassadorial committee in the State Department during my time with Walter Stoessel. He was first a member of the committee, and later he chaired it, since that traditionally falls on the deputy Secretary of State. I went through a series of: would you like your name put on the list for this or that? At one point I even came very close...my name had been sent over to the White House to be ambassador--I can't remember whether it was to Iceland or some other place, and for various reasons someone else, a political person, wanted that. In the final analysis at the end of the day, Malta was given me. I like to think not without some regard for the fact that we had human rights concerns in Malta, and there I was just finishing up two and a half years as the human rights guy in the State Department. Also, I'd had quite a bit to do with dealing with anti-terrorism issues. We had significant issues in that area, mostly with Libya just to the south of Malta. But it proved to be a great place, a marvelous part of the world. The Maltese are lovely people, and I loved every minute of it.

Q: Could you explain what was the political and economic position of Malta when you arrived there in '85?

MATTHEWS: When I arrived in '85 they were ten years into rule by a socialist government. The famous, if not infamous, Dom Mintoff who had been the original leader of the Malta Labor Party, and had been Prime Minister for ten years, and he decided for reasons which were never entirely clear, even to the Maltese, to step aside and pass the Prime Ministership on to another party fellow, Mifsud Bonnici, by name, although Mintoff stayed very much in the background with lots of interests in things political and otherwise. Malta, which had achieved its independence from Great Britain after being a colony for the best part of 150 years, had broken with the US-Western European Security Alliance, that would be essentially NATO in '74-'79, including closing down the remaining naval bases in Malta. Malta has superb ports, facilities, and the like, and since a lot of the employment in Malta, which is a small country, only about 375-380,000 inhabitants, a lot of the employment derived from those naval shipbuilding and ship servicing facilities. So the Labor Party had faced considerable unemployment and other

problems, and had taken on a rather anti-western, anti-NATO vein which was still very much the case when I arrived in August of '85.

That said, Mintoff had governed not only with the formal governmental structure, which Malta certainly had in all respects, a very functioning government, but he was fond of cultivating great global diplomatic schemes to be the conciliator, the negotiator, for all manner of world problems, whether that was between the Soviet Union and the US, or between Libya and the US, or whatever it might be. Among other things under the socialist government, Mintoff and then Mifsud Bonnici, when I arrived the relationship between Malta and Libya had become very uncomfortably close. I think because the Maltese essentially misplayed their hand. They were not as clever in handling Qadhafi as they perhaps thought they were. And there were problems in Malta of terrorism operations which were at least staged through there, if not planned there--not involving the Maltese, but using Malta's rather unique location between NATO's southern flank and Libya, and some of the other places of concern to us. My whole time there was spent dealing with the last two years of that socialist government. I enjoyed close relations for the most part with the Prime Minister and his other ministers, albeit, having to talk about these problems quite directly. I also cultivated good relations with the opposition party leader and his people. And in May of 1987, shortly before I was asked to come back on fairly short notice to take over that new position, Malta held its regular election under the parliamentary system, and the Nationalist Party, headed by Eddie Fenech Adami, won after having been out for 12-13 years, and that's the same government that continues on to this very day. And the US at present, I think, enjoys quite close, quite congenial relations with the present government.

Q: When you were talking to the Labor government about their, as you say, increasingly close relations with the Libyans, how would they respond? Did they see Qadhafi as being sort of a dangerous nut as I think many of us felt.

MATTHEWS: Certainly in private they would concede that he could be a dangerous nut. But the Maltese officials with whom I spoke were always supremely confident of their ability to handle Qadhafi. Leave Qadhafi to us, we have had hundreds of years of experience of dealing with people like this. The problem was this was not always as evident to the US and others that they were able to handle it. And the Libyans we knew were up to no good at times. And, in fact, during my tenure there in the fall of 1986, we, the United States, went in and bombed Libya in response to acts of terrorism. So I was often involved in conveying demarches either formally, or informally, to the Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and others in Malta about our concerns.

I'd like to back up a little bit and note that shortly after my arrival in Malta in 1985, there was a horrendous hijacking of an Egyptian airliner to Malta which resulted in the death of about 80-90 people, and to a large extent...I mean, this was a horrendous thing to happen, it would be to happen anywhere. In a little place like Malta it did color our anti-terrorism concern for years thereafter.

Q: Did we have any role of observing this...if I recall, it was an Egyptian plane that was hijacked, and then the Egyptians sent a team which thoroughly fouled up, or something.

MATTHEWS: The Egyptian airliner had been hijacked shortly after it took off from Athens on its way to Egypt, I believe. And the hijackers, who were Palestinians, hijacked the plane, and a gun fight broke out. The cabin lost pressurization, and to make a long story short, the airplane had to land in Malta because otherwise it would have crashed. And during the ensuing 24-36 hours I was at the airport, in fact right at the control tower with the Prime Minister, and all the other people, conveying the very firm US position that it was our wish as part of our basic tenet of our anti-terrorism policy, that the hijackers not be permitted to continue on. In other words, that they should be dealt with and have to deal with the consequences of their actions.

Complicating the situation was the fact that the hijackers, one hijacker to be specific, was taking the five American and Israeli passengers on board whom he had identified by virtue of collecting their passports, and every few hours he would shoot a different one in the back of the head. As you can well imagine, this added some degree of drama. It was a compulsive experience with a lot of back and forth. Basically, the Maltese government in the person of the Prime Minister personally, decided that Malta would hold firm, they would refuse the hijacker's demand to have the plane refueled so it could take off and go elsewhere. And during the long period of those 36 hours, or whatever, one of the other things going on was the government of Egypt whose aircraft it was, sent in a team of commandoes who arrived, and after sizing up the situation, decided to place an explosive charge at the rear of the aircraft, detonated it, and caused an explosion which resulted in a fireball which ran from the rear of the plane up through the front, which asphyxiated and killed 70-odd of the passengers. The subsequent autopsies showed very clearly the effect of the explosion because of the degree of soot in the lungs, correspondingly heavier toward the back, a little bit less so up front. Incredibly, the one hijacker, the sole hijacker who had been shooting the Israeli and American passengers in the back of the head and throwing them off onto the tarmac, incredibly he survived the storming of the plane, he was shot in the chest, had a lung sucking chest wound, and was taken to the Malta General Hospital, and subsequently identified as the hijacker. The man had very distinctive features. And Malta subsequently tried him, and found him guilty which was incontrovertible since there were eye witnesses all over the place. He received the maximum sentence which I think Malta could deliver for any such crime which was 25 years.

Then jumping ahead to long after I left, and not necessarily aware of the reasons for it, he was given early release but the US knew enough about it that we managed to get our hands on him, and we brought him to this country. This fellow, Omar Ali Rezak by name, had a trial here at the DC District Court some months ago, was found guilty, and will be sentenced next week. The expectation is that he will be given life in prison. So it comes full circle.

Q: Did you have any relations with the Libyans while you were there?

MATTHEWS: They were very much about. In fact, there was a Libyan Cultural Center as well as the embassy. They called their embassy something else. They called it a Peoples' Bureau. You can imagine, Malta being the literally small place it is, and I being by the way without wishing to sound at all immodest, I was the tallest person in the whole country. I say this because Maltese tend to be somewhat of short stature. So at functions, whether at Maltese government functions or other diplomatic dos, I would run into Libyans. We basically didn't really have anything to say to one another. I certainly had no representations to make to them, and such exchanges as might ever occur between the US and Libya, I was not used as the interlocutor.

Q: We're talking about the magnificent harbor there, and this is still a time when the Soviet Union was plying the Mediterranean. Were we in a phase of positive denial, or were we looking at Malta as a harbor for any of our ships? Did it play any role at all?

MATTHEWS: No, it didn't. The Soviet Ambassador at the time, Victor Smirnov, was a friend and colleague. We would often frankly discuss how interesting it was that time and technology had essentially passed Malta by. I mean, as magnificent as the harbor was, and is, for commercial uses, it really was needed neither by the Soviet navy, nor at that point, by ours, because we had, and have, the superb facilities in Naples and elsewhere for the Sixth Fleet. It just did not arise. In fact, such operations in that part of the Mediterranean were almost exclusively our US Sixth Fleet. There was an occasional Soviet vessel, or Soviet submarine...not very many subs because the waters are rather shallow in that part of the Med, so you wouldn't want your subs to be quite that exposed. That was not really a problem, and particularly since the very firm policy of the Maltese government was one of neutrality and non-alignment. They, for their part were not pushing for any new connection.

Q: You were there at the time when we were probably at our greatest confrontation with Libya and Qadhafi, both by sending ships into the Gulf of Sidra...weren't we doing that then? And were you there when there was some planes...

MATTHEWS: And then we bombed Libyan targets.

Q: The Maltese must have been upset. What were you getting from the Maltese?

MATTHEWS: Well, I of course, immediately conveyed our principled views and position on this matter to the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. They, as was always the case, wished to play the role of a great world peacemaker, and were very interested in acting as the middle man to broker a truce, as it were, between us and Libya. So I would inform them that we would not be dealing with Malta to the extent that we had problems with Libya. This was not to be settled there. But ordinary Maltese, including a number of officials, privately acknowledged they could readily understand why we would have been so put out by the Libyans, and why we would seek to smite them in this way. I recall by the way, for whatever reason...of course I had more than inklings that things were going to happen, so I stayed all night in my office at the embassy, not that my residence was that far away, it wasn't my first time in my government service I'd slept on the sofa, and I had a rather good one there in the ambassador's office. So at one point I recall early in the morning, got a call from the US military command asking me what the weather was like. I reported that the weather was quite clear, quite nice, thank you very much. I don't think they really needed to call the American ambassador to find out what the weather was like. And in fact, the aftermath of our bombing Libya certainly represented no difficulty whatsoever in the type of relations we then had with the socialist government in Malta. We had our very clear views of matters. I'm sure Malta tried several more initiatives to play the great peacemaker but that was not a role that we were seeking for them to play.

Q: Did you get involved in trying to get the Maltese to vote correctly in the UN?

MATTHEWS: On, UN votes. In fact, embassies, including small ones like ours, we'd get all these broadcast cables that came out on all manner of subjects. We would sort through these, and there were issues that the Malta delegation to the United Nations was probably not going to vote on at all. To the extent I seized the Foreign Minister usually personally with the importance of something, he probably more often than not got his representative in New York to vote for the US position, rather than not voting at all. We didn't really have any head banging over something that they just out and out opposed us on. Maltese have always been big on multilateral diplomacy, and, in fact they always had very experienced diplomats in multilateral organizations. So they knew the scene. They were big CSCE players. Malta fancied itself as a father of CSCE, sometimes to the irritation of many other delegations. That was a world they felt very comfortable with.

HOWARD H. LANGE
Deputy Chief of Mission
Valetta (1989-1992)

Howard H. Lange was born November 4, 1937, raised in Nebraska, and attended the University of Nebraska. After college, he joined the Air Force and served in Taiwan. After a time at the University of Washington, Lange entered the Foreign Service in 1969. His posts included Vietnam, Taiwan, China, and Malta. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2000.

Today is August 7, 2000. Howard, we're at 1989, you're in Malta. You were in Malta from 1989 to when?

LANGE: 1992.

Q: Okay. So you were off to be in a place that nobody had ever heard of or cared about since World War 2.

LANGE: Right, with a couple of exceptions. For years during the Cold War, the Maltese Labor Party prime minister, Dom Mintoff, made a career of playing off the Soviets against the Americans. He was something of a thorn in our side, and he held office from 1971-84. Then, there was a dramatic incident that took place in 1985. A hijacked EgyptAir plane landed in Malta and was eventually stormed by Egyptian troops. It ended badly, with considerable loss of life, including some Americans aboard.

Q: Who was the ambassador there? **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

LANGE: The ambassador when I arrived was Peter Sommer. Peter he was not a foreign service officer, but he had had some assignments in government including in the National Security Council. We just overlapped for about two months before he left. His successor, nominated about the time I arrived, was Sally Novetzke. She was Iowa State cochairman of the George Bush for President Committee in 1988, and as she put it, she was one of George Bush's 500

closest friends. She had never imagined that she would have an ambassadorial appointment. What she really wanted to do was in the field of tourism or something like that in the Commerce Department in Washington, but that was not forthcoming, so she took the ambassadorial job.

Before she arrived in September of that year, there was the celebration of the 25th anniversary of Malta's independence from Great Britain, which called for a presidential delegation. They put on a big show in Malta. It turns out that the principal representative for the United States was President Bush's brother William, known as Bucky, who was in the private sector in St. Louis. He and his wife Patty, plus former Ambassador to Malta

Bruce Laingen – he was chargé in Tehran at the time of the hostage crisis – constituted the U.S. delegation. This delegation probably had some relevance to the later selection of Malta as the site for the Bush-Gorbachev summit in December of 1989. At some point after Sommer had left and before Novetzke arrived, while I was chargé, I got a call in the dead of night - 3:00 am or 4:00 am, something like that - from the Department's Jeannie Bull, whose name is familiar to many who have worked presidential visits. She was responsible for securing hotel rooms for big events.

Q: That's probably the most important job of them all!

LANGE: That's right! I had followed with moderate interest the discussion in the press about a U.S.-Soviet summit that was going to take place aboard ship somewhere in the Mediterranean. As soon as I got this call, even in my sleepy state, I knew the fat was in the fire. Ground zero was Malta. I wish that I could say that I was honored or that I looked forward to a momentous event, or even that I was excited about a career-enhancing possibility, but at that moment, with the Bush visit to Poland that summer fresh in my mind, what I felt was dismay. Not surprisingly, the White House hadn't worked out any of this with the Maltese. None of us knew for sure the dimensions of what was to come. All I knew at that point was that I had to secure 400 hotel rooms, hopefully in concert with the Soviets because they would also need accommodations. At the opening of business in the morning, as Jeannie Bull had alerted me, we had telegraphic instructions. I contacted the Soviet ambassador, who hadn't heard a word from Moscow about Malta as the site of the summit. He agreed that perhaps we should make a joint approach to the government that morning on the subject of hotel rooms. But he played a very passive role in the meeting with the Maltese. Understandably, he wasn't going to get ahead of instructions from Moscow. The Maltese quickly agreed that they would do what they could and started immediately pumping me for details, which of course I didn't have. All I had was the demand for room reservations.

It often falls to us in the foreign service to support these affairs, and we've become familiar with the drill. The White House demands everything without offering anything in return in the way of hard cash or deposits to secure these rooms, or any schedule on when people would be arriving. The number we demanded turned out to be wildly exaggerated. Host governments in places like London or Brussels are used to this, but it took the Maltese a while to wake up to what was going on. On the receiving end of a summit, this travel agent function – getting hotel rooms, making sure X is available at Y at the right time, and all that – is perhaps our most important function.

One day before my new ambassador arrived, the summit survey team arrived, headed by a gentleman by the name of Sid Rogich. Rogich was in real estate in Las Vegas. Perhaps there are other countries that turn high-level visits over to political operatives, but I don't know of any. Rogich's Maltese counterpart, and my principal contact for planning, was the prime minister's secretary, a fellow by the name of Richard Cachia-Caruana. He was very able, educated in Britain, one of the Maltese elite. The Maltese did everything we called upon them to do. Once they realized that it was not going to be offshore as originally announced, but rather within reach of TV cameras and the media, which meant somewhere in harbor, they were all for it. For symbolic reasons, the summit was still to take place on the respective warships, the meetings alternating between one and the other. The Maltese wanted the meetings to take place in Grand Harbor, which is a beautiful, deepwater harbor with impressive historic resonance. Mariners have used it for centuries, going back to the Phoenicians, and since the Knights of Malta (more properly, the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St. John of Jerusalem, of Rhodes and of Malta) constructed their fortified city there in the 16th century, the sheer walls and bastions afford great views, wonderful overlooks, great visuals. But the Secret Service nixed the location. The angles were too great looking down; they thought it was unsafe. So they went instead for a location on the Southern side of the main Malta island, a harbor by the name of Marsaxlokk, which is also very nice and picturesque. It's more open, it's broader and doesn't have the same sort of dramatic overlooks that Grand Harbor does. The logistics would be only slightly more complicated because the entire island is not all that big.

We bundled the survey team into a van and went over to Marsaxlokk Harbor to check the layout. One of the first routes we took gave some elevation above the harbor. At a certain overlook, we all piled out of the van and Rogich got out and immediately did the director's thing – framing the view with thumbs and forefingers. Richard, the prime minister's secretary, later told me, “As soon as I saw that, I knew it was all over” as far as the Maltese having any impact on the summit. Richard was a fast learner.

So things started rolling ahead. The Secret Service had an overwhelming presence, as it always does, in terms of numbers and assertiveness. They're extremely demanding and in places where these visits take place with some frequency, in Europe for example, people learn to cope with this - they push back. The Maltese were babes in the woods, so they didn't know when they should push back and when they shouldn't. I mention this because it becomes relevant later in the story, during the phase after a high-level visit when someone has to sweep up the broken crockery.

One of the issues from our narrow point of view at the embassy there was the relationship of this summit to the host government. What the White House was really interested in, rightly of course, was the relationship with Gorbachev and the Soviets. Malta just provided a venue. William Bush, who as I mentioned had been there a couple of months earlier for Malta's 25th anniversary of independence, had probably whispered in brother George's ear that this was a really neat place to have a summit, and one supposes that is the reason it blew up on our shore.

I have to take a brief excursion to explain the Maltese political scene. It's a tiny place; the population is about 300,000. Party affiliation is almost evenly split between the Labor Party and

the Nationalist Party. The Labor Party has historically not been very friendly to the U.S., or perhaps I should say it has been “aggressively neutral”.

Dom Mintoff was prime minister for 13 years and developed into an art form the practice of playing off East versus West. The Americans against the Soviets; the Soviets against the Chinese. It seems he used or tried to use every relationship in one way or another. But Labor had been voted out in 1987. In Malta, the electorate is so evenly divided that a party generally prevails by only one-half to two percentage points. They have an incredible participation rate: Voting is not mandatory, but typically 95-96% of people vote because it's damned important to them who gets voted in. They have a highly developed spoils system. People can lose their job based on the outcome. The Nationalists won by a typically narrow margin in 1987.

In 1989, the Labor party suspected the Nationalists of engineering a Malta summit in order to boost their own prestige and future political prospects. So the Laborites were very negatively predisposed toward the summit, and had planned demonstrations against what they viewed as a cynical ploy by the Nationalists to curry favor with the U.S. and the West. That was all the White House planners had to hear. Negative demonstrations always make good TV, but that was the last thing they wanted, especially when the summit was not even about Malta. So the notion that Bush should not come to the prime minister's office for a meeting quickly took root in the advance team. Was the White House going to insist on just a five to ten minute handshake meeting at the airport, or would Bush travel the 15-20 minutes downtown to meet the prime minister, Eddie Fenech-Adami, in his office? This was of course of considerable symbolic and political importance to the prime minister. For a couple of weeks, the White House advance team held firm against the office call, and the issue was in doubt. While the issue was framed in the language of security, I believe that the principal concern was political – the visuals and how they would look back home.

Q: Were you and you ambassador pushing a different thing?

LANGE: Oh, yes! We thought it was important to have the meeting in the prime minister's office because here was a government that was finally friendly to us after 17 years of Labor. Were we going to slap them in the face and give the Labor Party ammunition for the next election? It seemed of some importance, even to the U.S., even in Malta, to have the meeting in the prime minister's office. I have to say - and I'm no advocate of political ambassadors in small posts - that this is one time where it was probably useful to have an ambassador whose name was at least known in the White House. She, Ambassador Novetzke, commented two or three times, “If George knew what was being planned here, he would make the right decision and meet the prime minister in his office.” She was unfamiliar with State Department structure, and she was reluctant to go out of channels, but at a certain point it became clear that the only thing that was going to turn the thing around was if she was able to establish a direct connection. I am a lifelong chain of command guy, but I encouraged her to do it. She managed to talk to the President for five minutes on the telephone and he immediately decided to come to the prime minister's office. It was obviously the right thing to do. The meeting did take place in the prime minister's office, and it was a great success. The bleak scenarios – demonstrations, security threat, really bad news – all melted away. The event was so popular among the Maltese that even the Labor Party stalwarts couldn't find it in their hearts to organize a meaningful demonstration against it.

A footnote of diplomatic history: The summit came so soon after Ambassador Novetzke's arrival that there was no opportunity for her to present her credentials to the Maltese president before the meeting with the prime minister. Technically, she was not yet accredited to Malta – was not officially the ambassador – but I don't recall that the Maltese raised any objection. The Maltese set some store by ritual, but they are also pragmatists. There was of course no way that we were going to let this breach of protocol stand in the way of her presence at the meeting. A few members of the diplomatic corps sniffed about it afterwards, but there wasn't any meaningful fallout.

Q: Were you able to talk to the Labor people about the demonstration and say, "Hey, come on fellas...?"

LANGE: Not at that time. I'd been there just a short time. I had made my calls on the Labor Party, but I didn't know any of these people personally and they didn't know us. Some of them, probably most of them, genuinely believed that the Nationalists had engineered this, going back to the visit of Bush's brother, that the Nationalists had put a bug in his ear and had convinced him. Of course the world revolved around Malta!

Q: Well if you look at it as the Mediterranean is the center of the world, and Malta is its navel.

LANGE: So of course it logically follows that the location for the summit was chosen solely to shore up the electoral prospects of the Nationalists. That was the Labor party's take on it, and their job was to open up the eyes of the Maltese electorate. They had read too much Machiavelli. It was rather difficult, even when I got to know them better, to discuss the real world with the Labor Party people.

The meeting in the prime minister's office was the extent of contact with the Maltese government at that level. After that, the President retired to the Navy ship, the cruiser Belknap. Then the wind came up. The Maltese told us later that if we had consulted them they could have told us that December is the worst time in the year to come to Malta, because you have one chance in ten there will be a really serious windstorm. And sure enough, we had a ten-year storm. One of the advance team's concerns was camera angle – insuring the best profile for the cruiser as it lay at anchor in the harbor. And to ensure the proper camera angle required fore and aft mooring. Mariners hate fore and aft mooring.

Q: Of course, because you want to swing and coordinate against the wind and tide and all that.

LANGE: Yes, and there wasn't a proper aft mooring at Marsaxlokk, so they called up a ship Chandler from Italy - of course we had a large Navy infrastructure up there and an Italian contractor who performed these sorts of services - and got him to come down. I don't know what the expense was, but even the Navy guys said it was a lot. When you hear that from the military, you know it had to be expensive. The Chandler placed what they call a first-class mooring, fixed to the sea bottom, in the proper location so there could be mooring fore and aft to insure the correct orientation for the cruiser; that is, a favorable camera angle. Later, when during the storm the wind reached a certain force and was not dead on the bow, they had to do what any mariner

would do, which is to cut loose the aft mooring. The ship began to swing on the bow mooring, and one side effect was to put White House communications off the air for a time, until they adjusted to the new conditions. There was considerable angst about the President being out of touch, but this never got any play in the media. Perhaps it did come to the media's attention, or perhaps it was just not as newsworthy as it would have been in earlier years, when the threat of a nuclear attack was thought to be genuine.

The plan of having the meetings alternatively on the U.S. and Soviet ships warships never worked out. Given weather conditions, Gorbachev refused to stay on board their cruiser. I'd noticed earlier that the Soviets seemed much less concerned about securing hotel rooms than we were. The reason was that their solution was the same they'd use for the summit in Reykjavik: They brought in a passenger cruise ship, *Maxim Gorky*. That saved everybody's bacon: It not only eased pressure on hotel space for us, but this passenger ship, tied up at the dock, turned out to be the venue for the summit meetings. Bush insisted on staying on the Navy cruiser, even though the meetings weren't taking place there. This was another source of considerable worry because, as you can imagine, even in a protected harbor, the waves were pretty substantial. The cruiser was fairly stable, but of course the tender bringing the President back and forth was rising and falling 10-12 feet on the waves. They broke a few ladders bringing him back and forth, and of course there was some risk of injury.

Q: Plus the President had been a naval officer, and he was a sailor, and continued to be a sailor. And of course Gorbachev was from the inland of Russia, so what the hell is this all about?

LANGE: There was that. I presume that the president wanted to make some sort of statement for the U.S. public or the Navy, or both. The Maltese developed a very reasonable backup plan for staying at a secluded villa, but this was turned down by the advance team. It would have worked, but transportation, security and scheduling would have been more complicated, so Bush staying aboard ship made life easier for the embassy.

Another wrinkle to the summit was the issue of "neither confirm nor deny;" that is, our policy to never confirm or deny that a naval ship is carrying nuclear arms. Sentiment against nuclear weapons was broad in Malta, not unlike in New Zealand, and it bridged both political parties. The Nationalists, however, didn't want to force our hand – they didn't want to push us as far as insisting on a declaration, because we had made it clear to them what our answer would have to be. We couldn't provide them with any assurance one way or the other. The Nationalists decided on their own to suggest, in a way that would not require us to either confirm or not confirm their suggestion, that they were reasonably sure that this was not a nuclear-armed vessel. One of the NSC staffers on the advance team thought we had to respond, but he was overruled. The statement worked: The Maltese got enough cover that they did not have to defend themselves to the Maltese electorate, but not so much cover that there was an issue for the United States to deal with.

Q: How about the Soviets? What kind of warship did they bring in?

LANGE: It was a guided missile cruiser, the *Slava*. It looked even more like a warship than ours: its missile launchers were much more evident in profile than ours.

Q: Ours were sort of enclosed, and the doors open when the time comes.

LANGE: Right. But the Soviet cruiser played no role, except that it, with the American ship anchored nearby, provided a nice tangible symbol of the meaning of the summit; that is, winding up the Cold War. The image, seen dimly through the storm, was effective, but an equally common TV and newsmagazine visual from the summit was the horizontal rain streaming past the window of the press center in Valletta.

I'd like to relate a final story on the summit. I mentioned that the Maltese tended to roll over whenever the Secret Service suggested something. There was dredging in Marsaxlokk Harbor in connection with a container port that they were developing there. The construction trade unions, and all organized labor for that matter, were virtually 100% Labor Party, and they were very effective at organizing their people. I heard of no specific plans, but the Secret Service suggested that was a security issue. The Maltese authorities quickly decided on their own to suspend dredging operations and to close down construction at the container port. Even before the summit was over, the Maltese started raising questions about how much this was going to cost, and as soon as I passed this on to anybody on the advance team, I got the classic, "We'll get back to you on that." A few weeks after the summit, the Maltese presented a bill amounting to about one million dollars, which I dutifully sent back to the Department. The Department was at first incredulous and dismissive, then eventually took the position that the Maltese suspended work on their own initiative and were now showing that they were poor hosts. I doubt that it was even discussed with the White House. Payment was a non-starter, and I had to tell the Maltese that we couldn't be of any help. The Maltese position was that this was something on which the Secret Service had insisted. I wasn't a party to the Secret Service meetings, but I have no doubt that they strongly suggested closing down the port project, as they always want the optimum security package wherever they go. Some things they get, and some things they don't, but in the case of Malta, I believe that they got everything they asked for regardless of cost. I'm sure the Maltese learned a great deal about summitry. Unfortunately, their hard-won experience is probably useless: Another summit does not seem likely any time soon. As for the million-dollar bill, thankfully, it didn't come up again. Perhaps the Nationalists presented the bill just to protect their backside against Labor, with no real expectation of payment. Or perhaps it was presented at the behest of their lawyers.

The Maltese were in fact proud of their supporting role for the summit. In January 1991, I represented the U.S. at the prime minister's dedication of a monument at Marsaxlokk Harbor to the "End of the Cold War", and the part played by the Bush-Gorbachev meetings.

Q: Did the embassy get involved with the press and all that when the world press came?

LANGE: The Maltese set up a big press center at their Mediterranean Conference Center at the northern tip of Valletta, overlooking the Mediterranean. Our public affairs officer facilitated contact between the local authorities and the White House people and tried to get the White House what they wanted. The press was our primary competition for hotel rooms, and they put cash on the counter, whereas all we had were promises.

Q: Well, sometimes when you get the attention of the world press, they all encamp and they start nosing around the rest of the place only because they are only getting handouts anyway, so thought pieces on whither Malta and all that. How was this going?

LANGE: No interest. I don't remember a single article on Malta that was generated out of the Malta Summit. Some stories about the storm, but we didn't have any requests for meetings with the ambassador or myself.

Q: With the summit, obviously this was something that Bush and Gorbachev said, hey, how about Malta or something like that? Was there ever any consideration that Malta wasn't the right place and were they looking, was an alternative being buffeted about?

LANGE: Not to my knowledge. I don't know how they settled on a shipboard summit in the Mediterranean. As I've said, my speculation is that it was our idea, and that Malta was resting there in someone's frontal lobe, placed there by Bucky Bush's earlier visit.

Q: It was probably George Bush because he was a Navy man.

LANGE: Right. I'm sure the notion of Malta came from us, and as I say, the Soviet ambassador as of the morning I got the call hadn't even heard it was going to be in Malta. As far as I know there was never any question that it was going to be held there.

One other anecdote about the summit. I had just come from the Presidential visit to Poland, where Bush demonstrated that he genuinely had a regard for embassies and the work of embassy staff. Perhaps this had something to do with his experience with the career service in China and at the UN. He certainly made an effort in Warsaw to meet the embassy staff; he seemed genuinely appreciative. So in Malta, the scenario was that Air Force One arrives at the airport and there's a transfer to a limo that takes Bush into town for his meeting with the prime minister. It was a logical moment for him to come over to the rope line, on his way to the limousine, and I thought I had this all arranged with the White House staff. I turned out the entire embassy staff, and it was a huge deal for local employees. We went out to the airport and stood behind the rope line, expecting that Bush would at least, if not come over, at least acknowledge us in some way. It didn't happen, and I lost some face with the embassy staff. It was symptomatic of the fact that Malta was just a place to have the summit. The summit was the big thing, the meeting with Gorbachev. From the cosmic point of view, it was understandable. From our narrow point of view at the U.S. Embassy in Malta, it was disappointing.

Q: Let's talk a bit about, we had gone through this difficult time with the Labor Party, who'd gotten rid of the British. I guess the British, with a certain amount of pleasure, had left Malta. They were dismantling their empire anyway. Did you find the Labor Party, was your impression that it was sort of like, in a way the left wing of the British Labor Party? Was this its genesis, extreme socialists almost communists, dislike of the West and capitalism and all of that. What were the roots of its stand?

LANGE: It was, as you described, classic Labor party. It was very heavily statist oriented, though some of the very worst economic problems they had on the island were not really the

fault of the Labor Party, but rather to some extent a legacy of the colonial period. The shipyards, after all, had started out as components of Her Majesty's Navy, and they become in due course parastatal-run shipyards. They did wonderful work, and they had excellent facilities. They could bring in supertankers and work on them at dockside. But they were very inefficient, bloated and high cost. They represented the worst aspects, or perhaps I should say were the climax expression of a state-run organization or institution. The Labor Party sought to protect every last one of those jobs. At the same time, they took a decidedly neutral approach in external affairs, starting as I mentioned earlier with the East-West aspects of that, that is the Communist world and the West, playing one side against the other. They were very supportive of the South in the North-South debate. Finally, they were extremely critical of the Nationalist government approach to Libya. Libya was and probably always will be a problem for Malta because of its close proximity. Any government in Malta has to recognize that Libya is important to Malta, in one way or the other. The question is how that works out. I'll come back to this a little bit in terms of the Pan Am 103 investigation. The Labor Party approach to Libya was that it should be treated as a friend and that Malta should be supportive of Libya's government and its foreign posture. Nor did the Nationalists have any wish to antagonize Libya. We didn't appreciate this approach, to say the least, but it wasn't entirely unreasonable in the Malta context. It's a very small country; Libya is a large country. Libya has oil, and Malta gets a preferential price on oil from Libya. But the Nationalists were prepared to throw in their lot with Europe – the West. The Nationalists explicitly wanted to become members of the EU. The Labor Party thought Malta should remain as an associate member, not become full member because that would compromise Malta's "neutrality."

I came away from my assignment in Malta with some views about non-career ambassadors in Special Embassy Program (SEP) posts. In the case of this political ambassador, as I have said, she really wanted another sort of job. All previous ambassadors had been career foreign service or, in the case of Peter Sommer, had had a number of government jobs. They were working ambassadors. They wrote reports, they made demarches, they did representation. Sally Novetzke was a great person, very likeable, and she presented a favorable public image for the United States. Of course that's important for any ambassador in a friendly country. But she had no wish to do reporting. She very much disliked making demarches, particularly unpleasant demarches. None of us liked to do that. I reckon that I made about 80% of the demarches that we were instructed to make. And she never quite accepted the full import of representation. She liked to have events with friendly people, and that's fine, but you know, particularly in an environment where there was just ½ percent of the electorate that separated those who were out and those who were in, that was not very far-sighted. She did not see the point in trying to relate to people with whom we had deep ideological differences. The long and short of it was that it fell to me to deal with the Labor Party, which was fine. I didn't mind it, in fact I kind of enjoyed it. I established relationships with a lot of people and I hope this paid off a couple of years after I left, when the Labor Party was voted back in, and the people I'd had to lunch and dinner were the prime minister and his cabinet. It was frustrating, and of course it added a lot to my workload, to be doing all the political reporting and demarching and at least half of representation.

There was some collateral damage. I found it difficult to give my full attention to the management side. For a variety of reasons, five different admin officers passed through Valletta

in the space of two years, and the embassy did not fare very well on the admin side in an inspection. That reflected inescapably on me.

Q: Was she married? Was there a Mr.?

LANGE: There was a Mr., but he stayed home running his business. He came out a couple of times, but he found Malta massively boring. I think the longest he ever stayed was a week and a half. He was pretty much not there, and she was absent a lot too. I spent a lot of time as charge. She once put it in one of her evaluations of me that for some reason she was absent during crisis periods, and this did in fact seem to be the case, for example during Desert Storm or at a particularly critical time in the Pan Am 103 investigation. Anyway, it's a shame that this small post, which could use a career person to do the work and which could add to the pool of ambassadorial posts for career people, now seemingly has been lost to State.

I should add here that I have absolutely no complaints in personal terms. Ambassador Novetzke and I got along well, and working for a political ambassador no doubt benefitted my career in the short term. Malta was not exactly a posting that normally commanded much attention. She submitted a very favorable evaluation after our first six months together, and I think that her name at the bottom, combined with the substance of the Malta summit, helped me over the threshold into the Senior Foreign Service.

I alluded a couple of times to the Pan Am 103 investigation. Pan American Airlines flight 103 broke up in midair and fell to earth in Lockerbie, Scotland, in December 1988. The investigation quickly established that a bomb was on the airplane, which was what brought it down. Early phases of the investigation focused on the Iranians. Speculation was that it was retaliation for our mistakenly shooting down an Iranian airliner a couple of years previously. The investigation went down various tracks. The Palestinians came on the screen briefly. They had a mission in Malta. The Libyans also had some grievances with us because in 1986 we had retaliated for the discotheque bombing in Germany by launching a bombing raid over Tripoli, and one of the bombs killed Qadhafi's adopted daughter. There was at the outset no shortage of potential suspects around the world.

Eventually, the forensic investigation, which was a really remarkable piece of work, zeroed in on Malta as one of the possible points where the bomb had been introduced into the baggage system. What led to this was the finding, at the crash site in Scotland, of some clothing fragments, which it was determined had been near the explosive device, probably in the same suitcase. The fragments were traced to certain garments, which were in turn traced to a manufacturer, and the manufacturer had sold those garments to a limited number of buyers. One of the buyers of those garments was a very small clothing shop in Malta. It happened that the proprietor of that shop had recalled selling several garments, including those in question, to some people that he remembered as having been from Libya. The Maltese language is Semitic, closely related to Arabic, although Maltese is written in a Western script. Spoken differences are also substantial, but they can make one another understood. In any case, the proprietor identified the buyer as Libyan, and serious investigation launched from there. The FBI sent some people to Malta who took up residence in an office of the embassy for over a year. This was an important part of the

investigation, and we'll see a lot of this come out in the trial when it's finally kicked off in Holland.

The FBI identified one current and one former employee of Libyan Airlines as Libyan intelligence people. They acquired photos of these people and showed them to the proprietor in a photo lineup, and amazingly enough, he remembered these people and what they had bought. This established a key link. The theory, which will be tested in court, is that based on their connections at the airport through Libyan Airlines, they introduced a briefcase with the bomb, and a detonator with a timing device. That bag was loaded onto a flight to Frankfurt where it was offloaded and transferred to Pan Am flight 103, bound for Heathrow and on to the U.S. This was at a time when there was a very tenuous, shall we say, control over unaccompanied baggage. It was supposedly impossible to put on unaccompanied baggage, but there seemed little effort to enforce that restriction. At any rate, the briefcase was transferred to Pan Am 103, which went on to Heathrow. The timing device was set to detonate when the plane was over water, in which case the evidence would have been unrecoverable. But the flight was delayed, so the bomb went off early in the flight, while it was over land. The timing device was traced to a maker in Switzerland, and the purchase was supposedly traced to the Libyan intelligence service.

This was all very tricky to handle with the Maltese, for reasons over and above the usual sovereignty sensitivities of an investigation in a foreign country. First, they didn't want to appear to be siding with the U.S. and British – the FBI was pursuing the investigation jointly with the Scottish Police – in prosecuting or furthering this investigation, pointing a finger at the Libyans. Secondly, they were concerned about the effect that an image of terrorist operations could have on their tourism trade, which of course is important to Malta. It happened that the foreign minister and concurrently deputy prime minister, Guido de Marco, later to become Malta's president, had made his name as a defense lawyer. He was more than ready to exercise his cross-examination skills, particularly when we (that usually meant me) went in with a demarche related to the investigation. The Maltese eventually did the right thing, but we had a reluctant host government, and it was difficult to ensure their cooperation. Our intelligence agencies were, of course, interested in the investigation, which added another complicating dimension. I won't say more about this, but perhaps some of it might come out at trial. Finally, since it was a joint investigation, we had to do everything vis-à-vis the Maltese in tandem with the British government. It was not always easy to keep everybody on the same page and steer clear of the jealousies between the Scottish police and the FBI. But all told, it was a remarkable investigative effort.

Q: How did the Gulf War affect you? We're talking about when Iraq invaded Kuwait and this engaged the energy of both the United States and Europe.

LANGE: We had to deliver a lot of demarches on that.

Q: When you say a demarche, can you explain what you mean?

LANGE: We made representations to the Maltese government in the form of statements of our policy, and requests for information, action or statements of Maltese policy. In the case of the Gulf War, we had Security Council resolutions to back us up on the shipping of certain materials,

particularly military materials, to Iraq. Some shipping went through Malta, and there was a lot of Maltese-registered shipping in all parts of the world. It was particularly the stuff that went through Malta that from time to time interested U.S. agencies. In making these demarches, we had to deal with the same defense lawyer, that is the foreign minister/deputy prime minister, de Marco. He applied a very strict legalistic interpretation of the Security Council resolutions, demanded elements of proof, and in general seemed to make it as difficult as possible to pursue questions regarding shipments going through Maltese ports. One should acknowledge that the Maltese government had to deal with the unions on the docks and the shipping companies, which were not always sympathetic to the Nationalist government, to say the least. So the Nationalists had their own fish to fry in terms of domestic politics. Basically these were not in themselves important episodes involving significant quantities of proscribed materials. They involved instead issues of principle, of assuring that all members of the Security Council were abiding by the terms of the resolution. There was no instance in which there were any obvious violations of Security Council resolutions. Overall, the Maltese were not enthusiastic supporters of Desert Storm, but to the extent they had a role to play, I would say that they acted correctly.

Q: Were they, as so many countries, was CNN [Cable News Network] being seen there? Because it became probably the world's greatest spectator sport, almost, watching the war being played out.

LANGE: They did not have cable in Malta while I was there. They were negotiating with some companies, including an American company, to install cable. Broadcast TV was local or came over the water from Italy. On arrival in Malta, one immediately received two strong visual impressions. First, it presented a dominantly ochre landscape, because all of the buildings were built of limestone, which was quarried in Malta. This was particularly striking during the dry season, when there was no green to relieve a uniform hue of hot yellow. The other visual image was on the skyline, where there was a forest of television antennae pointed toward Italy. You probably recall, as I do, the old days of a TV antenna on the roof. Multiply that by several times, because Maltese housing units are much smaller than American. The forest was dense indeed. In any case, the Italian channels did not provide American-type coverage, and without cable, the Maltese didn't have access to the "video game war".

Q: What sort of a role did Italy play there?

LANGE: A lot of people understood Italian - partly because that was the TV they got, partly because of the proximity - but it wasn't used very much. In the marketplace, you would hear either Maltese or English. I would say 90% of the people could speak English, but few could speak Italian. On the other hand, the legal system was derived from Italy, which is curious because you would have thought it would have been an English legal system. In terms of current relations, the Italians provided the only meaningful military assistance. It was very modest, but they provided assistance in the form of material, including uniforms and that sort of thing. But they got very little mileage out of their assistance; they didn't seem to have much influence in terms of policy or anything. The British were much more influential than the Italians. We managed to arrange donation of a couple of retired NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) patrol craft to the Maltese military as patrol boats. We got quite a bit of favorable publicity. The Italians were just taken for granted.

Q: Did we bring our ships in from time to time?

LANGE: The December 1989 summit, when the USS Belknap came into Marsaxlokk Harbor, was probably the first U.S. naval ship in Maltese waters since Maltese independence in 1964. I believe that after 1989, visits took place from time to time, but I don't know if they continued under the Labor Party government.

Q: How about Libya? Were the Libyans fighting for the Maltese soul, and we were trying to counteract that?

LANGE: Yes, the Libyans certainly had a presence there. They had significant number of visitors from Libya and a regular ferry service to Libya and back. Libyans would often come over and buy things they couldn't obtain in Libya. I remember tires were a big item for some reason; they were not readily available in Libya. They had an embassy comparable in size to ours – small by our standards, big by theirs. They had a public affairs program that engaged primarily in distributing literature. The Libyans sent high-level visitors from time to time, at the vice minister and ministerial level. So they definitely had a presence in Malta. The ambassador appeared to be a reasonable person. We had little to do with him, but he wasn't overtly hostile. The typical Maltese was not very interested in Libya or Libyan culture. Most Maltese are oriented toward Europe. Among the Nationalists particularly, many Maltese thought of themselves as Europeans. Even within the Labor Party, strong as its political impulse toward neutrality, few considered themselves to be North Africans.

Q: How about Islam?

LANGE: No. No impact at all. This is a very Catholic country, 95%.

Q: What about the Catholic church? Was it strictly spiritual, or did it have anything else?

LANGE: The Catholic Church had a lot of property, and the main job of the papal nuncio was to negotiate the fate of that property. He spent all of his time on it. I don't remember exactly the nature of their holdings. Their mission there was not very imposing, but they swung a lot of weight through the Church and by virtue of their property holdings. The Pope visited while I was there. That was a huge event. Again, the Nationalists arranged the invitation, and I'm sure that they welcomed the political dividend. On a local level, the influence of the Church was substantial, in the old-fashioned way. There were numerous churches around the island, and the parish church had tremendous influence. Many village churches had annual festivals, and they were huge events. We had the good fortune to live in an old villa, which dated from 1709 and which was located about 25 meters from a church. It was a mixed blessing at the beginning because the bells started at 6:00 am and went on regularly. The Maltese told us we would get used to it. We didn't believe it, but we did in fact get used to it in a few weeks. Still, you couldn't carry on a conversation out in the garden while the bells were pealing. The festival at our local church built up to a climax for a couple of weeks in late summer. There were fireworks and bells throughout this period, and during the two days of the actual festival, it was just nonstop cacophony. The Maltese love their fireworks. Nobody could quite explain this to me, but they

spent a lot of treasure on fireworks, which went on sort of all year around. They produced them in backyard factories, which would occasionally blow up, with injury or loss of life. At the same time, a lot of Maltese had very bad memories of the siege of Malta during World War II, when things really got desperate. The Germans blockaded the island. The Maltese ran short of food and fuel. There was regular bombing of Malta. So one might have thought that they had bad memories of explosives. Yet they had this drive to spend lots of money on fireworks. Most realized that it was an expensive, sometimes annoying and occasionally dangerous obsession, but campaigns to ratchet back the fireworks fell on deaf ears.

Q: I was consul general in Naples about 10 years before. The Neapolitans had had a very difficult time during the war. But boy, when the fireworks went off, particularly at New Years and there was another holiday, it was like World War II all over again. The whole Bay of Naples disappeared in the smoke.

LANGE: In spite of the privations, a number of the older people had some fond memories from the war. Perhaps because of the privations – shared burdens, a common enemy, all of that. An interesting WWII story: At an especially critical time in 1943, during the siege of Malta, a number of U.S. ships had been turned over for use in supply convoys into Malta. One of those was the tanker Ohio, which had a load of kerosene, important for cooking and other uses. It had been struck by torpedoes and twice abandoned during the convoy, but it didn't sink and was taken under tow. A famous picture is taken from the parapets above Grand Harbor. The Ohio, half awash, is being nursed into port with a warship on each side. They managed to get it in, even though its back was broken, and offloaded most of the kerosene. The Ohio became a source of inspiration at a dark time.

Another thing I could mention about Malta, that sort of relates to the summit. The Soviet mission had just built a new chancery; in fact, a complete compound. The Maltese were kind of bemused by the complex, which was on a hill and surrounded by an imposing and threatening fence topped by downward-pointing spiked metal apparatus.

Q: Sort of curved, pointing down.

LANGE: Exactly. The Maltese joked that they should have been pointed the other way to keep the Russians from getting out. The Soviets in 1989 were at the time very preoccupied by what was going on within the Soviet Union, and it was sometimes hard to get their attention. I remember summit planning meetings that we would have there, and Soviet embassy officers would sort of break off and go into a corner to argue about what was going on in the Soviet Union. There was the mix of personnel that you would find in many Soviet embassies; it was large enough to have people from the republics and indeed from all over the Soviet Union. They became embroiled in their own intramural arguments at the time we were trying to plan for the summit. It was a curious time for them, and they were running short of money. They had this grand compound, and they appeared to lack money to maintain it and keep it running.

The Chinese also had a sizeable compound, and they also apparently had to pinch pennies. As we used to say back in Nebraska, both the Soviets and the Chinese were “house poor.”

We had one floor in an office building downtown, and it was adequate for our purposes. It did present some problems, particularly from the standpoint of security. There was no way we could meet Inman requirements for a stand-alone embassy with a 100-foot setback.

Q: To keep it from being hit by a truck bomb or something. With such a strong Labor party, I would imagine there wouldn't be much room for a Communist party on Malta.

LANGE: No, there wasn't. I don't remember meeting anyone from the Communist Party. If it existed, it was a non-factor.

Q: Were the tourists mainly European, and did this cause you any problems?

LANGE: Tourism was mainly European and mainly British, i.e., the budget British traveler. The Maltese were trying to upgrade, trying to get more Scandinavians, people willing to spend a little more. They had a limited number of international class hotels. One of their flagship hotels, the Phoenician, was badly in need of refurbishing. I stayed there for a week when I first got there. It was beautifully situated, just outside the walls of the fortified city of Valletta. The hotel closed over a labor dispute shortly after I arrived and had still not reopened when I left. The islands didn't have much in the way of beaches, a couple were okay, but not great. Malta was on the other hand very interesting from the standpoint of archaeology. It had some beautiful Neolithic temples surrounded by a certain amount of mystery. They're still finding about the people who built these wonderful, old megaliths – comparable to but even more impressive in my opinion than Stonehenge.

End of reader