

## NICARAGUA

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| Robert E. White                | 1970-1972         | Deputy Chief of Mission, Managua                      |
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| Lawrence A. Pezzullo           | 1979-1981         | Ambassador  |

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| John A. Bushnell          | 1977-1982         | Deputy Assistant Secretary, ARA,<br>Washington, DC  |
| Marcia Bernbaum           | 1980              | USAID, Managua  |
| Stephen Bosworth          | 1981-1983         | Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary,<br>Western Hemisphere Affairs,<br>Washington, DC                    |
| Gilbert R. Callaway       | 1982-1984         | Counselor for Public Affairs, Managua   |
| Anthony Quainton          | 1982-1984         | Ambassador  |
| Sally Grooms Cowal        | 1983-1985         | Deputy Political Counselor to American UN<br>Ambassador, New York   |
| Robert W. Duemling        | 1984-1986         | Nicaraguan Humanitarian Assistance<br>Office, Washington, DC  |
| Richard Melton            | 1985-1988         | Office of Central American Affairs,<br>Director, Washington, D.C.   |
| Richard T. McCormack      | 1985-1989         | US Ambassador to Organization of<br>American States, Washington, DC                                       |
| Clayton E. McManaway, Jr. | 1987-1989         | Nicaragua Program, Washington, DC   |
| Mary Annette White        | 1987-1989         | Consular/Political Officer, Managua   |
| Richard H. Melton         | 1988<br>1988-1989 | Ambassador<br>Mexico, Caribbean, and Regional Economic<br>Affairs, Assistant Secretary, Washington,<br>DC |
| Edmund McWilliams         | 1989-1992         | Political Counselor/Deputy Chief of Mission,<br>Managua   |
| Stanley Zuckerman         | 1989-1992         | USIA Director of Latin American Affairs,<br>Washington, DC  |
| Harry W. Shlaudeman       | 1990-1991         | Ambassador  |
| Ronald D. Godard          | 1991-1993         | Deputy Chief of Mission, Managua  |
| Theresa A. Loar           | 1992-1993         | Nicaragua Desk Officer, Washington,   |

DC

Frederick A. Becker

1994-1998 Deputy Chief of Mission, Managua

**WILLIAM B. COBB, JR.**

**Visa Officer  
Managua (1945)**

*William B. Cobb was born in North Carolina in 1923. He received a B.A. from the University of North Carolina and an M.S. from George Washington University. His postings abroad included Managua, Havana, Manila, La Paz, Martinique, Stockholm, and Mexico City. Mr. Cobb was interviewed by Horace G. Torbert in 1990.*

COBB: I arrived in Managua two days later, having taken the up and down trip in a DC-3 or 4. I arrived at the airport in Managua and took a taxi into town. I had been told in the Department that I would probably go to the Grand Hotel, so I went to the Grand Hotel and asked if there was a reservation for me. The answer being no, I made one, got my room and asked where the embassy was? They said it was about three blocks down the street so I walked three blocks down the street to the embassy. I walked in and I said, "I'm the new vice consul". There were no marine guards in those days. They did not know who I was. I walked into the office of Maurie Bernbaum, who was the second secretary, chancellor of the embassy, and Maurie said, "What are you doing here?" I said I have been assigned here to replace Dave Ray. He said that he knew nothing about it, where is so-and-so? "I got a telegram saying he was coming but I did not get one saying you were coming."

I said, "I'm sorry, but here I am. What shall I do?" He said, "In the first place, go to the Grand Hotel and get yourself a room." I said I had done that. "Then you come back to the office and I will tell you what to do. All you have to do is to replace Dave Ray as the vice consul in charge of the visa section. Dave has been declared *persona non grata* and left the country last week at the request of Mr. Somoza." He had been known to agree with a visa applicant that Somoza was a son-of-a-bitch. The visa applicant went back and told the members of his club that everybody in the embassy did not think that Somoza was perfect, that at least there was a vice consul who thought he was a son-of-a-bitch. Somoza heard about it within twenty-four hours and came down to the chancery and told Ambassador Fletcher Warren he wanted Ray out of there immediately as being disloyal. Fletcher Warren did not have much choice except to get him out. So that is how the vacancy had occurred and I was assigned to it.

I was shown my office, which was not an office, just a place in the interior patio and was told that visa applicants would come to me and I would say to them, in Spanish, "Jura usted que lo que ha declarado en su solicitud es la verdad." I asked what that meant. It means, "Do you swear you have told the truth in your application?". I said "I can certainly do that". So that is how my Foreign Service career began. I stayed in Nicaragua only two weeks.

Q: *Only two weeks!*

COBB: Only two weeks. I fell and broke a bone in my left leg just above the ankle. I did not know it was a break for two days and hobbled to and from the office on a stick, but realized I could not walk on the foot and so Maurie Bernbaum called Dr. Fuentes, who was the local dentist and asked him to x-ray it. So I went to the dentist's office; the dentist put his x-ray machine down over my ankle and took it a picture of it.

Q: *There was no shielding I suppose?*

COBB: Oh no. I think it was the only x-ray in town that worked, that's why we used it. He reported back that I had a broken leg and that I ought to have attention. There was no plaster of Paris in the country at the time so they could not set it. Bernbaum wisely sent this information to the Department of State which said, "Send him back home and we will put him in a cast when he gets back". So I left Managua on about the 16th of October 1945, flew back to Washington, landed at National Airport, called the office of Harry Havens, who was in charge of the medical branch and told him I was reporting in as according to the orders I had received. He said, "Take a taxi out to the Navy hospital. I will arrange to have you admitted." Which I did.

Q: *This was out in Bethesda?*

COBB: Yes it was. I took a taxi out to the naval hospital and when I got there, I went in the emergency entrance and there was a stretcher, and a young Navy lieutenant said in a carefully modulated voice, "Do-you-speak-English?" I said, "Yes, what do you think I speak?" He said, "We were told that the vice consul from Nicaragua was coming. We did not know if he spoke English or not."

I was in the naval hospital where they set the bone and took care of it. I had a complete recovery. Then I had to negotiate with the Department my status of medical leave. I had not been in the Department long enough to acquire any medical leave, so I was put on leave without pay during the time I was in the naval hospital. In those days the charge was \$5 a day for full coverage for Foreign Service officers.

**EDWARD WARREN HOLMES**  
**Consular/Political Officer**  
**Managua (1946-1947)**

*Edward Warren Holmes was born in 1923 in Beverly, Massachusetts. He received a bachelor's degree from Brown University in 1945, and a master's degree in international law from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1946. Prior to joining the Foreign Service in 1946, Mr. Holmes was a personal assistant to Henry Merit Wriston. His career in the Foreign Service included positions in Nicaragua, Venezuela, Israel, South Africa, Ethiopia, Malawi, Ghana, and Washington, DC. Mr. Holmes retired from the Foreign Service in 1980. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993.*

HOLMES: I went to Managua, Nicaragua.

*Q: Where you served for what, about a year, year and a half?*

HOLMES: A little over a year, a year and a half, I think.

*Q: What were you doing in Managua?*

HOLMES: Let's see. First post. Trying to learn what the Foreign Service was all about. I had a wonderful boss, Ambassador Fletcher Warren.

*Q: One of the major figures.*

HOLMES: Who was a wonderful first boss, I must say.

I should mention that amongst the lectures that Perry Jester gave us was one word of advice to all the young men in the course (I don't think there were any women in the course in those days), that if any of us had any thoughts of getting married and were planning to put it off, don't put it off. Get married before going to your first post, because marriage at a post can cause all sorts of problems and difficulties, or coming back here, and so on and so forth. So three or four of us, I believe, got married shortly after the end of the course, as did I.

My wife was in Europe at the time, working for an organization. She got back one week before I was due to go to Nicaragua. I had my orders. In those days, it was extremely hard to travel, to get places on the airplanes and so forth.

*Q: Because it was the immediate post-war period.*

HOLMES: Yes, immediate post-war period, troops were coming home, transportation was all very, very jammed up and hard to get. So she arrived in New York on a ship after having great trouble getting home. She came home finally, I think, on a Swedish ship, jammed on sort of a semi-freighter-type thing, because she kept getting bumped. She had reservations to get home, but kept getting bumped for troops, I suppose, or more important travelers. She was just a young person out of Fletcher. I met her at Fletcher, by the way. This was her first job, and she had attended a conference in Luxembourg about the post-war world or something of that nature. So she got back one week before I had to leave.

It was the Labor Day weekend, and we got married in New York City by going to a Supreme Court judge, showing my official government orders, and getting a waiver. This was the war period, and the judges were used to servicemen. I was not exactly that, but I fit that pattern, and the judge was very nice and signed the papers. It was all sort of a hazy rush, but I went here and there, and blood tests and this and that, and getting the waiver and so forth, and finding a minister. My wife is the daughter of a minister from the West Coast, but her father had a friend in New York and so forth. We found the minister, and we got married. She didn't come with me, obviously, right then; she went back to the West Coast to see her family. But that was quite a hectic time, just, as I say, a few

days before taking off for Managua. So that was my introduction.

*Q: What were you doing in Managua?*

HOLMES: I think I did probably consular work at first, for a while. The ambassador sort of moved me in different sections of the embassy, basically. I think I did consular work, I think I did some economic work, and then went into the Political Section, as I recall. Anyway, I think consular to begin with, as was quite common, giving visas, American citizens, the whole consular range, because this was a very small post. There must have been not more than ten officers.

*Q: What was the political situation in Nicaragua in those days?*

HOLMES: Well, Somoza (the first), Tacho, was in control of things, very much in control of things. We were, of course, fairly close to him, let's say. And things were peaceful. There were always rumors of coups, and there were a number of underground opposition groups. We tried, I think, to ameliorate the rigors of the Tacho regime, let's say. But he had been a faithful friend during the war. Although there was some disdain for him, I think, within the American community, on the other hand, he was a friend. So it was just sort of a balancing act. He himself, although he has obviously a pretty notorious image, was personally a very charming person, who loved parties and he loved dancing. If he would come to a cocktail party, as he often would, near what would have been the end of the cocktail party, he would suddenly summon his jazz band from the palace. And once the jazz band arrived, that meant the party went on all night. In those days, no diplomat could leave as long as the chief of state was present. So cocktail parties often went on until two or three a.m., until he tired of dancing and enjoying the party. This was a frequent occurrence. And so if you could get out before, you could perhaps escape, but once the band arrived, he would say, "Nobody's to leave. We're all here to have fun and dance."

So this was quite an introduction to the Foreign Service, to get to know the chief of state, not too well, but meeting him at parties. He was a very, very gregarious, open, friendly sort of person, and very friendly toward Americans. And so one did get to parties at the palace, and he would come to diplomatic parties, and stay, sometimes. Sometimes he would go off.

*Q: How did we report on political events there? Here we were, we were friendly to the...to Somoza.*

HOLMES: The dictator.

*Q: But from what I gather, there was some unrest. There must have been some people who didn't think...*

HOLMES: There was some unrest. There were some opposition parties, legally.

*Q: Well, obviously, you were at the lower level, but it was a small embassy, did you feel under any constraints or problems? Because it's usually the lot of the youngest political officer to take the opposition under his wing and report more on them.*

HOLMES: I would say that it was a little more open than that, that the chief of the Political

Section, who was Maury Bernbaum, a career officer, later ambassador to Ecuador and other places, would see opposition leaders. There was a parliament and there was nominally an opposition party. So it was not a total dictatorship, as in some countries that we all know since and before that time. As part of our friendship, I think, we did lean on Somoza to maintain at least some semblance of democracy. So one could see opposition leaders. And I remember they used to come into the embassy, and I would escort them from the door up to Maury's office, and then withdraw, perhaps as he discussed political things. So we constantly reported on opposition groups. And there were a lot of not only threatened coups, there were attempted coups from time to time.

I can remember my home was in the center of the city. It was a not-terribly-desirable location, but then I was brand new and I couldn't afford to get out of it. Many of the Americans and foreigners lived out on the hills on the outskirts of Managua. I was right in the center of town, near the main military base, Campo Militar. From time to time, tanks would roll out of there, and we'd say, "Uh oh, another coup." And sometimes there was firing and shooting around. We got to be quite accustomed to early morning tanks rolling by and shots being fired. We would just stay put and it would usually be over in a day or so.

So all during my entire period, he was still there. When we left, he had not been overthrown. But there were the usual threats and attempted coups and that sort of thing.

*Q: How did Fletcher Warren, a big figure in foreign affairs in that period, operate his embassy?*

HOLMES: Oh, just as a family, I would say. He was completely open. I found it extremely heartwarming that he would treat me so well and give me all sorts of advice, not just on how to report things. Maury Bernbaum was a superb draftsman, and I learned an awful lot from him as far as the technical part when I was in the Political Section under him. But Ambassador Warren trained me for the Foreign Service as a whole, the Foreign Service life.

I can remember when my wife and I both got malaria at one time, which was very, very rampant there, he came down and sat in our bedroom and talked to us, because we both felt pretty low, with a terrible case of malaria. He and his wife came and sat with us a long time, in our not-very-desirable house. I mean, he was that human. He was like an uncle or a favorite person in the family, you know. Fantastic.

It was a wonderful introduction to the Foreign Service, aside from the disease. The illness there was in those days rampant. Our house, for instance, was totally unscreened, and at night there would be swarms of mosquitoes from Lake Managua, which was right there in the City of Managua, and we got malaria a number of times. In fact, we were medevaced, finally. That's why I left early, frankly, we were both pretty ill. They sent me down to Gorgas Hospital in Panama, and the doctor said I should not go back to that place because I had had repeated attacks of malaria and it had bothered my liver and stomach and so forth. But that was not uncommon in those days. Now I think, since then, there has been a tremendous improvement in living conditions. But this was right after the war, and everything was scarce. Screening was scarce then. We had to import food, I remember, at one... Some food was simply not obtainable there because of the war. Basic things.

So he was marvelous, and his wife. His wife was very, very nice to my wife and trained her in the

intricacies of calling on other ambassadors' wives. Of course, my wife had no idea about all these protocol things. She was very patient with...

**ROBERT O. BLAKE**  
**Commercial/Administrative/Political Officer**  
**Managua (1947-1949)**

*Ambassador Robert O. Blake was born in California in 1921. He entered the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included assignments in Managua, Moscow, Tokyo, Tunis, Leopoldville, and Paris, and an ambassadorship to Mali. He was interviewed by Horace G. Torbert in 1990.*

*Q: This is a Foreign Service oral history interview with Ambassador Robert O. Blake made on May 7th, 1990 at DACOR Bacon House in Washington, DC. The interviewer is Horace G. Torbert.*

BLAKE: When I got to Managua in 1947 we had no official relations with the Nicaraguan government because we had broken relations when Tacho Somoza decided to throw his uncle out of office just after he had him elected in a phony election. This was a little bit more than Secretary Marshall could stand, so we did break relations. The chargé d'affaires was Maury Bernbaum, who was definitely one of the most outstanding young middle grade officers that the Service had at that time, and was given this job because of its sensitivity. One of the problems was that General Somoza, living in the post-war period when arms, from airplanes to tanks, to anything, were relatively easy to come by, had the idea of perhaps establishing a Pax Nicaragua for Central America and the surrounding areas; and we were constantly trying to use what influence we had in Nicaragua - and it was substantial even though we didn't have relations - to keep Tacho from invading Costa Rica, invading Honduras, and in one incredible case from bombing Caracas where the very newly installed democratic government was not to his pleasure. Maury got, as I recall, a certain number of fairly specific instructions about keeping Tacho from doing this, or doing that, and was pretty much left on his own to figure out how to do it. And one of the ways to do it involved me. Being the most junior officer in the place, without any family, and with a good fast car, on one occasion they sent me to the Costa Rican border to hang out for several days, and just simply bluff the Nicaraguans out of going any further. Another time I was sent to Puerto Cabezas on the Atlantic Ocean where we learned that a Nicaraguan controlled aircraft was about to bomb Caracas. I literally sat out at the airport for the better part of the week. They had no capacity to fly off at night, so as soon as darkness would fall, I would go back to town. Results; we succeeded in stopping..., between that and a series of other measures, the bomber from taking off from Puerto Cabezas. I often wonder about the fact that nobody put a bullet in my head in any of these situations, but when you're young and think you can do anything, nothing is going to stop you. I am constantly amazed at how much latitude we had from Washington.

*Q: This is hardly what you are trained for.*

BLAKE: Yes, no training at FSI along those lines. As a matter of fact I found that the training that I got in the Foreign Service Institute helped me understand consular work, but there was no

training on the political side.

*Q: For example, how to stop an invasion.*

BLAKE: Exactly, or even whether you should stop an invasion. I found that Maury Bernbaum was a first class person. We were, of course, confronted by the fact that General Somoza was no democrat, but neither was he a hard-nosed, brutal dictator. His relations with his people were relatively relaxed, and he more or less went under the rubric that what was good for Somoza was good for Nicaragua. He was essentially investing in the country rather than taking out millions for Swiss bank accounts, at least as far as we knew at the time.

*Q: Some other members of the family perhaps did later.*

BLAKE: I understand that changed. His son, Tachito, who later became president was a very different kind of a fellow from his father. But in any case, in Nicaragua, at least, the embassy - not the CIA - was the main political actor. We were in fact kept quite close in touch with opposition groups, sometimes at some risk. We weren't trying to hide the fact that we were doing it, and we even to some extent kept touch with the people who you might have called proto-Sandinistas, the people who were holing up in the bush. There was no question in the minds of the Nicaraguans that, the United States, was the major factor which decided which way security affairs would go. It wasn't like the old days in the banana republics. Finally, we did renew our relations with Tacho, I can't remember why we did it but I guess we decided enough was enough. In any case we were a major factor and people watched everything we did.

*Q: I take it, however, during your time there, we never actually got an Ambassador there, did we?*

BLAKE: Oh, yes. We did get an Ambassador, and his name was George Shaw. He had been a long-time consul in places along the Mexican border. He was not in any way of the same class as Maury. He was a man of limited vision, a person who more or less followed instructions from Washington when they came, a perfectly nice guy. We all loved him, but he wasn't a strong person, at least at any time that I was there. I was only in Nicaragua for a little over a year and a half because I'd been chosen for Soviet language and area training. But Nicaragua was a wonderful experience of diplomacy in action, success working under the rubric of a general instruction: don't ask too many questions, just do it and report it.

*Q: Was there any, what you might call routine, conventional work that you did at that time - either consular, or anything of that sort?*

BLAKE: At that time all junior officers were rotated around to different jobs. For a short period I did trade reports, which I hated. And then I became administrative officer because the administrative officer went crazy.

*Q: Over the job?*

BLAKE: I never was quite sure. He was a wonderful older fellow named Linton Cook. He had spent most of his career in Italy, with the soft and lovely life of small Italian posts. He just wasn't

able to stand up under the Nicaraguan heat, disease, and the pressures of the job. I always felt lucky that I just got through that business because my accounts for disbursing were off as much as two or three million dollars, which of course were errors in the way they were reported rather than anything else. I never had to pay anybody anything.

*Q: If it's big enough, you don't pay it.*

BLAKE: That's right. I also started a commissary for the Embassy. We never had one before and I hadn't realized how dangerous it was to keep certain foods at least pretty cool. As a result, a lot of my canned goods exploded one night spattering the whole place with rotten ham. We lost a lot of money. But they were wonderful experiences. Then I went into the political section. Even before, when I was assigned to other sections, I was called on by Maury to go do political reporting and, indeed, we looked at the job as everybody being a part of a team. That was the right way to do it.

*Q: Just to get a sense of proportion, roughly how many Americans were there on the post? How big was the staff?*

BLAKE: I suppose that we were 30, no Marines, the communications load was much lighter than it later became. We had a Military Attaché, and we had the vestiges of a wonderful group which was called the Nicaraguan Canal Commission. Of course, we never had built the canal...

*Q: We were still studying it.*

BLAKE: The Army was determined to study it as long as the wonderful boat on Lake Nicaragua held out, and until the colonel who was head of it reached retirement age. It was a strange remnant of the past.

**ROBERT C. BREWSTER**  
**Political Officer**  
**Managua (1949-1951)**

*Ambassador Robert C. Brewster was born in Beatrice, Nebraska in 1931. He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Washington in 1943, at which time he joined the U.S. Navy in 1943. Ambassador Brewster entered the Foreign Service in 1949. His career included positions in Nicaragua, Germany, Paraguay, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Well, your first assignment was to Managua in Nicaragua. We're going to concentrate more on the later part of your career. But in Managua, you were there from 1949 to 1952, I think.*

BREWSTER: Yes.

*Q: What sort of impressions did you have of how the Foreign Service worked at that point?*

BREWSTER: In "worked," how do you mean?

*Q: Was it what you imagined it would be, or was this sort of a shock when you found yourself doing maybe consular work or general services work or something?*

BREWSTER: No, it wasn't a shock. I had wanted to be -- what else -- a political reporter. I had done two years' graduate work at Columbia in international affairs, and that's what I wanted to do. But I was not appalled when I was assigned to the consular section, particularly when I found that it was in an adjoining building that the embassy -- the remainder of the embassy, I should say -- was perfectly content to leave completely alone if I'd run the thing and keep out of their hair. This happened to suit me just as well.

I had some fascinating experiences, and, in addition, I had to learn Spanish very quickly. And when I went on to political and labor reporting after a year, year and a half -- whatever it was -- I was pleased to change. At that time the idea was one went through the four kinds of work and then went on to the specialty or whatever it is you particularly wish to do. But I had no dislike of consular work even though I had some unpleasant surprises with respect to malfeasance of the local staff.

*Q: How were you able to find out this?*

BREWSTER: I don't recall, except that one employee, the principal offender, had been a constant subject of rumors and accusations, and I no longer recall the specific instance that made it clear that he was in fact in on the take.

*Q: But this is, of course, always a problem that hovers over the consulate.*

*What type of work were you doing when you say you were doing political labor reporting? What was the situation in Nicaragua when you were there? This is 1989 and it's a area of tremendous interest because of the leftist government there, but what was the situation in Nicaragua at the time and what type of things were you doing? This is 1949 to the early '50s.*

BREWSTER: Well, the situation was that the country was in the control of Tacho Somoza, the father, who, when I went there, was head of the National Guard and another person was the titular president of the country. But Tacho ran the country -- that was perfectly evident to everyone -- and the United States' stance was one of close cooperation with him.

*Q: So was there much in reporting? Were you under any constraints or anything to make sure that things looked right, or was there any problems really to report on?*

BREWSTER: Most of the political reporting was done by the ambassador, who was a former newspaperman from North Carolina and by the DCM, who was a career officer. I had the nuts and bolts, which turned out to be biographic reporting, labor, protocol, things like that, and public reaction sort of reporting.

**DOROTHY JESTER**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Managua (1954-1956)**

*Dorothy Jester was born in 1914 in Mesa, Arizona and majored in Spanish at Stanford University. She was posted in Lima, Mexico City, Munich, Mexicali, Bonn, Santiago, and Santo Domingo. Ms. Jester was interviewed in 1998 by Laurin Askew.*

JESTER: No, not that I recall. It was rather nice being in Mexicali for almost three years, because from there it was only a relatively short drive up to South Pasadena, where my mother lived. Then the Personnel Department of State asked if I would like an economic assignment for my next post. I said it sounded great, and so I went as a junior economic officer to Managua.

It was a two-man economic section. About nine months after my arrival, number one was transferred and I moved up. A vice consul named Donald Easum soon arrived to help. Did you ever hear of him?

*Q: Easum with an S? I ran into him in Madrid.*

JESTER. Right. Well, Don Easum was brand new to the Service but was smart as a whip. He had delayed his entry into the Foreign Service until he could finish his Ph.D. in economics. He was immediately an effective officer, and really personable. He has remained a good friend.

*Q: Did you have any educational preparation? Did you major in economics at school?*

JESTER: I never even had a course in economics. But in the Foreign Service you learn on the job. When I was assigned to the Department in 1958 I took night classes in economics at George Washington University, and I soon learned that I could hold my own with graduate students because of my practical experience in the field.

*Q: What was the state of our relations with Managua at that time, in the 1950s?*

JESTER: It was fine. You may remember a story of Roosevelt talking about Somoza, the dictator, saying, "Yes, he's an SOB but he's OUR SOB." Actually, he was a very nice person face to face. I'll tell you my first experience with him.

The day I got to Managua, the ambassador invited me to a party he was giving that evening for the president and his wife and just the embassy staff. I arrived to find chairs and tables around the swimming pool, with a sheltered area at one side for the honored guests and the ambassador and his wife. At one corner of the pool, there was a small band of musicians. The president always took music with him.

As we happily dined in the lovely tropical evening, the band launched into Mexican music, specifically "Jalisco!" (That is the name of the state of which Guadalajara is the capital.) I had just

come from Mexico where I had learned the guitar and many Mexican songs, so I could not resist joining in. Suddenly, I noticed the ambassador summoning me over. He said the president wanted to talk to me. He asked me how I happened to know the song, and I repeated what I have just told you. Then he asked me to go up and sing it with the orchestra. I still have a picture of myself singing into the mic.

About three weeks later, the Foreign Service inspectors were in town. My housemate, Florence Finne, who was the administrative officer, were at a table with the inspectors at a big party given by the president at the Casino Militar. There was a large orchestra playing. Suddenly, we were aware that President Somoza was walking across the dance floor to our table. He reached for me and took me up to the orchestra, where he and I together sang "Jalisco!" He would break lustily into the chorus but would have me sing the verses. I'll bet you have never met anyone else who sang a duet with a president.

He was personally very nice. When I was transferred from Managua, the ambassador, Tom Whelan, who was a potato farmer from North Dakota, a man so informal he would not ride in the back seat of his limousine but always up front with the chauffeur, told me we had to go say goodbye to the president, who was again very gracious.

**FRED A. COFFEY, JR.**  
**USIS**  
**Managua (1957-1959)**

*Fred A. Coffey, Jr. was born in El Paso, Texas in 1930. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps. He received a master's degree from Louisiana State University in 1955. His career with USIA included positions in Brazil, Nicaragua, Indonesia, Thailand, Argentina, and Washington, DC. This interview was conducted by G. Lewis Schmidt in 1990.*

*Q: So where did you go then, from Brazil?*

COFFEY: I was assigned to a small post in Managua, Nicaragua. There were two Americans and eight foreign service nationals at the time. Nicaragua had also had a type of special relationship with the United States. The czar, the dictator, Tacho Somoza, was a close friend of President Roosevelt, and he was considered a staunch anticommunist, amongst other things. He ruled Nicaragua like a fiefdom, but he did stand up strongly against communist infiltration and made it very tough on them, although he trod all over any kind of democratic principles. Nevertheless, our policy at the time was to support the Somoza family and their application of government. It made it very difficult for us to talk about democracy, to talk about the openness of a system with that kind of a policy. Which brings to mind a point that a former PAO, John McKnight, kept impressing on all of us when I was a JOT in Brazil: You cannot work a successful information policy when our policy is bad, and I considered our policy wrong at the time, as many officers in the embassy did, too. But the State Department saw fit to promote our relationship with the Somoza family because they were in power at the time.

*Q: My recollection of Nicaraguan history is pretty foggy, and I know about the Somoza regime, but at what point had "Tacho" come to power? Was that back in the '40s, then, during the Roosevelt era?*

COFFEY: Well, Tacho was a member of the military in the Guardia Nacional in the late '20s and early '30s; and he, himself, was chasing the so-called rebel, Sandino, around the hills in the early '30s. There was US Marine intervention at the time, supporting the government in place in Nicaragua. In the early '30s, when Sandino was brought in to meet with Tacho, it's reported that Tacho had him killed. So the regime stayed on. Tacho died in 1955, if I'm correct. We flew him to Panama, trying to help him. He was shot by some irate Nicaraguan. His son Luis took over, the oldest son. Luis was rather a benign authoritarian who was educated in part at Temple University in Pennsylvania, if I recall, and had ideas of opening up the system. He told us many times at the embassy, through Tom Whelan, our ambassador there for seven or eight or nine years, told us that he was going to try to open up to the system, the democratic system, but if his brother ever came in, to beware, because his brother, Tachito - little Tacho - would be ruthless, in humanitarian terms and in greed. They were not great friends. Well, as it happened, I was there during the period of Luis as President. Tachito, in charge of the national guard, would frequently, it was rumored -- and I had one bit of evidence myself -- bring in people and toss them into a cage with jaguars (tigers) as a way of putting a little pressure on them to talk. I talked with one Nicaraguan who said he'd been in the cage with the jaguars.

At one point, as a matter of fact, I gave a fiesta, a party for the media, for student leaders and members of the opposition. Some of them were important people and wanted to promote democracy. So I had about 50 guests and invited Ambassador Tom Whelan to the party. We had a good time, a lot of rum, and my guests met a number of embassy people for the first time, because the embassy was steering clear of the opposition to Somoza. Next morning I was on the carpet before Ambassador Whelan, who said in very definite terms, "Fred," he said, "We're here to deal with the Somozas and no one else, and I want you and your program never to forget that."

*Q: And had Whelan attended your party?*

COFFEY: Whelan had been at the party, had a couple of drinks.

*Q: He didn't know what the guest list was when he came, or --*

COFFEY: Well, he'd known. I'd told him I was inviting a wide array of political views, and he said, "Well, we'll see." He came and seemed to enjoy it. He talked with a number of people, but I don't know what happened during the night. He must have had a reassessment, and so he let me and the program know. At the time I was acting PAO; we were between PAOs. Bill Thoman had been there when I first arrived, served about 10 months and was transferred, to be replaced by Stu Ayers. There was about a four or five month gap between them. So I devised programs to reach these potential leaders. I felt it was useful to keep contact with all groups, which USIS figures is fundamental anyway. I received firm support from USIA, however.

*Q: Did Tachito ever become the president? The only time I was in Nicaragua, Luis was the*

*president, and I attended -- I can't remember the occasion -- I attended some session at which he was presiding; I got a look at him at that point; I never was there when anybody else was president.*

COFFEY: Well, yes, that happened, much to the disadvantage of Nicaragua. I'd already been assigned to Indonesia at that time, but the former minister of education -- I believe his name was Schick -- was elected president in a so-called election about 1962-63, and was president for a year or so until he died. Of course, he was much the hand servant of the Somoza regime. Then Luis died and Tachito did come into power, about 1963 or 1964 -- I stand to be corrected there -- and remained in power until the Sandinistas and the other groups, the anti-Somoza groups, overthrew him in 1978 and 1979. So Luis's prediction was fulfilled: he was a ruthless man. He dominated Nicaragua and every element in it: the airlines belonged to him; the shipping lines belonged to him; the radio and media, except for a little bit of the opposition media, belonged to him. The Colorado party and something like one third of the land, the arable land, belonged to the Somoza outreach. It was not an enviable situation in that country for democracy, nor for US foreign policy in going along with it. The Exchange Program in Nicaragua.

*Q: Did you have an exchange program there, too?*

COFFEY: Lew, we had a -- I thought quite a good exchange program for the size of the country and the size of our budget. USIA and the exchange program, which was allocated then out of the State Department, was quite generous. We had a steady flow of student leaders and adults in a number of professions, not only -- and here we prevailed against the ambassador -- not only to select pro-Somoza people, but people who were in the moderate opposition, democratic opposition.

*Q: That's what I was going to ask. Were you able, both in the student group and to some extent in the regular professional groups, to get people who weren't devoted entirely to the Somoza regime?*

COFFEY: The answer is yes. It had to be done very delicately because the ambassador wanted to clear all the names with the Somozas. We didn't go along with that, and I'm not sure that he actually did, but it was his intent that we should not ruffle the feathers of the Somozas. One incident sticks out, though. The name Tomas Borge -

*Q: Spell that?*

COFFEY: -- spelled T-o-m-a-s B-o-r-g-e -- stands out. And Tomas Borge was a student leader at the time, and he, if I recall, was educated at the University of Leon, in the city of Leon. He had also had some experience with a communist center up in Mexico led by Toledano, an international Latin American communist. T-o-l-e-d-a-n-o. He came back to Nicaragua and I got to know him.

I nominated him for a student grant, and my boss had agreed. A number of other people said, "This is the kind of young man we're trying to reach." He was 21 or 22, still very impressionable, still had not made his final decision in life which political route to travel. Well, the State Department turned him down, saying, "We will not issue visas to communists." And so Tomas Borge didn't get to go. As you know, Tomas Borge was the minister of interior under the Sandinistas, and one of the most

ruthless communists in the group. There are others that we backed away from because of the same prohibition, that, had we been able to reach -- who knows whether they would have been -- had a different outlook in their later years. But that's one of the reasons I felt during my career that the exchange program is one of the finest and most enlightened programs that the United States government has. By and large, the people who experience these exchange programs have learned somewhat about our country and our intentions, that we're not a threat, we're not an imperialistic nation, we're not trying to grab off other peoples' territory, and that we have lots of problems, but that our democracy somehow works.

*Q: How long were you in Managua?*

COFFEY: I was there a little over two years, maybe 25 months. One program I'd like to mention, though, Lew, which I thought was very interesting has to do with unions. The communists were trying to take over the stevedores' union in the major port of Corinto, C-o-r-i-n-t-o. Most of the union members, though, were anti- if not noncommunist. So I put together some labor films about the US labor movement, some materials that we had written and that USIA Washington had provided, and that the local labor attaché had provided, on how to conduct union meetings, how to control the meetings in some kind of order, and took this material over to Corinto. We had to go by train because the highway was bad the last 40-50 miles, but a train did run from Managua to Corinto. The first night we had about 70 or 80 people there, and a good discussion, and the second night a similar format but a lot more people attended.

We talked about basic things: how to control a meeting, in other words, the president took over the microphone and the PA system and when he was ready to release the microphone he passed it on in an orderly fashion to somebody else of his selection. He who controls the PA system. One of the tricks of the communists, always, is to outlast the good guys. When everybody else is tired and starts for home, then they speak up and take over the meeting, and vote in and vote out who and what they want, and assume power -- a very simplistic technique, but effective. Well, after our second session the union people asked me to come back with more material and a speaker from Managua, perhaps the labor attaché. That was scheduled for a week or so later. On Saturday morning, then, two weeks later I had sent the projector and the films and material down to the railroad station to be put on the car with me. I was to arrive about an hour later. Shortly -- I was at the embassy getting ready -- Tom Whelan, the ambassador, got a call from the port director in Corinto, expressing regrets that I'd been killed and was there anything he could do. Well, Tom, the ambassador, called me -- I was downstairs -- and expressed his regrets.

*Q: Did he know you were dead?*

COFFEY: He wasn't quite sure. But what had happened is that the communists -- the leftists had planted a bomb in the projector case in the freight storage room where we had placed the projector and blew that projector and all our films and everything across the horizon, destroyed the room, and supposedly I was to be with the projector at the time. They'd stuck it in the projector case. And they called to Corinto a report of my sudden demise. Tom assured the man that I was all right. I got hold of a new projector and what material I could get together and made the second train of the day to Corinto. And as far as I know, Lew, the union stayed out of noncommunist hands for quite a few years after that. I would consider that a successful program.

*Q: The union -- well, the people who were trying to control the union had not gotten into it, I mean, they had not gotten into control of it yet at that point? They were just trying-*

COFFEY: The communists were trying, and they had almost succeeded when the port director had mentioned it to somebody in the embassy that they needed help. So the Embassy sent out their information man: me.

*Q: The most expendable.*

COFFEY: Most expendable; yes, exactly.

There was another interesting incident in this Somoza period, though. Occasionally the students would protest against the government and the Guardia Nacional would go into the university and knock them around. In one incident they killed five students, mostly at the university in Leon. At that time USIS was sponsoring the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington in concerts in Managua and in Granada, a city south of there. Well, the concert in Granada was planned, all the tickets sold out and the day before the concert -- the five students were killed during protests against the Somoza regime. The student leaders came around to me and said, "Fred, we can't have this concert. This would celebrate the death of these -- of our fellow students." And I said, "Well, it doesn't need to be that way. Of course, we are very, very sorry about the deaths and do not support that kind of action." But I was trapped, there again, by U.S. policy. Well, the students took things into their own hands. Howard Mitchell was the conductor at the time. They decided to kidnap Howard Mitchell and prevent the concert.

*Q: Which students, now, the anticommunists or -*

COFFEY: They were of mixed ideologies, I suppose, but their fellow students had been killed by the Guardia Nacional and they didn't want us to support the Somoza government and appear to be doing so with this concert in Granada. They didn't want to give the false impression that all things were okay and peaceful and tranquil, when they weren't. So they grabbed off a member of the symphony and then they called me and said, "All right, we're ready to bargain. We'll release him if there's no concert." I went down to Granada and talked with a couple of students, and I said, "Well, I've got a little surprise for you. Number one, you grabbed off the third trombone player, not Howard Mitchell; he's safe in his hotel and security is keeping him safe. However, we want the concert to go on, and we're very, very sympathetic with what happened to the students." They wanted me to make a condemnation speech on the platform and I said, "No, I can't do that, but I can call for a couple of minutes of silence, and everybody will know exactly what it's about." They agreed. They released the third trombone player, who joined his fellow musicians very happily; and at the concert we had two minutes of silence. So our objectives were partly met and Howard Mitchell had another successful performance.

Another event that was very important to us was that the second Coffey son was born in the Baptist Hospital.

*Q: You were spreading them around the area.*

COFFEY: Oh, we were. He became a Nicaraguan. My wife, Jane -- Ruby -- was supposed to be -- well, I'll clear that up now. Her name is Ruby Jane, and one part of the family calls her Ruby, and the other calls her Jane. So my wife Jane was supposed to be in the hospital for about four or five days, and rest. However, there was a crazy man down the hall; he came bursting in the door. Well, I happened to be there, fortunately, as he started throwing chairs. So we decided at that time that home was a better place for Jane. Now, in many countries, and certainly in most Third World countries, medical problems are paramount. My son Jeff was born with the cord around his neck and later on developed epilepsy, because the doctor wasn't there when we needed him. He came rushing in just at the birth and wasn't able to prevent the cord situation, and cut it probably a little bit late. Also, I lost about 60 percent of the hearing in my left ear. I had a terrible ear infection and there were no antibiotics to be found in the town. At the time it was a Saturday and a Sunday. There was no embassy doctor and the local doctor the embassy had been using, a Nicaraguan, was off on a hunting trip. So I suffered through, and later testing showed that I'd picked up some damage that would be with me the rest of my life. Well, I would say that's about it for Nicaragua.

**FREDERICK L. CHAPIN**  
**Political/Labor Officer**  
**Managua (1959-1961)**

*Ambassador Frederick L. Chapin was born in New York in 1929. He joined the Foreign Service in 1952. His career included posts in Vienna, Nicaragua, Brazil, and El Salvador, and ambassadorships to Ethiopia and Guatemala. Ambassador Chapin was interviewed by Ambassador Horace G. Torbert in 1989.*

CHAPIN: The son-in-law had been a lieutenant in the Guardia Nacional and they attempted to oust Somoza the only way that was possible, namely, by assassinating him. Somoza, the elder, Tacho Somoza, was in fact murdered by an assassin with poison-filled bullets as he was leaving a party given at the Casa del Obrero, The Workers' Club in Leon, which resulted in all labor activity in Leon being shut down.

I had some initial contacts who introduced me to local labor leaders in Leon and together we organized the First Federation of Trade Unions which was established under the new Nicaraguan labor code. We followed all of the rules and I stayed in the background as much as possible but [I] sent an organizer up there whom I paid for out of my own pocket, I was never reimbursed by the U. S. Government for it. And, our Ambassador Whelan, who had been the Republican state chairman in North Dakota was somewhat surprised at this but I told him that for an annual budget of \$1,500 I could organize the best trade-union movement in the country. Well, when Roberto Gonzalez and his corrinto trade unionists tried to take over the construction union in Managua, the ambassador took me along to see President Somoza and I gave him all the facts, in essence, about Roberto Gonzalez's background and his communist affiliations. But Somoza, like so many dictators, chose to work with other autocrats and found it easier to work with them than with the democratic movement, and so he supported the communist trade unions and they did in fact sign a collective bargaining agreement with the Managua construction industry.

I had sponsored the first collective bargaining agreement in Leon between the construction industry and the construction union which was part of this federation we established. I was carefully 50 miles away from the final signing ceremony but I had brought both parties close enough together so that it was certain that a collective bargaining agreement could be signed. As I mentioned, Roberto Gonzalez was attempting to organize all the ports and one of the main ports on the Atlantic Coast from which the Longleaf Pine Company was shipping logs to the United States, an American company, was next on Roberto Gonzalez's target list. So I sent the same organizer who had organized Leon over to the Atlantic Coast. It will be recalled that Puerto Cabezas is the port from which our ill-fated Cuban armada sailed. In those days there was nothing but a dirt strip that DC-3s landed on in Puerto Cabezas.

On the second trip over, we finalized arrangements for the trade union federation of Puerto Cabezas and we had a festive occasion and signing ceremony. The trade union federation had provided some difficulties because the workers on the pier, which was being repaired so that it could take our vehicles for the invasion of Cuba and the railroad, were run by former Caribbean nationals and their descendants who were black and spoke English. The taxi and drivers and mechanics union was composed of people who spoke only Spanish and the other two unions which were part of the saw-mill and the lumbermen each spoke a different Indian dialect so it was quite a complicated situation to wield that into one federation but it was successful and we did keep the communists out.

As with the Leon federation, Somoza eventually took over the federations. But for a while, they ran on a democratic basis. In fact, the only person they trusted to count the votes in the election for the first officers of the federation in Leon was yours truly. I have a picture of me counting the votes with the Nicaraguan government trade representative sitting in the front row.

*Q: Sounds pretty Yankee imperialistic to me!*

CHAPIN: Well, it was all done privately. They asked me to come in and it was all done on private funds, no U. S. Government money involved.

*Q: How did you cut out these funds so that they wouldn't come back and bounce on you?*

CHAPIN: No, I personally paid for it and I never was reimbursed. It only cost me \$150. That's why I told the ambassador -- I could organize the best federation in the country.

Well, another thing that happened early on, fairly early on while I was there, was that the plotting against Somoza in those days was not from the left but from the right. The conservatives were the ones who were trying to oust him and shortly before I arrived in July there had been a vain-glorious attempt by Pedro Joaquin Chamorro and a group of Nicaraguan aristocrats who landed by parachute in the mountains and attempted to mount a coup from there and, of course, they were all rounded up by the Guardia Nacional and imprisoned on the hill next to the President's palace, or at least their leaders.

The next attempt was by Arturo Cruz and some of his cohorts in Diriamba and Hinojotepe, two heads of what they called departamentos. They were headed by Jefe Politico, not a governor but a

representative of the central power who had virtually total control over those departments. These young conservatives, Arturo Cruz, at the time, was managing director of the Banco Nicaraguense in Diriamba, had this crazy idea which was shared by others that, if the conservatives knocked over the capitals of a couple of departments, the United States would still in old gunboat fashion land the Marines and separate the two sides if they could hold these capitals for two weeks.

I was a much better friend of Arturo's brother, Ernesto, who, by the way, served as my drop for the clandestine communist paper because he had been a Marxist while at the University, as was his wife. There was a meeting at Ernesto's house one evening, a social event ostensibly, and Ernesto and his wife were there, Arturo and his wife were there, and Cree and I were invited. The two Cruz brothers had a sister who was married to somebody whose name I can't remember. Anyway, we all sat around after dinner [and the] theory was espoused that, if they knocked over two departmental capitals, wouldn't the United States land Marines? I said, "This is crazy. This is absolutely the silliest idea I have ever heard. You'll all get yourselves shot, by the way. The Guardia National is much too well organized. This is absurd."

Well, I got wind that the issue continued to fester, and so the day before this coup was to be launched, I went up to Diriamba and saw Arturo. He pulled me into the social club where we had lunch in the darkest recess he could find, and I said, "You know, this is just absurd as I told you ten days ago. This won't make any sense." Well, they persisted, and sure enough over the weekend they launched on the Guardia headquarters in each of the towns and temporarily had control. But the Guardia first sent in a column in their newest police cars which we had provided to them because, in those days, aid to the police was not illegal as it became later under the Aid Program. The Guardia National column got badly shot up and ambushed, but force prevailed and the Guardia National was much too strong. Indeed, they rounded up everybody except Arturo and one or two others. I reported all of this, but my sources I refused to reveal to the ambassador, who was the godfather of all the Somoza children, and I swore the (inaudible) to silence on his honor as a Catholic gentleman which he respected.

I had the inside story, not only from having been up there but also one of the prominent members of the taxi union in Managua had relatives who lived in Diriamba and he was the first to bring some of the wounded Guardia back to the hospital and gave me a first-hand account of the initial battle in Diriamba. So there were exciting days.

*Q: You should have been put in charge of the Cuban campaign.*

CHAPIN: Well, I asked my uncle later, Admiral Kirk, who had been head of U. S. Naval forces in Normandy as well as previously in Sicily, whether anybody had consulted him or any of the other amphibious experts. On his virtual deathbed at Bethesda Naval Hospital he told me that no one had been consulted that he knew of and he himself at the time was working on a CIA project. So that was very badly bungled.

I was out of Nicaragua by the time the actual Bay of Pigs incident took place. I had just arrived in the Chad as chargé. The French high representative, who really worked for French intelligence and had during the war worked for de Gaulle, was very critical of our generals and admirals. Unfortunately, the French generals had just risen in Algiers and so I said to him, "Our generals

may be stupid, but at least they are loyal." And that shut him up.

**ROBERT E. SERVICE**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Managua (1961-1963)**

*Robert E. Service was born in 1937 in China to American parents. He received a B.A. from Oberlin College and an M.P.A from Princeton University. His postings abroad have included Managua, Salvador Bahia, Mexico City, Santiago, Madrid, Buenos Aires, Brasilia, and Montevideo. Mr. Service was interviewed in 1998 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

Q: *So, your first assignment was Managua?*

SERVICE: Yes.

Q: *You're single at this point?*

SERVICE: Yes.

Q: *You were in Managua, Nicaragua from when to when?*

SERVICE: From 1961 to 1963.

Q: *How would you describe the situation in Nicaragua during this period?*

SERVICE: Nicaragua had been run by the Somoza family since the 1930s. The old man, Tacho he was called, had been assassinated in 1956. His two sons, Luis and Anastasio, Jr., known as Tachito, took over. When I got there, Luis was President and Tachito was head of the National Guard. People didn't really trust Tachito, but they gave Luis the benefit of the doubt. They thought he was sincerely trying to modernize and democratize the country, to move away from the family dictatorship that it had been. That was true all the time I was there. Things seemed to be moving in a generally positive direction. Shortly thereafter, Luis died and Tachito became more involved, and the situation deteriorated.

Q: *Why were there reservations about Tachito?*

SERVICE: Tachito, much more than Luis, was in the Latin American caudillo mold. You prove you are a leader by being more ruthless than the next fellow, by being willing to use intimidation and force. In that he was like his father. Luis was more liberal, more democratic. Or at least that is how it appeared to us.

Q: *What was the social situation, not society, but the social in Nicaragua in your eyes, as you saw it, in 1961?*

SERVICE: You mean the poverty, and things like that?

Q: *Poverty, and was there sort of a ruling family? I mean, how did things work?*

SERVICE: The country was not the poorest in Central America, but one of the poorer ones. It had more land per capita than some. It did not have the Indian problem that Guatemala has. Everybody was pretty much mestizo, except for the people on the coast, who were black, primarily. There was a fairly small, educated, elite in the cities. The rest of the country was pretty poor. There were not huge slums, but there was a very sharp drop off in living standards once we got beyond the urban elite. It was at about the time I was there, although we were not aware of it at the time, that the Sandinistas started organizing in the mountainous areas. At first they were just a handful of people. I was not aware of their existence until many years later.

Q: *What were American interests there at that time?*

SERVICE: They were rather limited. There were a few Cubans in the country, supposedly refugees from Castro, but we checked to make sure they were not serving as conduits for sending machinery to Cuba. This was after the Bay of Pigs and after we had broken relations with Cuba. There were a few American cotton farmers, and the Blue brothers had started a cacao plantation. United Fruit was trying to grow bananas on the Pacific Coast side of the country. They had pretty much abandoned Nicaragua in the 1920s and 1930s. Now they were looking for a new land free of the various diseases that affect bananas. But, overall, our economic and commercial stake was not great.

Q: *What about Embassy social life?*

SERVICE: I was young and single. I spent most of my time with young people outside the embassy. It was an international group but included a number of Nicaraguans who had spent some time studying in the States. Marta Molina and Frances Urbina Somoza (a distant cousin of Luis and Tachito) were the girls I knew best. We used to do things on weekends together. We would go off and explore one of the islands in the lakes, or go to a waterfall, or go to the beach, or one thing or another. I was invited occasionally for diplomatic functions within the U.S. Embassy, and to the Ambassador's house periodically. A number of us from the Embassy played bridge every Monday night at the Club Nejapa, Nicaragua's one country club. It was a duplicate game. Two of the regulars from the Embassy were the administrative officer, Jack Baxter, and his wife. Both were killed when a light plane crashed. We had a visitor from Washington who wanted to visit something on the Gulf coast of the country. Two small planes were used and there were extra spaces, so the Baxters decided to go along. Flying out they went in separate planes, but coming back, because it was bridge night, they both took the first plane to depart. It never made it. They had two small children, girls, who became instant orphans.

Q: *Who was the Ambassador while you were there?*

SERVICE: Aaron Brown. His wife's name was Dorothy. Aaron's previous job was head of personnel. He had earlier been DCM [deputy chief of mission] in Bogota. Aaron was a New

Englander, rather reserved. But he was always very good to me.

*Q: What type of work were you doing there?*

SERVICE: I started off in the Economic Section. Actually, I was sort of the Commercial Officer. It was a two-man section. I had a very good Nicaraguan named Juan Sierro, who did most of the work. Then, the head of the section left and they had some trouble replacing him. I was head of that section for about nine months. It was a great experience for a first term FSO-8 [Foreign Service officer, rank 8] officer. I used to go to the Ambassador's staff meeting every morning. The usual attendees were the political officer, the economic officer, and the DCM. We discussed what was going on, and had arguments from time to time. I remember one time when the national railroad wanted a loan from the Ex-Im [Export-Import] Bank and the embassy was asked for its opinion. The DCM, Lou Blanchard, was all for granting the loan. I argued that the railroad had no future and we should not encourage it. I don't remember how it came out, or whether I was proved right or wrong by subsequent events, but it was rather heady stuff for a young officer to be arguing with those twenty or more years his senior. At one point I did an airgram on the wealth of the Somozas. I think I concluded that they were not as wealthy as popular opinion imagined. For a number of years, officers who followed me to Managua or worked on Nicaraguan affairs would mention having read that airgram.

*Q: There were no attempted coups or earthquakes, or anything like that, while you were there?*

SERVICE: There were a lot of earthquakes, but nothing major. In those days the major earthquake referent was that of 1931. Such and such was before or after that. Now when anybody talks about before or after the earthquake, they are talking about the earthquake of 1972 or '73. The rains came and the rains went. The heat stayed most of the time. It was a very pretty country, but not particularly healthy. I got hepatitis and also shingles, but neither badly enough to keep me away from the office for more than a day or two.

*Q: Well, what was the feeling about the economy in Nicaragua at that time? Was it . . . for its size and place a viable economy?*

SERVICE: I suppose one would have to say yes. But there was a big movement at that time to form various Central America organizations, a Central American common market, a Central American Bank, a Central American this and a Central America that. USAID [United States Agency for International Development] put a lot of manpower and money into supporting those things, as did the multilateral banks. People thought this would be the path to a better future. The five countries would get together and work together, rather than each try to duplicate what the other was doing. For example, Central America did not need five plants making tires, or farm machinery, or whatever. They would agree on some rational allocation of industrial projects. In that way all would be better off. All that was still in the formative stage when I was there.

*Q: How about the Alliance for Progress? Was that getting cranked up, at the start of the Kennedy administration?*

SERVICE: Those were the big years for the Alliance. There was enthusiasm, manpower. There were a lot of meetings and seminars on the Alliance for Progress, or this or that aspect of it. It was

an exciting time in terms of hopes.

*Q: Was there any particular aspect of the Alliance for Progress that the Embassy was pushing?*

SERVICE: I don't remember in detail, although I'm sure we thought education, health, and housing deserved high priorities. I know there were a couple programs involving labor unions, and how labor unions could have a larger, more productive role.

*Q: Was Nicaragua a police state at that time or was it pretty open?*

SERVICE: I had very little feeling that it was a police state. Formally, the main street of Managua was called Avenida Roosevelt. But the Nicaraguans always called it Avenida Central, which had been the name before. As you came up Avenida Central from the lakeshore, you went past an Army installation just below where the Presidential palace was. At night time you used to have to turn off your lights when you went past there, so they could see who was driving and how many were in the car. We joked about that a little bit. We said, "What kind of country is this where you can't even go up the main street without having to run into the military?" I can't think of much beyond that. I can remember of almost no cases of the military or police arresting people or beating people. There was very little political oppression that I was aware of. But that was before the days when people who had been mistreated sought out the U.S. Embassy to protect them. We had long been identified with the Somozas. The opposition did not trust us.

*Q: Is there anything else you want to say about your tour in Managua?*

SERVICE: I should mention that I met my wife there, although we didn't get married until four years later. Karol Kleiner worked in Washington for the Bureau of Labor Statistics and came to Managua writing a report on Labor Law and Practice in Nicaragua. One day I found her sitting in the Commercial Reading Room, for which I was responsible. We went out a few times during the two or three weeks she was there, and then kept in touch until we decided to get married in 1967.

### **RICHARD H. MELTON**

#### **Labor Officer**

#### **Managua (1963-1965)**

*Richard H. Melton was born on August 8, 1935 in Rockville, Maryland. He received his BA from Cornell University in 1958. He later attended Wisconsin University where he received his MA in 1971. He entered the Foreign Service in 1961 and served in many countries throughout his career including Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Portugal, England, Uruguay, and Costa Rica. Mr. Melton was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 27, 1997.*

MELTON: I remember coming to the Department from the Hill by cab with my friend. We were talking about Managua and the cab driver began laughing and humming. He said he had been there

in the Air Force during World War II and painted a very grim picture of Nicaragua, but by then it was too late--the assignment had been made. I stayed in Managua from 1963 to 1965--two years.

I was assigned to the Political Section of the Embassy as a labor officer. Toward the end of my tour, I did some economic reporting as well, but during most of my tour I did political reporting with emphasis on labor affairs.

During the first part of my tour, Nicaragua was undergoing a small economic boomlet, based on cotton and beef production. The political structure was dominated by elites in the two major cities outside of Managua, Leon and Granada--one Liberal, the other Conservative. The politics of the country tended to be dominated by the traditional old families from those two cities. The Somozas were super imposed on that traditional structure, although the old families continued to set the pace for the country. There was only a small middle class, leaving the majority of the people confined to the lower economic strata which was predominantly agricultural. Most of the people lived along the West Coast; the center of the country was sparsely populated and the East Coast was the home of the Miskito Indians, but also sparsely populated. Nicaragua, unlike Guatemala for example, did not have a large Indian presence.

Nicaragua was going through a period of hope during my tour. Anastasio Somoza, the old dictator, had died and had been succeeded by the more liberal son, Luis, who was about to step down to be replaced by a close friend of the Somozas, Rene Schick, a former judge. Schick, although handpicked by the Somozas, demonstrated a welcome degree of independence. The hope was that he would serve as a bridge to a more open political system. That did not happen. The untimely deaths of both Luis Somoza and Rene Schick led to Anastasio Jr, "Tachito," assuming the Presidency putting an end to the period of hope. But that did not happen until after I had left. So during the 1963-65 period, there were indications that Nicaragua was moving towards a more democratic system. So this was an interesting period--a time of possibilities--in Nicaragua's political life.

Somoza's National Guard was one of the principal barriers to this hoped-for political transition. It was a single military force; it was never as large as later reports suggested--probably in the 7,000 man range. That was not out of line even with countries like Costa Rica which had no military force, but only police. Later reports made the Guard seem much larger and all powerful. While in Managua, I managed to do some English teaching at the binational center. The students and I would frequently enter into discussions and the role of the National Guard was a frequent topic. I was certainly not a defender of the Guard, but I felt obliged to provide my students some factual material, such as the size of the force and its relationship to the U.S.. It is then that I found that the Guard's size was greatly overestimated by Nicaraguans and that there was an unjustified aura about it.

Most of my contacts were with the would-be-opposition; the Liberal and Conservative parties--the traditional ones--were family run and split by internal conflicts. The Liberal Party had become an instrument of the Somozas. The opposition was largely ineffective, but among labor there were some members of the Christian-democratic-social movement which was beginning to advance throughout the continent. That movement was associated with the Church and its hierarchy. It was showing some vibrancy in Nicaragua, particularly in the non-Somoza labor movement. I got to

know a lot of the members of this new movement; most were quite young. Those contacts became quite useful when I returned 25 years later for my second tour in Nicaragua.

The Alliance for Progress was a new American effort to improve the standards of living in Latin America. It was a Kennedy-inspired program. So we had large assistance missions in many Latin American countries, including Nicaragua. The problems in a place like Nicaragua was that its political system was a closed one dominated by the Somozas. That made the management of a program like the Alliance for Progress difficult because it had as one of its objectives the propagation of a democratic political system. That of course was not welcomed in a country like Nicaragua. Furthermore, all assistance tended to feed into the Somoza system making it difficult to separate economic development assistance from support of the Somoza regime.

One of the problems we had was to satisfy one of our clients: the AFL-CIO. My own analysis was shared by my boss, the Political Counselor: I thought that the Christian-Democrats did represent a voice for democracy. They were also dedicated to trade union principles. There was another strand in the Nicaraguan labor movement which was much more politically oriented; that group supported Somoza's Liberal Party and had the backing of the AFL-CIO because it viewed this segment of Nicaraguan labor to be more aggressively anti-communist. Even though I recognized the importance of the AFL-CIO position, I was at cross purposes with American labor because I tended to believe that the Christian Democrats in the Nicaraguan labor movement deserved at least equal access to US support because it was far more active in its pursuit of a democratic political system for Nicaragua. Fortunately, our USAID mission had a wise labor technical assistance officer who was in charge of conducting training programs. He was an old-line communications worker; we became good friends. We had a visit from an AFL-CIO delegation which wanted me to be removed for being unsympathetic to the AFL-CIO position in Nicaragua. My friend from U.S. labor movement gave me full support and shielded me from the ire of his union colleagues. I found out from the head of the delegation that it had come to Nicaragua prepared to award a medal to Anastasio Somoza, Jr. I objected strenuously; I talked to the Political Counselor who agreed with me that that would be a disaster for the U.S. image and the course of democracy in Nicaragua, and we finally dissuaded the delegation from this unwise course.

We did manage to get the AFL-CIO to move a little, but not nearly enough. This was the era of a very tough anti-communist line in the AFL-CIO. Eventually, after my departure, the AFL-CIO came around grudgingly accepted the importance of the Christian-Democratic movement.

Aaron Brown was our Ambassador; he was a fine man. He had been the Department's chief personnel officer. He was from New England and had all of the classic virtues which we tend to associate with people from that region--straight, honest, forthright. He told his people when they were right and when they were wrong and supported you when necessary. A first rate ambassador. He supported our position on dealing with the Christian Democrats, he was very frank about the reality of the situation. I attended many meetings with him and Nicaraguan leaders, particularly younger ones. He would always be asked why the U.S. could not be more active in supporting efforts to replace the Somozas. His answer was that Nicaragua was their country and they would have to do all the heavy lifting; his advice was that since the Nicaraguans would have to live with the results of any political change, they better give long thought to what actions they might take. The U.S. would not take the heat for any political change which might not be acceptable to

Nicaraguans in general; they would have to take responsibility for their own actions. That was a sound message.

It should be noted that the Sandinistas were in existence in 1963. As a matter of fact, the head of the movement, Carlos Fonseca Amador, was captured by the National Guard while I was in Managua. The government held him for a while, but then concluded that he and his followers were of no great significance and released him--after beating and torturing him. He left unimpeded by the government. The other locus of opposition was the Christian Democratic movement that I discussed earlier. It was bolstered by the defection of some major figures in the Conservative Party. Some oppositionists defected to the Sandinistas and remained with them, but most like Mrs. Chamorro, split from the Sandinistas later. But that is another story.

Our policy toward Nicaragua was an aberration. Prior to Ambassador Brown's arrival, we had allowed one political appointee and Somoza friend, Thomas Whelan, to remain in place for ten years. US administration after administration accepted Somoza as an immovable reality. The Bay of Pigs operation in part was launched from Nicaragua--Puerto Cabezas on the east coast. So there was a bond between the countries even though the question of what the U.S. should be doing in the twilight of the Somoza regime was being discussed. As I said, the Alliance had a strong bias toward building democracy and that gave us good reason to consider a Nicaragua without Somoza. But as I said, in general, in a country like Nicaragua, it was very difficult for an assistance program not to support the existing regime. That was a problem.

Nicaragua had at one time a thriving banana industry, but by 1963, there was no major American firm like United Fruit or Standard Fruit which dominated the life of the country as these mega-firms did in other Central American countries. There were no large US investment in Nicaragua in the early 1960s. Cotton was a major product because Nicaragua had the right soil and climate to make it a fruitful producer. It was a relatively new crop for the country and American firms had not managed to become the large land owners that they had in other countries. So the U.S., particularly in light of the Alliance for Progress, had a pretty good reputation in the rural areas where its programs managed to achieve positive results--schools, public health facilities, etc.

Somoza had a unique relationship to the U.S.. He was a graduate of West Point; he had a lot of friends in the U.S. who gave him support--far more than any other leader in Central America. It was quite clear to us that particularly Anastasio, Jr. had access to privileged American information--i.e. Embassy reporting. We had the feeling sometimes that he was actually reading our messages. Anastasio had a fix on every officer in the Embassy--he soon segregated the staff into friend or foe. It was quite clear that he did not include members of the Political Section, myself included, in the "friend" category. I remember attending a dinner given by the former Nicaragua Labor Minister, whom I considered a first rate person, along with the Political Counselor. We were chatting when Somoza came over to join us. He said, somewhat sarcastically: "Ah, my good friends from the American Embassy..." although this was my first face-to-face encounter, it was clear that he knew a lot about us and our views.

Even as a junior officer, we, as diplomats, had access to some privileged places. We were readily accepted wherever we went. One of my children was born in Nicaragua. The facilities were modest; this was a time when Managua had not yet modernized, although in the pre-Nicaraguan days it was

in some ways more varied and attractive than it is now. Since I worked with labor unions, I probably had more access to the average Nicaraguan than most of my colleagues. The friendships I made were lasting ones and greatly helped in my return to Nicaragua some 25 years later.

**JAMES B. ENGLE**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Managua (1963-1967)**

*Ambassador James B. Engle was born in Montana in 1919. He received a Ph.D. in American foreign policy from the University of Chicago in 1941 and was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University. His career included positions in Naples, Italy; Accra, Ghana; Managua, Nicaragua; Saigon, Vietnam; Nha Trang, Vietnam; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and Washington, DC. Ambassador Engle was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1988.*

*Q: In Managua, I'd like to just concentrate quickly on your role as DCM. Who was the ambassador when you went, and what were the dates you went to Managua, Nicaragua?*

ENGLE: I got to Nicaragua in December of 1963. The ambassador was Brown, I think it was. I can't remember his first name. He was a career minister, previously head of personnel.

*Q: What was our policy towards Nicaragua at the time?*

ENGLE: Our policy toward Nicaragua was the best policy the United States ever had toward Nicaragua, and it was based on the Alianza Para el Progreso, but it wasn't just that. We had that policy officially everywhere in Latin America. This was Kennedy's policy brought in in 1961, of aid on a dignified basis, emphasizing growth.

*Q: This is the Alliance for Progress.*

ENGLE: Yes. But in Nicaragua, we had a policy that had been carefully worked out ever since Brown arrived, of trying to expand democracy, expand moderate government, let's say, in Nicaragua, by bringing in the moderate opposition, the conservative party, which was controlled by people largely educated in the United States. That was true of the governing liberal party, Somoza's, too. They had become familiar with democratic institutions in the United States and admired them, and they all wanted to bring about a political arrangement whereby there could be transfer of power back and forth, accepted by the country without revolution, and also, at the same time, in conditions of dynamic economic growth in the country. The country was just zooming at that time. It was one of the most promising economic situations anywhere in the world. Politically, the progress was very rapid when we began bringing conservatives into our houses and arranging for them to meet liberals and have dinner.

*Q: This had not been done before?*

ENGLE: No.

*Q: But you felt quite free to move between the two wings of the parties?*

ENGLE: Yes. We made it very clear. But fortunately, after Luis Somoza left power in '61, Luis was the elder son of the old Tacho, who was assassinated in 1956, Luis became president 'til '61 and he was a moderate. Things were drifting in the right way under Luis, who was American educated. They were going in the right direction, but when Brown got there, it moved far more rapidly because it was institutionalized as a US policy of bringing together all the moderate elements in the country and try to persuade them to adopt a political mechanism, in other words, a Congress with all the necessary institutions of a democratic setup.

I must say that after Luis left power in '61, it was arranged that there should be a pro-Somoza liberal to take over the government, and that was Schick. Rene, I believe, was his first name. Rene Schick, who was a moderate man, very favorable to the United States. Luis, who left power, realized that this kind of arrangement would help moderate things still further. It had been a country where there was a lot of unrest all the time coming out of the 19th century.

It was also, I would say, a country that was like the Wild West of the 1870s. Everybody was armed, most people were on horseback, you fired first and asked questions later. This is the way the country was, still. It's unbelievable. It's like going to the Wild West in the United States, even during this period. But things were improving all the time, and our policy found the Schick regime to be very agreeable. In effect, it was actually supported, tacitly, by the conservative opposition, which didn't do things that provoked it. The country was in kind of an elated state as a result of this relaxation of tension. I can say that I've never been in a country which was so pro-American as in Nicaragua. Every part of the country, I'd go to villages, the most remote places, even on the east coast, and I found practically everyone.

*Q: There was not much residue of resentment because of Walker and the gray-eyed man of destiny and then, of course, the Marines in there and all that?*

ENGLE: No. In fact, everybody tried to remember his contacts with the Marines and tell me about them. That didn't leave contrary to the people now who are opposed to our policy in Nicaragua, who say that we did nothing but oppose true Nicaraguan interests all those decades. This wasn't true at all. We probably favored those who happened to be in power more than we should have, but Nicaraguans, in general, did not harbor old resentments, any resentments against the United States. Maybe there were a few people that I couldn't find, but my colleagues and I got around the country, just everywhere, and every place was open to us. We'd just walk in anywhere without introduction, say who we were, and they'd say, "Oh, my goodness. I've got So-and-so living up in San Francisco, he's my cousin. Do you know him?" I very, very seldom heard anything critical of the United States. I've never been in a country before that wanted so much to be the 51st state of the United States.

*Q: At the time, was there any political development that was particularly critical that happened while you were there?*

ENGLE: Yes. There were a couple of things. I would mention that there was a tiny cell of Communists who called themselves Sandinistas, out in the bush. The policy of General Somoza, who controlled the National Guard, the Guardia, he was the head of the National Guard, which, by the way, had only 6,000 members for all the police and army duties in the country. Today how big is the Army? 120,000 plus as many in the reserves, maybe 20 times as great, and yet this regime refers to the Somoza regime as a military dictatorship, and we do, too, as most of our people who don't understand.

There was this little group way back in the bush, and General Somoza's policy was to hunt them down and kill them.

*Q: This is Somoza who later became president.*

ENGLE: Yes, a West Point graduate who took over the National Guard at his father's death. I believe he didn't head the Guard until after his father was assassinated. But he was the strongest man in the country.

*Q: His first name was?*

ENGLE: Anastasio, Jr. -- Tachito. The other great development was that there was to be an election, a popular election in February 1967, and the conservative party was given all kinds of freedom to conduct big rallies criticizing liberals and Somoza all the time. We sent representatives to all these things, and we told the liberals, "We're going to be present at all of your rallies, and we want you to know this." They understood this. Most of the liberals liked this idea, that there were going to be friends in the opposition. We helped them a great deal in this four or five years.

But the conservative party was headed by a hot-head named Dr. Aguero, a dentist trained in the United States. He and a few other extremists decided that in the election where Aguero was opposing Anastasio, Jr., for the presidency, the votes weren't going to be counted honestly, so they'd better have a revolution before the election.

Let me say that I was a DCM, and I was always fearful that the hot-headed minority in the conservative party, in the leadership, would precipitate violence as a solution, which was the typical Nicaraguan solution. After the American intervention in the Dominican Republic under Lyndon Johnson in '65, the idea came to me that due to undertones in Nicaraguan politics, that this small minority in the conservative party might decide to precipitate exactly the kind of revolution there, hoping that America would intervene as they had in the Dominican Republic and had historically in Nicaragua over the decades. To them, it was successful American intervention. Both parties believed this intervention was successful. (Laughs) Except at certain times, the conservatives when Somoza was in. They saw, traditionally, America as the outside force that could change things in Nicaragua, so therefore they would be in favor when they were out of power.

There were undertones that suggested that the same thing could happen in Nicaragua, so I talked the line all the time against this kind of thing happening. Others did, too, in the embassy, suggesting that we wouldn't do this kind of thing in Nicaragua, which is a different situation, that

Nicaragua had far better prospects in the Dominican Republic, moderate people like themselves could build democracy in a country, it would not be necessary to resort to force.

*Q: The role of the ambassador at this time, was he doing the same thing or was he around at this time?*

ENGLE: He was around, but he was unwell most of the time, and he died only a year or two after he left. Aaron S. Brown was his name. He was a very effective ambassador, liked by all sides and was symbolic of the Alianza, and knew how to persuade elements in both parties to cooperate with each other. We merely followed him always on this, talking the line hard ourselves, but it was something that really worked. Aaron was very concerned that something like this might happen, particularly in the last few months before that election. But we had definite information clandestinely, a few weeks ahead of time, that it was definitely planned that there should be something, and it would be in the great political rally in Managua to be the climax of the conservative campaign. We expected at least 50,000. Managua didn't have more than 200,000 living there.

So I immediately requested the CIA station chief to bring in walkie-talkies so that we could monitor that effectively. I began planning, I and others, including the ambassador. We were going to the conservative leadership and trying to persuade him not to do anything, "Just go through with the election, whatever the result. We've got a lot of time to build a future here, and we're counting on you people."

They looked to us, you see, for leadership and guidance on this, and so did a lot of the liberals. I began planning, with one or two on my staff, what we would do if this broke out. So we had a plan of operation immediately available for when it did. We got four or five or six walkie-talkies, TRC-120s. They were effective. We had them all ready. The intelligence indicated, and there were also hints in the open, that this would take place in Managua on that Sunday the 22nd of January.

There was a big conservative social gathering in Granada, which was the conservative center, sort of a historic place 30 or 40 miles south of Managua. We were invited, as always, and so we went. I spent that whole evening with members of the staff, and I believe the ambassador might have been there, trying to persuade them -- this was directly now -- not to do it tomorrow, pointing out dire results, and telling them, "The United States is not going to intervene to support you, not militarily." As I recall, we didn't have any authority at all from Washington to do this, but we did it.

*Q: Were you deliberately trying to avoid asking Washington?*

ENGLE: We reported all along, but as I recall, there was no guidance. In any case, the leadership in Washington was, I would say, traditionalist in the sense that you had a change of assistant secretaries. You had Tom Mann as Assistant Secretary now. As we looked at him, he seemed to be less persuaded of the need to follow the old policy which was still on paper, the policy we'd been following so successfully. We had a feeling that we didn't have any real support one way or the other from Washington.

*Q: Which, in a way, is probably ideal from an operation point of view.*

ENGLE: It was ideal, and it was the result of that that we were able to get this revolution stopped, and wound up before Washington got excited. It would have been a real crisis there in Managuan foreign relations.

*Q: How did this play out?*

ENGLE: I said to myself, "If it breaks out Sunday, we've got to have this all solved by dark on Monday. In other words, it was about 27 hours; that's all the time we've got. Then Washington will take it over and it will be a terrible mess." This was the plan. I'd been thinking about this for two years already.

I worked out a duty list beforehand of people to come in early in the morning on Sunday to stand by at the embassy for what we thought was going to happen, and we were at the embassy, waiting. Nothing broke out until marching down the street, bands of conservatives, they always had to march at a meeting, at 2:00 p.m., opened fire just randomly at the National Guard who were around. The Somozas brought in a lot of National Guard units into the city because they expected something, too. In the meantime, I had lookouts in various places in the Grand Hotel, which was a building down in the center of town, at the big square where the meeting was being held. Had four or five people out with walkie-talkies and they'd report to me all the time as to what was happening. I was in the embassy managing the show.

At about 2:00 o'clock, I got word that firing had commenced. There was no systematic plan of the opposition; they didn't know what they were going to do. Most of them were there and didn't know there was going to be anything. Right away, the National Guard responded with gunfire and the conservatives in the march, this great mass of conservatives, turned around and started running. They ran back down the street. These are rather narrow streets, by the way. As they ran past the Grand Hotel, someone got the idea that this was a place of refuge because there were a lot of foreigners staying in the place; they'd be safe in there. So they ran into this hotel. It wasn't a very big building. They ran into this hotel, which must have had four or five stories, and took it over, barricaded themselves in, and seized everybody in the hotel as a hostage.

*Q: Including an American officer that you had there.*

ENGLE: That's right. They probably didn't quite know who he was, but he explained himself and he wasn't touched at all. He kept reporting to us from this room which he had rented right in the front of the hotel on the second floor, and we got vivid reports which we fired off to Washington right away. There was a lot of confusion. We knew something of what was going on, since we did have some people down there, but not everything. One fellow, a junior officer named Pat Theros, took refuge in a place that sold coffee and doughnuts and that kind of thing, and he got on his walkie-talkie to me and said, "I'm under the counter. Can you hear the gunfire?" (Laughs) "What shall I do?" He reported everything he knew. He eventually got out.

It was some time before we were able to put very many pieces together to determine intelligently just what the deployments were on the two sides, what was happening. We did have the head of our military group, a full colonel, who was down with the Somoza military units, the Guardia, and he

reported from time to time, as did the defense attaché when he got to the scene. We arranged that he shouldn't be around, but the commander of the military group didn't pay any attention to the instructions, and he was down there on the other side.

Q: *Too involved, would you say?*

ENGLE: Too involved, yes.

Q: *You really wanted him to stay away?*

ENGLE: That's right. This resulted in sharp language on my part and that of others, complaints to his boss down in Panama.

At that time, we knew there were a lot of American citizens in that hotel, and other foreign nationals, as well. We began planning what to do with these people if the place became free. Of course, we started from the beginning and tried to persuade both sides to stop firing, because for us, it endangered American nations. That was the concrete reason we could use for interfering: "Just don't do any firing." But they did a lot of firing, and they fired, as I recall, 37-millimeter cannon shells, the Guardia did, point blank from a block away or so into the front of the Grand Hotel, and these shells went all the way through the hotel, some of them did, and our man there, Walter Cadette, a junior officer, was wounded. But he kept reporting up to a certain time and then just faded out. We got no more from him.

The firing did die down, but there was a lot of firing. We knew there were conservatives up on rooftops in various places, firing as snipers and otherwise. But we still had only a vague idea, except where the Guardia was. We could identify that because it was their units and they were friendly to us, of course. Both sides were friendly to us. We could see how they were deployed. We just didn't want any massacre as a result of military action on either side.

By some time well after dark, after interviewing a few people who were let out, as I recall there were some nuns and one or two others who had some reason to be released, they came out and told us what things were like on the inside, and we got a picture of what was happening. We managed to get one of our officers who was head of our political section, named Edward T. Cheney, also from Vermont, later killed in the Philippines, into the hotel. By the way, the ambassador was not well. He had terrible heart and other problems. He was at the residence, and we reported to him now and then how things were going. Ted got in and talked to the rebel leadership, all of whom were good friends of his. He came back out. This was without result. We reported what he came back with.

During the night, we were doing a lot of things supportive in the way of, for instance, making plans for dealing with all the people who would get out of the hotel. We arranged for people evacuated, whether they were American or not, to be taken in by embassy families. So this was all planned during the night, and also how we would get supplies, food, in to them, because the hotel had very little food, in case the thing lasted very long. We didn't want them to die of hunger. We were going to mount a food assistance program that we'd arranged to get through the lines during a cease-fire. But that part of it turned out not to be necessary.

I remember going out. I was very exhausted. I had gotten up at 4:00 o'clock that morning. About 1:00 o'clock the following morning, I went home to eat a meal, and that was several miles away. I swam for about an hour. Instead of sleeping, I swam and went straight back to the office. By that time, we thought we could put a team into the hotel by arrangement with the Guardia, to talk to them about their plight and what could be done, and urge them not to do anything to jeopardize all these foreigners, including Americans.

So I headed this team and went with the ambassador's car, with the flag flying, and got within about two blocks. I remember seeing a couple of nuns crouched behind a tank. (Laughs) So I stopped to talk to them. They had been released, but they were afraid of being shot, still, by conservatives who didn't know what they were shooting at. I talked to them, and when I was standing out there talking to them, I was fired at. (Laughs) Bullets hit the tank from rooftops. These poor fools didn't know what they were shooting at at all.

I had the chauffeur drive up to the front of the hotel and had already arranged with the Guardia not to fire. I called in, urging them not to fire. They didn't fire from the hotel; there were people watching, obviously. I walked in the hotel and there was a lot of destruction from cannon fire. I had a meeting with the same people I'd talked to Saturday night down in Grenada. (Laughs) I remember saying, "Well, here we just resume our meeting. Remember the night before last, we urged you not to take action. I want to tell you that you're totally surrounded, and if you keep on going and there's no truce, you're going to be destroyed, every one of you. This is not good at all. You're all friends of ours. You're not going to achieve anything, and you are jeopardizing all these Americans. What you've done is not going to be very popular back in the United States." They kept hinting that we ought to bring in forces. "We're not going to bring in our forces at all. You're responsible for these hostages. We're expecting you to solve this problem."

Ted was with me, too, the two of us. We began to discuss with them a hint that they'd made, that they'd really like to end the thing. They were armed with just old pistols and old rifles, and their armament was nothing. You know, it turned out in the end, there were more than 1,300 of them in that place. Maybe only a third of them had arms, but they had crammed into this small building.

Ted and I put together sort of a proposal that I took up to General Somoza for a cease-fire and an end to the whole thing. Luis was there, too, thank heaven, in the president's office, and I talked mostly to him and the acting president, who was Guerrero, Schick having died. He was a good friend, too. Both Luis and Guerrero were good friends of ours.

The proposal was this: that there should be no more firing, that those in the hotel who were in rebellion would deposit their arms as they walked out, deposit their arms in stacks and be frisked, and would be put on buses and taken back to their home provinces at government expense, and that everybody would be able to return home without being touched. Only then -- this was the condition of the rebels -- would the hostages be freed. They would be the last ones out.

So this was done, and it was done correctly by both sides. They piled up their arms and left, went back home, and somewhere I had to transport a couple hundred miles in government-financed buses back home. I remember being there at the entrance when the last ones put down their arms.

American reporters by that time had got there. It didn't make much of an impression in the US. Some photographers were there with TV crews. You know, not one of them came up to me and asked me for any information. They talked to the colonel commanding our military group; he was the only one they talked to. Therefore, it was reported inaccurately in the United States, the whole thing. There were some newspaper reporters, too. They didn't bother to get a balanced story; they didn't bother to talk to the embassy, nothing like that, or any responsible person. They came back with a report to the US which got played for just one day, and it was warped.

*Q: I'd like to go back to one thing before we move on, and that is you said you figure you had maybe 24 or a little more hours before Washington would take over, and then it would be a big mess. How did you see the situation, as far as Washington? What was the problem about Washington that bothered you?*

ENGLE: They would get too excited about the Americans in that hotel and would want to send protective forces, and that this would get us involved probably more and more, more than just that with the two sides, with our forces there. I thought this was a very bad thing. Remember, we ended up in Santo Domingo with thousands of American troops, and it took months to get out.

*Q: Yes, and with a lot of ill will.*

ENGLE: With a lot of ill will, and we didn't need this.

*Q: But the main thing was, you felt that Washington was inclined, as we were in those days, to send troops. When in doubt, to protect Americans, send troops.*

ENGLE: Probably so. We knew they wouldn't admit this in the first instance; they would wait until the problem looked desperate to them, and then they would make a snap decision like that to throw some forces in, like they had in the Dominican Republic. Maybe not, but it just seemed to us that this was likely, and we didn't want this to have any chance at all of coming about. In fact, it was great the way it happened, because American prestige was high. Everybody thought that we conducted ourselves well. We pulled the two contending parties apart, and both of them, I think, were glad of that. Certainly all the families of the conservatives who were inside that hotel were gratified, because they thought they were going to lose their heads of family. The women, for instance, came around to me afterward, women who never kissed me before, thanks.

*Q: What happened to the young officer, Walter Cadette, who was in the hotel?*

ENGLE: Walter left the Foreign Service after Managua, and he's one of the vice presidents of Morgan Guaranty.

I want to say something about the Americans and other foreigners. It turned out there were 94 Americans and 31 other foreign nations from various countries. We had transport waiting for them. They were put straight into the vehicles, taken straight to American families where they were assigned, given drink if they wanted it, the children were taken care of, and then provided a nice dinner and put to bed. At the same time, we had people working on their transportation outside the country. Within a day or so, we had all of them out of the country or wherever they

wanted to go.

*Q: You were planning all the time for the next step.*

ENGLE: We were planning the next step, and all this without any instructions. It was just the way it should be done.

**LEWIS M. WHITE**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Managua (1964-1969)**

*Lewis M. White was born in August 1921 in Virginia. After serving in the US Army from 1943-1946 he finished his bachelor's degree at Georgetown University. His career included positions in Colombia, New Caledonia, Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Morocco. Mr. White was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in June 2001.*

*Q: Where did you go in '64?*

WHITE: I went to Nicaragua as chief of the economic section. But they'd reduced their staff there. They had three people in the economic section, and they lost their commercial attaché, so they asked me in the Department of Commerce that in addition to being chief of the economic section that I also serve as commercial attaché. I was very glad to have this title as I was always interested in promoting our trade. We had another officer who was a commercial officer.

*Q: You were there from '64 to when?*

WHITE: '69.

*Q: What was the government situation in Nicaragua when you got there?*

WHITE: It had been ever since about 1936, I would say, controlled by the Somoza family. Anastasio Somoza, Sr. was assassinated in '56. He was in the National Guard that we set up and trained during our long occupation of Nicaragua. We thought this institution was necessary to provide some stability and guarantee orderly and democratic changes of government. He was elected president and ruled as a dictator. When he died, his oldest son, Luis Somoza, became president.

Then they had Rene Schick Gutierrez, who was pretty much a stooge of the Somozas. He had been Minister of Education and Minister of Foreign Affairs. He was a bit of a womanizer. He used to flirt with my wife, who was a beautiful woman. Finally it appears that he was getting ready to flee the country with his daughter-in-law when he had a heart attack and died. There were ghastly photos in the newspapers. I knew him rather well and he knew me by sight. He seemed to be fairly popular. At the time Anastasio Somoza, Jr. (Tachito), was in charge of the National Guard. He was

a graduate of West Point..

They had a good rate of economic growth, about 3.5% a year; and just about every year that I was there you could say that there was economic growth and some kind of stability that was favorable to U.S. business, favorable to the Central American common market. I don't recall any excessive inflation. It was an anti-communist government, of course. No communist countries were represented by embassies. They were strongly opposed to Fidel Castro and communist Cuba.

Tacho Somoza was eventually elected president. We were not partial to Tacho. We just accepted the fact that he campaigned for the presidency and was elected. The opposition to him was fractured, which made it easy for him to win.

I think Luis Somoza was probably more effective than Tacho Somoza, but he died while I was there. And he wasn't as harsh as his father. His father invited Sandino to talks and then he had him assassinated when he came. Sandino was one of the original people who fought against our Marines.

I don't think the Marines made a very bad impression, though; they were asked to come in by one of the factions because of the instability in Nicaragua. But we were also in the Dominican Republic for quite a while, collecting the customs and trying to bring some kind of stability.

I don't think there was enormous resentment of the Marine; a lot of Nicaraguan women married Marines. The Marines helped out in their earthquake. We were trying to establish a situation where they would have orderly changes of government. And eventually, when it seemed that that was possible, the Marines were withdrawn.

*Q: As economic counselor, who were you dealing with in the Nicaraguan government?*

WHITE: Well, we dealt with everybody. I could call on Somoza when he was president. I could see President Schick at social events and discuss some problem we might be having. I knew the president of the Central Bank very well and even sent him to the U. S. on a Leader Grant. I always had good relations with the Minister of Economy and the Chief of the National Planning Commission. I could call on the Minister of Agriculture. The officials in Nicaragua were very accessible. I had many contacts in the business community. I liked the place and stayed there five years. I had many contacts and made a list of all of them for my successor with a sketch on each of them.

Somoza supported the Alliance for Progress; he did what he was supposed to do to promote the Alliance for Progress. I think it got worse later when they had the earthquake and he had the constitution changed, and had himself elected for seven years. Then the opposition really got bad; it wasn't bad when I was there, we didn't have much communist insurgency in the country. But after the earthquake in December 1972 that killed around 10,000 people and left 300,000 homeless, repression of the communists increased.

There was one event that sticks in my mind. Prior to the election for president the opposition confronted the National Guard with the demand that it remain neutral in the election process. That

led to violence. Somebody shot at the National Guard. I think it was Juan Parisi. Maybe he killed somebody. Then the National Guard killed about sixty people. And the conservative opposition had snipers on the roofs; they were shooting at people in the streets. The candidate of the Conservative Party, Dr. Fernando Aguero, and his supporters retreated into the Grand Hotel, holding a number of people, including Americans, hostage.

So we were faced with a situation. How could we get those hostages out? Our commercial officer, who had been observing the whole thing for the embassy, was caught in there, too.

*Q: Who was that?*

WHITE: Walter Cadette. After that, he retired from the Foreign Service. He had part of his ear shot off when the National Guard surrounded the hotel and tanks were blasting into the place and shattering glass.

I was in my home in the suburbs at the time. But when the DCM's wife called me up and said, "There's something going on in town," I went in to the embassy.

Ambassador Aaron Brown and the DCM, Jim Engle, were there. We had to decide what we were going to do.

The consul we sent down came back and said he couldn't get through the military lines. And I said, "In the Dominican Republic sometimes we used our military people for things like that, because they're recognized by the military." Colonel Francisco, who administered our military aid, had red hair and I knew he would be easily recognized.

So the ambassador asked that the military attaché Colonel Ladne and Colonel Francisco come down, and Colonel Francisco got through the military lines and talked to our people inside. Eventually we sent Ted Cheney, our political officer, and maybe some others down, and they worked out an agreement to let the people out. His daughter recently wrote an article in *The Foreign Service Journal* on how he mediated this conflict. So far as I know, they let everybody out, even the people that were in the uprising, and didn't do anything very drastic. I believe the opposition leader Fernando Aguero was under house arrest for about six months. I thought the Embassy deserved a lot of credit for the way in which it mediated this affair and no doubt saved many lives.

Jim Engle, the Ambassador, and I were in the Embassy until about 2 a.m. when the ambassador told Jim and me to go home so we could come back the next morning and he would stay through the night.

So when I came in the next day, Juan Parisi, the public enemy number one, who fired the first shot - apparently, because his brother had been killed by the National Guard - was in my office. He wanted asylum. And he stayed there all day. I had to feed him, and his family kept coming in, but we weren't associated with that uprising as far as I know.

So I told the ambassador that I would take Juan Parisi down to the Venezuelan embassy, where

they did give asylum. We could give it in the case of hot pursuit; but in this case, we didn't want to give asylum, we didn't want to be associated with the uprising. I took him in my car down to the Venezuelan embassy in the middle of town. But that was a little touchy because my car wasn't operating. It kept chugging along; I didn't know what was the matter.

But the next day when I went out to take the hostages who spent the night with us to the airport my car broke down altogether. And later I saw that somebody had cut the water hose. So I think somebody must have known I was going to take him to the Venezuelan embassy, and they cut the water hose so I couldn't do it.

*Q: How did it come out? I mean, you got the man to the Venezuelan embassy?*

WHITE: Yes, I got him there. They took him in because he was a friend. We didn't want him all night in the embassy. We didn't want to appear to be involved in the uprising in any way.

One of the inspectors came through about a year later, and he grilled me on it. He seemed to have had a report that the embassy was involved; but I don't think it was. I told him, I thought the people in the political section always had their contacts with the conservatives, and I had my main contacts with the government, dealing with economic issues. I didn't really keep up with the political opposition and didn't get invited to their affairs. I told the inspector that I didn't think we were involved in any way whatsoever. We were just observing what went on and maintaining normal contacts with the opposition..

*Q: Did we have an aid program there, or were they self-sufficient?*

WHITE: No, they needed aid, and we had an aid program. I remember we were building the Rama Road with a U. S. loan.. We were engaged in various projects to help them; we gave pretty substantial aid. I know I got some Export-Import Bank loans to build granaries. It was part of the Alliance for Progress. They were in the Alliance for Progress just like all the Central American countries. They had a Central American Common Market and I spent a lot of time reporting on developments in the Common Market.

*Q: Were you feeling any political pressure while you were there, because the Somozas had pretty good contact with certain elements within our Congress? I was wondering if you felt any of that?*

WHITE: I didn't feel any political pressure at all. In one case, I decided to recommend the president of the central bank, who was a good friend, always a good contact, and I thought he was a pretty able man, for a Leader grant in the United States. Then Somoza fired him. And then he came in and said, "Well, do you still want to send me to the United States on a Leader grant?" I said, "Well, certainly. I think if you've got the abilities and capabilities." So we sent him to the States; I know Somoza didn't like it - the man they fired we sent to the States on a Leader grant.

*Q: Of course, the whole idea is that it's not somebody that 's already in the government, but somebody that's got potential. Isn't that part of the promise?*

WHITE: I had that impression. And I knew that former Ambassador Brown had a high opinion of

the president of the Central Bank. Some of his enemies were saying that he had been a communist as a student in Chile. But we had no evidence of that.

What would the Congress want us to do, that we didn't do? What kind of pressure?

*Q: I was just wondering whether you were getting pressure from somebody in Congress to, say, be sure to approve this particular aid request or something?*

WHITE: No, I don't think so. But I don't think we would do it if we didn't think it was a valid request, being useful to the country, just because somebody from Congress thought it should be done. We might listen to it and consider it, but that wouldn't be the determining factor.

*Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?*

WHITE: We had Aaron Brown as ambassador; he was a career man, a very good man. An Excellent man. Then we had Kennedy Crockett, who had been a civil servant with the Department and I think was "Wristonized" down there. He had been DCM in Costa. He was a very good man; he was from Texas. So we had two very good people there. I liked the embassy team quite a bit and I loved the Nicaraguan people. I hoped we could do something about their poverty, which was extreme.

I might add something at this point about my wife. She was very active in cultural circles wherever we went. Tacho Somoza was married to an American, Hope Portocarrero, whose uncle was Nicaraguan ambassador in the U.S. She asked my wife to go with her one time to see the Conservatorio of Music in Guatemala with the idea of establishing something similar in Nicaragua. Later Joaquin Chamorro, the publisher of the opposition newspaper *La Prensa*, present my wife with an award as the person who had contributed the most to Nicaraguan culture in that year. After we left Chamorro was assassinated - some say by henchmen of Somoza - and later when free elections were held his wife Violeta de Chamorro defeated Daniel Ortega, the Sandinista, in the presidential elections.

*Q: How about the banana companies? Was United Fruit a power there at that time?*

WHITE: Well, we had Standard Fruit, but I don't think they were a power. I went over and visited their establishment on the Atlantic coast. We had the Bonanza Gold Mines; I visited the gold mines too with Ambassador Brown. I don't think they had any influence on the government, didn't try to influence the government. Occidental Petroleum built a fertilizer plant. The government was very glad to have these investors, as far as I could determine, and they wanted even more U.S. direct investment.

But the climate wasn't good in Nicaragua for foreign investment. Other countries in Central America were more pleasant place to live.

*Q: Was this because of the weather and that sort of thing?*

WHITE: Yes, it's hot in Managua. In Guatemala it was much better. In Costa Rica, the cities were

more pleasant to live in and the climate was better. But as far as being pro- American, friendly people, I think the “Nicas” were just about tops.

*Q: Were we sensing a major divide between the peon class or the peasant class and the ruling people?*

WHITE: I used always to be very sorry for the people in Nicaragua because they were poverty-stricken. They had unemployment; they had a lot of poverty. Even the wealthier classes did not seem particularly wealthy. And the problem was, what could you do about that poverty? Even the Somoza government - they were part of the Alliance for Progress - they were doing some things. The principal cash producing exports were coffee and cotton. Both were very dependent on world prices and there was a quota for coffee. Some Americans were there growing cotton, but when the price declined they were forced to close down and return to the U.S. With the exception of the Somoza family I didn't see tremendous wealth there. But I always thought globalization was the way to deal with poverty in these countries. Private investment. They have to have the proper climate for it. I didn't think big government programs were the solution.

*Q: What about the ruling family? Did the Somoza family and its offshoots pretty well control everything?*

WHITE: They had a lot of land, a lot of property, a lot of companies. But Somoza always said, “It's better that we invest our money here and create employment, rather than invest it abroad.” But his companies were not always profitable. Some owed money to American companies. I could have said we are not a collection agency. But if I had some influence, I used it. I knew people in the business community very well and was on good terms with them.

*Q: How successful were you?*

WHITE: I usually got it eventually. I was dealing with Somoza's people, and they found the money one way or another.

*Q: Did you have many Congressional groups coming down?*

WHITE: We always had Congressional groups every place I've been. And other kinds of groups. We had the Vice President come down - Rockefeller. Different delegations. You know how it is in the Foreign Service. I don't think there's a single country where you don't have these delegations. Of course, we didn't have the big ones like those we received in Morocco.

*Q: No, no. Well, sometimes. I was talking to somebody that was ambassador to Costa Rica, I think in the early '70s, who said the highest American government official to come was the lieutenant governor of Mississippi. And he just happened to have spent the night there. I realize this is in Costa Rica.*

WHITE: Well, I don't think we had an exorbitant amount, but every now and then you'd have a delegation of somebody from Washington, even if it was only one of the staff aides.

*Q: What was your impression of how the National Guard operated and acted towards the people?*

WHITE: They wouldn't be like Costa Rica, where they were nothing but a police force; they had more control than that. There were firefights when they had leftist opposition in the countryside - a few firefights when I was there. I don't think it was as brutal as say Argentina and Chile during the seventies.

I was not a tremendous admirer of the National Guard, although we did create it because we thought they could guarantee free elections, an orderly change of government. But I guess they had to have some sort of an army. It wasn't any worse than, say, the Guatemalan army or the Salvadoran army.

*Q: During '64 to '69, there hadn't been many great changes in Nicaragua, had there?*

WHITE: There was the fact that they had the rate of growth of about 3.5% a year. They had a pretty good economy as far as exports were concerned. I don't recall much inflation. And they tried to make the investment climate good. They were cooperating to a certain extent with other Central American countries in the Central American Common Market. There were programs of the Alliance for Progress that were going ahead.

After I left it got worse, because then they had the big earthquake that killed about 10,000 people and destroyed Managua. Then Somoza became more dictatorial. And especially the communist activity became much greater.

Eventually he stepped down because he was losing control. He ended up in Paraguay where he was assassinated. And the Sandinistas came in at first with other opposition groups, too, but then it became more and more leftist and more and more dependent on the communist countries. An unfriendly government.

**A. LINCOLN GORDON**  
**Assistant Secretary for Latin America**  
**Washington, DC (1966-1967)**

*Ambassador Lincoln Gordon graduated from Harvard University in 1933, was a Rhodes scholar, taught at Harvard, and then held a variety of positions in the United States Government. Ambassador Gordon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1987.*

*Q: Was Johnson able to deal with them pretty much on an equal basis? He didn't play the big brother?*

GORDON: No, no. In fact, he was very respectful of their position as presidents, the office. I had also noticed this when presidents visited Washington. Of course, that was another thing that brought us together in the White House. We had received Diaz Ordaz. We had Forbes Burnham from Guyana, the Prime Minister; we had Schick, who died a few weeks later of a heart attack, but who was [from] Nicaragua, and some other Latin American VIPs visiting at the White House. I

remember with Schick, for example -- after all, Nicaragua's a pretty small country -- but the President was very courteous with his fellow president.

There was one other episode there, having to do with Schick's death which I found quite moving. It illustrates, in a rather nice way, what you might call the sentimental side of the President's character. We got word one day -- in a flash telegram from the Embassy down in Managua -- that Schick had fainted at some ceremony at noon or so, and had been taken off to a hospital. The first reports were not too serious, but it was an alert. I'd been down on an official visit to Nicaragua about two weeks before. Schick had been up at the White House four or five weeks before. I'd become quite fond of him. He was a very attractive man, about my own age, much too young to have a fatal heart attack I thought. But we got another message during the course of the afternoon, and the report seemed to be all right. Still later, I was in the office by myself, trying to clean up the day's work, at about six-thirty or seven.

A telephone call came through from Guillermo Sevilla Sacasa, the dean of the [Diplomatic] Corps and the man who has been the Nicaraguan ambassador in Washington since the flood, saying, "I've just been on the line to Managua and talking to my" -- his wife is a [relative] of [Anastasio] Somoza [Debayle] -- "brother-in-law." I presume he means the present president. "And," he said, "the situation with President Schick is much worse than has been told to the public. I'm terribly worried about it, and they're worried about it. They've got a couple of pretty good cardiologists, but all of us would feel much happier if we could just get somebody from Walter Reed to help out the team there and make sure that everything possible is being done."

I said, "I'm sure this can be arranged. Give me a little while. It's late, and I'm all alone here, but let me see what I can do." So I called up the Secretary of the Army, who was on his way home. I took advantage of the opportunity to go home myself, and he called me shortly after I got home. I explained the situation to him. He said, "Well, I'll call the director of Walter Reed, and he'll be in touch with you in a few minutes."

Fifteen or twenty minutes [later], this director, Doctor So-and-so -- I've forgotten his name -- called. And I explained the situation. He said, "Oh, no problem at all -- except transportation. Obviously, if we're going to get anybody down quickly, it'll have to be on a special plane, and that means a White House plane. We're not authorized to do that without word from the President."

I said, "I'll take care of that." So I got hold of the White House operator and asked for Walt Rostow. The President was host that night for a big dinner party for the President of Israel, at which Walt was also present. I said to the operator, "It's urgent. Please have him paged, and I'll wait." I waited, and in due course Walt came to the phone, and I explained the situation. Walt said, "Well, obviously there's no question about this. But it's a funny thing. The President, lately, on these special plane missions, has insisted on knowing about them himself. I'm sure there won't be any problem, but I'll have to buttonhole him. I can get to him in the next twenty minutes. I'll call you back. Just stay put there." So I waited.

About twenty minutes later, the telephone rang. It was the White House operator and then the President himself. He had left the dinner party to call me. He'd gone upstairs to his bedroom, because the situation involved a presidential heart attack. I think he was moved by the combination

of his having had a heart attack himself, plus the fact that this was another president, plus, I'm sure, the fact that he had entertained Schick there in the White House only a couple of weeks before. He said, "Of course there will be an airplane, no problem about that. What I want you to do is more than getting just any old Walter Reed cardiologist. I want you to get two. I want my own heart man, Willis Hurst, who's down in Atlanta, Georgia. And I want you to get Dr. Mattingly, Ike's heart man. Get the plane to pick up Mattingly at Andrews, stop in Atlanta and pick up Dr. Hurst." I said, "How do I get a hold of Dr. Hurst in Atlanta?" He said, "Do that through the White House operator. That's easy. I've got my Air Aide with me, Colonel So-and-so, and he'll take care of all the details on the plane. I'll put him on when we finish talking." And he asked me if I had any late reports and [was] intensely anxious that no stone be left unturned.

So I spent the next hour on the telephone. But the first thing I did was to put in a call for Atlanta. I asked the operator to call Dr. Hurst and said I would wait. She found his line was busy. When I finally got through to him, I found that the President had called him directly to tell him to expect my call. I finally got Dr. Mattingly -- the poor fellow had been at a movie -- and got the whole thing laid on. About midnight the Air Aide called me to say the plane had just taken off from Andrews Air Base. Unfortunately, Schick died while they were on their way.

**ROBERT E. WHITE**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Managua (1970-1972)**

*Ambassador Robert E. White was born in 1926 in Massachusetts. He was in the U.S. Navy from 1944-1946. He received a bachelor's degree from St. Michael's College in 1952 and a master's degree from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1954. Ambassador White entered the Foreign Service in 1955. He worked primarily in Latin America, with posts in Ecuador, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Colombia, and ambassadorships to Paraguay and El Salvador. He was interviewed by Bill Knight in 1992.*

WHITE: In 1972, I left the Peace Corps and went to Nicaragua as Deputy Chief of Mission. I left the Peace Corps because I received a call from the White House, from Dwight Chapin, I had to fire five or six people in order to make room for Republican political appointees. There had already been rumors about this, and I said: "Look, I'm not going to do that." I went to see John Crimmins, then Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, who responded in what I thought was a totally admirable way. He said, "You did the right thing. I don't have any office directorships open. You'll be a DCM in the morning." And so I ended up in Nicaragua.

Unfortunately, I ended up as DCM to an ambassador who was arguably the worst ambassador we've ever sent to Latin America up until that time. His name was Turner B. Shelton. He became a total acolyte of the Somoza dictatorship. This left me in a rather unusual role.

*Q: He's the one who kept the refugees out of the embassy at the time of the earthquake?*

WHITE: Right. It was one disaster after another. Just to give one example, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. When Somoza had him assassinated in 1978 or '79, that provided the flashpoint for the Sandinista revolution. This was a man of such fame, for his total integrity and patriotism that his violent death brought all the disparate groups together in Nicaragua and that event, more than anything else, ended the Somoza dynasty. There was a running battle between Somoza and Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, who was the editor and publisher of La Prensa, the most powerful newspaper perhaps in Central America at that time. He (Somoza) had made a remark that could have been interpreted by his zealous supporters as a license to do away with Pedro Joaquin and I suggested to the ambassador that there should be some public way of identifying with Chamorro in order to extend some protection over this person who was playing a remarkably positive and pro-democratic role. He refused out of fear of offending President Somoza. I called up Pedro Joaquin and said I think we should have lunch in some public place very soon. He said: "I have already eaten lunch but I will come and have a second lunch with you." So we went to probably the most popular restaurant in Managua and put ourselves on display. The United States presence was so powerful that even having lunch with the DCM served as some measure of protection and Pedro Joaquin Chamorro understood this gesture and was pleased with it.

*Q: Did you have any feeling that Shelton's attitude to these things was under instruction from Washington?*

WHITE: Not in the normal sense of instructions. Turner B. Shelton had been a USIA officer. He had come into USIA because during the war he was the liaison between the motion picture industry and the U.S. government. When Edward R. Murrow came in to head the agency he somehow effected the transfer of Shelton to the State Department. The State Department had real problems with Shelton and he was on the selection out list. But he had been DCM in Budapest. After Richard Nixon was defeated as governor of California, he went on a trip to Europe. All of the ambassadors and chargés had something else to do when Richard Nixon called and wanted to come in and speak to the ambassador. But not Shelton, as he recounted to me many times. They talked until three in the morning, and had a couple of days together. This connection obviously served him well. During my time there, Howard Hughes was ejected from the Bahamas and came to Nicaragua. The Secretary of Commerce came down and cleared the way for him to be there. So, yes, my impression is that the Nixon White House felt very close to Somoza. And, while Shelton, if anything, went against the official instructions of the State Department, I think he had good solid backing for the way he conducted himself in Nicaragua.

Scandal piled on scandal. For example, AID funds were being diverted into the pockets of the Somoza clan. The Vice President, even though he was a loyal Liberal, and a friend of Somoza through his father, had a large family and his kids were being influenced by the Sandinistas and particularly by the church, he was worried about the future of his country. And he was, within reasonably tolerant limits, an honorable person. He and I would meet and he would tell me where the stolen funds were going, how they were being siphoned off, and I would report this. The ambassador found out who was telling me this and told President Somoza. It's a wonder that they didn't kill the fellow. He was fired as vice president. This was, to me, the last straw. I wrote a letter to Charlie Myers and John Crimmins in the ARA front office, a private letter, no copies, and it went all the way up to U. Alexis Johnson, who was famous for being Nixon's favorite career Foreign Service officer. He too was outraged and he wrote in the margin "Let us get rid of this

man!" -- meaning Shelton. But even he wasn't powerful enough to do it.

Q: *How long were you in Nicaragua?*

WHITE: Two years. 1970 to 1972.

Q: *Was your personal relationship with Turner B. Shelton a tempestuous one?*

WHITE: Well, it had its problems. Yes, it had a lot of problems. It was really a quite good embassy with solid professional people and a political AID director, Bill Haynes, who was really excellent. A Republican from Texas. A man who really ran the mission well. Yet, it is impossible to keep an embassy running in a professional way if everybody isn't doing their job and telling the truth and having frank exchanges. So with Turner B. Shelton my insistence that the embassy report the repressive features of the Somoza regime, about the corruption, about all these different problems we had with the Somoza government, resulted in real tensions within the embassy.

In fact, after I wrote that letter I referred to, I got a call from John Crimmins saying, "Look, we believe all that is going to happen to you if you stay there is that you are going to get badly hurt. Therefore we are going to pull you out of there and send someone else. There's no way we effectively can do the work the Foreign Service is supposed to do as long as he is there. So we are not going to worry about Nicaragua for a while."

**RONALD D. GODARD**  
**Political Officer**  
**Managua (1973-1975)**

*Ambassador Ronal Godard was born in Oklahoma and raised in Oklahoma and Texas. He was educated at Odessa College and the University of Texas. After a tour with the Peace Corps in Ecuador, he joined the State Department in 1967 and was posted to Panama, the first of his assignments in Central and South America. These include Costa Rica, Chile, Nicaragua, Argentina and Guyana, where he served as Ambassador from 2000 to 2003. His Washington assignments also concerned Latin American Affairs. During his career the Ambassador served with the Organization of American States, was diplomat in residence at the University of Illinois in Chicago and was Political Officer in Istanbul. Ambassador Godard was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

Q: *Ok, well then in '73 or so you moved out?*

GODARD: While I was in Washington I got a call toward the end of my tour. I guess it was the political section chief who'd called me, and recruited me for a job in Managua, Nicaragua. This was right after the earthquake in December of '72 when the city had been wiped out. It sounded real interesting, the job did, when I talked to my future boss and somehow I sold it to my wife, taking our newborn son and my little girl down to the ruins of Managua. I accepted the assignment and it was a very interesting tour.

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

GODARD: Summer of '73 until summer of '75.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

GODARD: The ambassador in those days was Turner B. Shelton. He was a conservative. I don't know if he was a great donor to the party. He used to be a filmmaker.

*Q: I'm told that one of the things he had done at various times was make sure that congressmen were very happy wherever he was.*

GODARD: The story is that he was in Budapest I think it was and Nixon, during those years in exile before he came back and after he had lost the governor's race in California, did some traveling. And he was very well taken care of by Turner B. Shelton in Budapest and that's where the connection was established. I don't know if apocryphal or not.

*Q: My ambassador, same period, was Henry Tasca in Athens, who had done the same for Nixon in Morocco.*

GODARD: Ok. Well Shelton's claim to fame before was I think Hopalong Cassidy films was one of the things that he did in Hollywood and he was very close to the Somoza government in Nicaragua.

*Q: One of the stories that still circulates in Foreign Service circles is how he closed the residence down after the earthquake. He was not very welcoming to anybody who needed housing or even to go to the bathroom or something like that.*

GODARD: That's right. Those were the stories. I wasn't there immediately after the earthquake, they had people that found appropriate housing by the time I got there, but those were the kinds of... I lived for two years with earthquake stories from all the people who had been there. From Nicaraguans and from the embassy staff, and one of the stories was that they camped out on the grounds, but were not allowed in the building for the operation of the embassy immediately after the earthquake. Because the embassy building was completely destroyed. It was on the cusp of a volcano and there was a fault that ran right under it. The one person that died was the ambassador's secretary I think. Staff housing collapsed next to the embassy. But yeah, there's lots of stories about the ambassador and his wife not being particularly outgoing toward the staff during those times of crisis.

*Q: Well then, what was the political situation like when you got to Nicaragua in '73?*

GODARD: It was a pact that had been concluded by Somoza who was a very able politician. The conservative party was the traditional opposition to his government, and then Somoza sort of double crossed the guy that he'd made the deal with, Fernando Agüero, and made a deal with lesser lights in the conservative party and had somebody on a triumvirate that he had created who was

much more malleable. It was essentially a military dictatorship. The Somoza family ran it as a family enterprise. They had one of the major newspapers there. The competition was a conservative politician, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, who was the most prominent opposition force there. They very wisely allowed the opposition to maintain that aspect of democracy, but they controlled very closely the economic life of the country. A lot of corruption. And that set the stage for the Sandinista revolution, and I saw just the beginnings of that toward the end of my tour.

A celebrated incident happened. I was in Costa Rica with my in-laws who were visiting at the time. As I was driving back I heard over the news that the border was being closed and there was some sort of problem in the capital. The Sandinistas had mounted a dramatic attack on the home of a former labor minister at a Christmas party. They had captured most of the cabinet, their ambassador to the United States who was Somoza's brother-in-law, Somoza's sister, almost got our ambassador who was there. A good part of the diplomatic corps was at this same function. And they held them hostage and they negotiated on and on and finally obtained the release of some of the Sandinista figures that had been arrested and were in jail at that point. And it was the cardinal of the Catholic church who was the primary negotiator and I think the Spanish ambassador played a role as well. Dean of the diplomatic corps. And as I left town they had negotiated transportation to the airport and they went on to Cuba. As they left town, people along the sides of the streets applauded as they left. During the two years that I'd been there, the Sandinistas, we'd heard rumors about their being up in the hills. Every once in a while there were shootouts of one kind or another that we only were able to gather limited information about what had really happened. So we knew that there was this activity out there, but the attitude of the public toward the Sandinistas after that incident was a pretty dramatic indication that the day of the Somozas was coming to an end. And after that the momentum kept growing. There were other dramatic guerilla activities, and their neighboring states, particularly the Costa Ricans, were aiding and abetting the Sandinistas.

*Q: As a political officer, what were you doing?*

GODARD: The ambassador pretty well monopolized contact with the foreign minister and Somoza; those were his primary contacts. And I, as a political officer, part of my job was young leaders' opposition parties. I was particularly in contact with the Christian democrats, and some of the other conservative politicians of one kind or another. I was also the labor officer. There was a big hospital strike there where I co-authored with my boss a dissent channel cable reporting on the events in that strike. The ambassador had refused to send it out, so we sent it as a dissent cable. It was a good opportunity for me to learn my trade as a political officer. It was the job of taking people out to lunch, entertaining them at dinner, and getting to know personally political leaders I would subsequently run across during my career as they became more important.

*Q: But now was Shelton, was he the ambassador the whole time you were there?*

GODARD: Yeah. He was there for almost four years in all I think.

*Q: Was there any disquiet within the embassy about too close ties to the Somoza and company?*

GODARD: There certainly was in the political section. And there was always tension involving my boss in particular.

*Q: Who was your boss?*

GODARD: Jim Cheek was the chief of the political section. The ambassador, as I say in talking about the dissent channel message, it was sometimes difficult to get our reporting cleared up to Washington.

*Q: What was the issue on the hospital negotiations?*

GODARD: Well, it was pooh-poohed and discounted as a significant event by the front office. We didn't want to make too much of it because it was still early, but it was a significant concession I think on the part of the government, finally coming to this agreement. So we wanted to get that story out, and we finally did. The guy who handled that message was Luigi Einaudi who was on Kissinger's staff at Policy Planning and Jim actually got a commendation, what was the award?

*Q: The Rifkin award.*

GODARD: He subsequently got the Rifkin award for a lot of other things that he had done. So it was a difficult situation, and that continued after Jim left. I was there by myself for a while, and then Jerry Sutton followed, my next boss, also a very strong officer.

*Q: How were relations with the ambassador?*

GODARD: At my level they were pretty nonexistent. Didn't have much contact with him, he didn't have much to do with me. The DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission), I saw him..

*Q: Who was the DCM?*

GODARD: Leland Warner was the DCM in those days. And he was a good DCM in terms of supporting his ambassador, and was certainly not a sympathizer of a more balanced approach to reporting on Somoza. Bob White was the DCM before. Shelton had asked for him to be replaced. They brought in another DCM who he could get along better with. Bob went on to bigger and better things later on. But the contact I had with the ambassador was very, very limited.

*Q: Did you get any feel for this Somoza support within the United States? I think he had been at West Point, and a congressman had been his roommate, a West Point graduate or something.*

GODARD: John Murphy was the guy I think he'd been a roommate with. Somoza was a very capable politician, and a very personable guy to deal with one on one, and had quite a following back in the States. Folks that he knew personally and people like Congressman Murphy were willing to really stand up for him. So he had a certain amount of support back in the States and certainly they had through the ambassador the ear of the Nixon administration. Things began to change after Nixon stepped down. It became more and more difficult to ignore the rising opposition to the dictatorship, and also more difficult to ignore the kind of corruption that was going on. We were pouring a lot of money in there through AID (Agency for International Development).

*Q: One of the things that often happens in an embassy is that the upper reaches of an embassy, the ambassador supported by his DCM and all, can often understand or get very close to the powers that be in the country. And I'm talking about a country where there's corruption, where there's a dictatorship of one form or another. And the junior officers, sometimes mid-career officers are kind of seething underneath. They want to get out and change the world. I mean this is a normal dynamic that played out in families everywhere else. Was this going on in Managua?*

GODARD: Oh yeah. All the other officers were pretty appalled at the policy approach that we were taking with the Somoza government. Not all of them, but almost all of them. We had a very active social life, some of my best friends are still people that I had known in Managua. Those relationships have been enduring. Got together a lot and talked about the sorts of things that were going on. And it sort of duplicated itself in our wives' lives as well in terms of the us and them kind of situation, in that his wife was a very strong personality.

*Q: This is Leslie.*

GODARD: Yes, Leslie Shelton. Who ran the wives' group with an iron hand sort of thing, and was also very supportive of Dona Hope Portocarrero de Somoza, Anastasio Somoza's wife. That was just when things were changing in the Foreign Service, when there were prohibitions against mentioning the wives' role in the performance reports of an officer. And there was a lot of new guidelines. There was actually an attempt to suppress that cable when it came out, and my wife was one of the people who was leading the wives in taking a principled position that they too could.. there were little things, the fundraising, how the money was spent, stuff like that, that they took a stand on and were instrumental in a small way in moving the status of spouses in the Foreign Service in the right direction I think.

*Q: Had any of the figures, Ortegas or anyone else, crossed your path at all, the Sandinista type?*

GODARD: They were all in the hills. They were all clandestine. I can't think of any who became prominent members of the directorate of the FSLN (Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) who were out in the open. They were either in exile somewhere else or in the hills.

*Q: People you were acquaintances were saying, "Well you know I've got a friend who was a college friend of mine, he's up in the hills," that sort of thing?*

GODARD: There were actually some of the lead families in Nicaragua whose sons were a part of this revolutionary movement. They were some of the best families in Nicaragua. Those names reappeared in the FSLN directorate later on, in the leadership of the party. So you heard stories like that, about the Carreon kids had disappeared, and there's rumors that they're up in the hills, and then the university campus here again was just awash with the pro-FSLN sympathy. And there were also, as it became clearer for the legitimate political parties, the ones that were not in clandestinely, who were operating, the Christian democrats, social democrats, the conservative party, and some others, that the real gain was the Sandinistas because they were the only way they were going to get rid of this guy, open the society up. Later on they formed a coalition of support, and eventually you have parties clear across the political spectrum, from communist to social

democrats to conservative party figures supporting the revolution. And that's how many of my contacts whom I had known suddenly became cabinet ministers and whatever in the government that finally came to power.

*Q: Did we have much contact, it was called the national guard wasn't it? This was Somoza's military force. How were they looked upon?*

GODARD: They were corrupt. I think their loyalty was maintained through this system of corruption from the Somozas. They were giving pieces of the economy, in fact headed up autonomous, rather semi-autonomous agencies of one kind or another of government entities and whatever. Among the officers, I don't remember any heroes out there. They were a pretty disreputable bunch far as I could tell. Somoza himself headed up the national guard, but his half brother, illegitimate son of his father's, was the general in charge.

*Q: Did you press Chamorro?*

GODARD: Pedro Joaquin Chamorro.

*Q: And his wife Violeta. Were they part of your..?*

GODARD: Oh yeah. I knew them both. In fact, when I came back, that trip I was telling you about from Costa Rica, this seizure of Chairman Castillo's house. My assignment from my boss, Jerry Sutton, was to go see Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, because immediately what Somoza had done was occupy the principal offices of Cesar, that was his paper, and impose strict censorship on the paper. So I went to demonstrate, show the flag is what it amounted to, that we were concerned and watching very closely what was going to happen to Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. He was very glad to see me. Took me around the paper and introduced me to the military people who were there watching the operation of the paper and so forth. I don't think he ever forgot that gesture because it was a very tense moment. He always lived on the edge and finally was killed by somebody acting on behalf of Somoza I think, elements of a coup in that. Anyway, he was always sort of on the edge of tolerance for the Somoza regime. But they were the true voice of opposition.

*Q: How about his wife Violeta?*

GODARD: I had met her. At that stage Violeta was very much a housewife. She did not play a preeminent role in politics. She was of course the president when I came back the second time, so I got to know her quite well. But at the time I first knew her, she was very attentive to her guests and ran around getting them drinks and making sure that you were taken care of and all of this sort of thing. She sort of repeated that pattern as president. Very can I get you anything?

*Q: What about later when the Sandinistas took over, which wasn't that much later, it became very much the in thing with what do you call it, the glitterati, the chattering class in Europe and in the United States, was there any sort of group from this particular group, the commentators or the czars and all, who were protesting against the Somoza government, or was this not on their radar?*

GODARD: Among the opposition?

*Q: I'm thinking in the United States or in Europe.*

GODARD: Well, I think it was a little early for that. There was some literature about the dictatorships in Latin America, but I don't remember Somoza attracting a lot of high profile attention. The problems of Nicaragua I don't think had really come on the screen. We were still pretty much in ignorance I think of the developing political turmoil in Central America. We were focused, insofar as we thought much about Latin America, on Cuba.

*Q: And also on Chile.*

GODARD: And Chile. Big problems in Chile. Argentina later. Central America I don't think really got on the screen.

*Q: I talked to somebody who was ambassador to I think Costa Rica a little bit around this time, was saying that the highest level visitor he had was the lieutenant governor of Mississippi.*

GODARD: That sounds right. We did have while I was there Somoza's supporters. I think Murphy came down, and this senator from Nebraska whose name I can't remember was visiting, but that was pretty much it. It was much before the slew of coattails that came traipsing through Central America all the time later in my career.

*Q: How about Cuba? Was Cuba messing around there?*

GODARD: Yes, later on. It was '75 when I left Nicaragua. The Sandinistas were victorious in '79, that was the time that the revolution occurred, but it was gradually building up and indeed Castro is the one who brought together the various elements of, I'm confusing the FMLN with the FSLN. I don't think he had a role in that. But anyway, all of the commandantes at one time or another spent a good deal of time in Cuba. They got some training there and then later on, particularly through Costa Rica, they established a supply line that all kinds of weapons were brought in for them to use, a big push against Somoza.

**AARON BENJAMIN**  
**Program Officer, USAID**  
**Managua (1974-1978)**

*Aaron Benjamin was born in New York, New York in 1932. He received a bachelor's degree from Brooklyn College in 1954 and a master's degree from New York University in 1959. Before joining USAID in 1966, Mr. Benjamin worked as an urban planner for many years in New York, San Francisco, and Zurich. His career with USAID included posts in Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, and Egypt. Mr. Benjamin was interviewed by Charles Christian in 1996.*

BENJAMIN: I think it was at the beginning of 1974, that I got a call from Nicaragua, which had suffered a major earthquake in December of 1972. Apparently, several major fault lines converged right in the center of the old downtown of Managua, the capital city, and with the earthquake, it was literally wiped away. I was invited to come up there to get involved in their reconstruction program and was pleased to accept considering the enormous challenge.

*Q: That was a real challenge for our disaster assistance program as I remember.*

BENJAMIN: Yes it was. OFDA did a tremendous job during the first year after the earthquake, providing emergency assistance, tents, medicine, etc. I went up to Nicaragua in February of 1974, and immediately got involved in several programs. One was called Las Americas, a project to convert 11,000 temporary shelters into permanent homes. These were wooden shacks that were built in three months. We developed a program to make these houses permanent over a three year period. The first stage was to put in utilities, water, sewer, electricity, and so on; the second stage was to put in a cement floor over the dirt floor of each dwelling. Next, we put in pre-fabricated sanitary units, with built in shower and sink just outside of the shelters, replacing the latrines outback.

The next step, was to build three rows of cinder blocks at ground level, around the perimeter of each house cementing the blocks to the cement floor. At the same time, at intervals of one meter, we installed foundations. These consisted of a steel angle attached to a cinder block. We planted these foundations in the ground and attached them to the block walls.

Except when the cement floors were being poured, the family was able to continue living in the house while the construction was going on. Eventually, the rows of cinder blocks were built up to window level, the roof was replaced, and rooms were added.

During this three-year period, schools, day care and health centers were built in each neighborhood, as well as. factories and vocational training centers within walking distance or a short bus ride from the project to provide vital sources of employment for project residents. We had, in the space of three years, converted a community of 11,000 temporary shacks built to respond to the emergency needs of the earthquake into a community of about 8,000 permanent homes served by a complete array of services and community facilities.

*Q: This was a program that was expedited I would assume. There was a lot of pressure to move quickly on this one.*

BENJAMIN: Oh yes, absolutely.

*Q: It was well funded I would assume.*

BENJAMIN: Yes, a \$3 million grant was provided at the emergency phase to build the temporary houses, and was followed up by a \$15 million loan for their conversion into permanent housing and services. Incidentally, another \$15 million was provided in Housing Guaranty Authorization for middle-income housing. Apart from housing programs, another \$30 million loan was provided for general reconstruction, which included the construction of schools, hospitals and public

offices. Also, low cost financing was provided for water and sewer connections in pre existing low income neighborhoods.

Most of the new facilities were built in three distinct satellite centers, seven kilometers from the old center, away from the fault lines, in the vicinity of the new housing projects that I described previously. Each of these centers was to have major shopping and office facilities and were to be connected by ring roads similar to our Washington D.C. Beltway System. Three ring roads were planned which would be intersected at critical intervals by radial roads, coming out of the center of the city. To serve the technical needs of the reconstruction project, I was responsible for the recruitment and management of about 50 expert consultants, including architects, engineers, urban planners, economists, sociologists et. al.

So, that was the nature of our reconstruction program. I must say that although the plan that I just described was supported by the AID Mission, the Nicaraguan Government and most of the private sector, it was subject to a lot of criticism. There were many interests that wanted to return to the status quo and rebuild back in the old downtown, right on the concentration of fault lines that had caused such horrific damage in the first place.

*Q: These satellite centers were out in the suburbs?*

BENJAMIN: Yes. They were about seven kilometers away from the old center. We had hoped that eventually the old center would be cleaned up and redeveloped with recreational facilities and parks, but under no circumstances rebuilt to the same degree of high density as before. Remember, 10,000 people died in that earthquake; and virtually all of the deaths took place in the old downtown area.

*Q: That is a tremendous number.*

BENJAMIN: Especially in a town with a population of only 250,000

*Q: Did they end up with parks in the center of town after that, or did they build back up?*

BENJAMIN: No, unfortunately, at least to the best of my knowledge, the center has not yet been rebuilt at all. Efforts have been stymied because of the political turmoil that has taken place over the years in Nicaragua. I left Nicaragua after about four and one half years in July of 1978, when the Sandinista invasion of the capital city took place. The Sandinistas ran the government for several years, which period was characterized by counter revolutionary activities and economic deprivation. There were great hopes for an economic resurgence with the advent of free elections a few years ago, but regrettably thus far, no major changes for the better have taken place.

*Q: I assume under the type of government they had down there before the Sandinistas, the full support of the country was available for the relief programs?*

BENJAMIN: Yes. The government pledged all available resources to relieve the suffering caused by the earthquake and to restore the damaged and destroyed facilities -- schools, hospitals, roads, housing, as soon as possible.

It should be noted that there was not only a concerted effort to reconstruct and replace damaged public and private facilities, but also to respond to the long-term development needs of not only the capital but also secondary cities like Leon, Masaya, Corinto and Granada. These cities had populations ranging from 20,000 to 60,000. To determine their urban development needs, AID financed a National Urban Assessment which was carried out with the cooperation of INCAE, the Central American Center for Business Administration, which was located near Managua. Urban Planning Programs were developed for the individual municipalities and technical assistance was provided to the Vice Ministry of Urban Planning, which in turn provided technical assistance to the smaller communities. AID was interested in expediting the development of the secondary cities and promoting the devolution of power from the central government and the capital city, to these smaller communities, ultimately transferring to them, economic as well as political power. That in itself was quite an interesting program, and I think we made a very positive impact.

Also, we had an excellent agrarian assistance program called INVIERNO, the acronym for the Institute for the Welfare of the Farmer. It examined virtually every facet of rural life and provided assistance for various sectors such as agricultural production, marketing, transportation and health, generating market town and rural municipal development technical assistance and loan programs.

*Q: So there was a substantial development program going on at the same time as relief activities.*

BENJAMIN: That's right. It wasn't just a reconstruction program. As I've indicated, it was quite varied. Development initiatives in the urban, rural and industrial sectors were being carried out concurrently. The program was ambitious and very challenging. I was professionally satisfied with my contributions to both the reconstruction and long-term development aspects of the AID Program, and I was particularly gratified when the AID Mission nominated me for the Rockefeller Award for my accomplishments. Also, I was one of three winners named for a joint award by AID for the design and management of the grant funded technical assistance program, which helped to create the institutional capability to guide the planning and reconstruction of a new Managua.

*Q: All right, that brings us to about 1978.*

**CHARLES ANTHONY GILLESPIE, JR.**  
**USAID**  
**Managua (1976-1978)**

**Nicaragua Task Force**  
**Managua (1978)**

*Charles Anthony Gillespie Jr., was born in Long Beach, California in March, 1935. He graduated from UCLA in 1958 with a bachelor's degree in psychology. Following a six year term with the U.S. Army, he entered the Foreign Service in 1965 and was nominated by President Reagan as Ambassador to Colombia in 1985. In addition to Colombia, he was posted to the Philippines, Indonesia,*

*Belgium, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Chile.*

*Q: Then where did you go? You got out of Syracuse University in 1976.*

GILLESPIE: At that time there was no rigid rule about onward assignments. However, by about December, 1975, or January, 1976, I was basically told, "Look, the job of Administrative Officer in Managua, Nicaragua, is coming open." Managua was the place where a terrible earthquake had taken place in 1972. It housed the largest AID Mission in the Western Hemisphere and one of the largest in the world at the time. Interestingly enough, there was more money going through there than anywhere else. It was the biggest aid pipeline in the world, because of the earthquake-related relief effort. At the time it amounted to something like \$150-200 million annually.

The Administrative Officer had a joint administrative responsibility. There had been all kinds of discussion about duplication of effort at Foreign Service posts and who was going to manage what. There was also a little bit about ambassadorial authority. It turned out that Managua was one of the few places where the Administrative Officer at the Embassy was also delegated the appropriate authority by the Agency for International Development and by the U.S. Information Agency to be Administrative Officer for those agencies and to handle their administrative work. At other places you often had three Administrative Officers. There was a USIS (United States Information Service) Executive Officer, an AID Administrative Officer, and a State Department Administrative Officer.

Anyhow, I was approached by some people, including a man named Carl Ackerman, who was a very senior administrative type, and Joe Donelan, for whom I had worked previously. Donelan said, "We'd really like to put a good officer in Managua. Would you go down there and take that combined Administrative Officer job?" This was one of the reasons why, during my second semester at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University I paid a lot of attention to the AID programs there, because I knew that I was going to be involved with AID in a very real sense. So, at the end of the first summer session at Syracuse University in 1976, we packed up and went off to Managua, Nicaragua.

*Q: You were in Managua from when to when?*

GILLESPIE: We got there in mid-summer of 1976 and left in August, 1978.

*Q: What were the political and economic situations in Nicaragua during this 1976-1978 period?*

GILLESPIE: As I mentioned before, Nicaragua was still heavily involved in recovering from the earthquake of 1972. It had been devastating. Some 10,000 people had been killed, and the whole city of Managua had been virtually wiped out. The population of the country was about 2.0 million. Its economy, which was basically agrarian, included the production of cotton, some sugar, some beef, coffee, and not much more. These were the main products, the main exports, and the mainstays of the economy.

The country's history, and particularly its relations with the U.S., have been troubled and difficult, by most people's accounts. Back in the 19th century and in the early part of the 20th century we

had no compunction against intervening directly in the country. If customs duties were not being collected or other things were not it had been taken over by people called "the buccaneers" and an American in the 19th century who thought he would set himself up as...

*Q: "The grey-eyed hand of destiny."*

GILLESPIE: Yes, Walker. The situation was difficult, at best, like that in a lot of the Central American countries. Nicaragua itself had been ruled, if that's the right word, by two groups which competed for power. They were the Conservatives, who lived on the shores of Lake Nicaragua, especially near a town called Granada, and the Liberals, who were anti-clerical and lived near a town called Leon Northwest of Lake Managua. They were really groups of warlords or gangsters who administered the law however they wanted to do. They vied for power and fought with each other. Eventually, Managua which is located more or less half way between Granada and Leon was settled on as the capital. It was supposed to bring the two groups together, but never very successfully. There was a nominal democracy, with lots of corruption, and so forth.

I guess that modern U.S.-Nicaraguan relations have to date from about 1936 or so - the immediate post-Depression era - when there were real problems there. Basically, to quiet things down, we sent in the Marines. The Marines trained a body called the *Guardia Nacional*, the National Guard - kind of what we're doing in Haiti. But it was in a much more unilateral and bolder way.

I had gotten into scuba diving up in New York, as a matter of fact, and did my qualifying dives in Lake Erie. However, there is a lake called Lake Managua - not the big lake, Lake Nicaragua - into which the Marines managed to crash a couple of planes in the 1930s. I did some scuba dives to bring out some pieces of wreckage from these aircraft. In any event, we probably helped to create two monsters in Nicaragua during the Marine occupation or presence there. The first was the National Guard and [the second was] its leader, who was named Somoza. He was the beginning of the Somoza dynasty, because that is what it was. The Somoza family controlled Nicaragua under an almost hereditary succession process from the 1930s until 1979.

The reason that the U.S. intervened in Nicaragua in the first place in the 19th century was that there was a rebellion taking place, led by a man named Augusto Sandino. By our actions we probably at least contributed to the creation of *Sandinismo*, which turned out to be the National Sandinista Liberation Front, *Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional*, whose Spanish acronym is FSLN. I got to see sort of the end of all of that during the period that I was in Nicaragua from 1976 to 1978.

I am not an expert on our ambassadorial succession there in Nicaragua, but the two Ambassadors for whom I worked and their immediate predecessor were political appointees. Two of them were appointed by Republican administrations and one by a Democratic administration. They were all the wrong man in the wrong job at the wrong time. The Embassy in Managua itself was an interesting place. It's where I began to see and to question why there weren't better Foreign Service Officers in these jobs. I suspect that my question could have as easily been asked in some places in Southeast Asia and Africa, but these happened to be in Latin America.

I arrived in Managua in 1976, initially serving under a Republican-appointed Ambassador James T. Theberge, whose Deputy Chief of Mission was Walker Diamante, a career Foreign Service

Officer. We had a wholesale turnover of the staff of the Embassy. The Political Counselor, the Administrative Counselor, the Economic Counselor, the chief of the Consular Section, and the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) Chief of Station were all replaced. The turnover in the Public Affairs Officer from USIA (United States Information Agency) took place a year later. All of them arrived at post in 1976. The DCM, Walker Diamante, stayed on for about six months and was basically let go by the newly-arrived Ambassador.

Ambassador Theberge's predecessor was interesting and worthy of a book: Ambassador Turner B. Shelton.

*Q: Oh, God, yes!*

GILLESPIE: Ambassador Turner B. Shelton was quite a man. He was appointed by President Nixon. The reason for his appointment was that he had contributed heavily to the Richard Nixon political trajectory over many years. Turner B. Shelton was called a Hollywood producer. Now, I'm not an expert on Turner B. Shelton, but my understanding is that what Turner really produced best were what were called "blue" movies. Whatever else he did, he made a lot of money in the movie business, whatever kinds of films they were, and he contributed chunks of this money to Richard Nixon's campaigns over the years. He obviously merited an appointment and he got the Embassy in Nicaragua.

*Q: I also understand that he not only produced movies but also provided solace and comfort for Congressmen and so forth.*

GILLESPIE: Oh, yes. He knew how to take care of people.

*Q: Tell me, because there must still have been reverberations in the aftermath. I haven't previously interviewed anybody on this, but there has been comment throughout the whole Foreign Service on the conduct and that of Ambassador and Mrs. Shelton during the earthquake of 1972. Could you discuss this?*

GILLESPIE: Sure. I could mention it from two aspects. I heard about it when I got to Nicaragua, but I had already heard about it when I was in Mexico.

*Q: I heard about it in Greece!*

GILLESPIE: We had sent people from the Embassy in Mexico City down there. They came back and told stories that one found hardly believable. No, that's not true. They were believable. However, they really were bad - kind of horror stories.

In Nicaragua we owned - and still own - the House on the Hill. The House on the Hill is a totally lovely, out of proportion mansion on what I think is the highest point overlooking downtown Managua. I used to know all the details on it because I used to carry a little card on it, because it was fascinating. I don't remember all of the details, but it's probably an eight bedroom house, covering a couple of hundred thousand square feet. I may be exaggerating, but it's one of the largest Embassy residences in terms of square feet of space in the world.

When the 1972 earthquake hit, our Embassy sat on the edge of a lake, which was a former, volcanic crater. The Embassy building itself, the Chancery, crumbled. The Ambassador's secretary was killed. I don't remember if it was in the Embassy building itself or in her home. However, she died. About 10,000 people were killed in the city, which was devastated. The economic base of the country, the Central Bank, and all of that, came tumbling down. The situation was awful.

There was a huge, humanitarian relief effort undertaken. Ambassador Shelton set himself up as the general in charge of this whole operation. Mrs. Shelton insisted that she was going to make sure that everything was handled right. We shipped in temporary duty American staffers and brought in Foreign Service National or local employees from other countries to help out to do our own work and to help with the national recovery effort. The logical place, which had not been touched by the earthquake at all, was the big House on the Hill. It's on a big piece of ground - I think that it covers about 12 acres. It contains the Ambassador's Residence, a very large, second house, which is not grand at all but is nice and spacious. It had been the home of the Deputy Chief of Mission. There is a swimming pool, a big tennis court, and some outbuildings - all nicely arranged.

The U.S. military from Southern Command Headquarters [SOUTHCOM] in Panama saw the House on the Hill as the logical place to set up the base of our part of the recovery operations. Mrs. Shelton would have none of this. She wanted to carry on as if nothing had happened. I heard stories about how we had people up there in tents near the tennis court and here and there on the property. Mrs. Shelton wouldn't let them use the bathrooms and would not allow the cooks to prepare food for these people in the kitchen of the Residence. Really, this was quite unacceptable from my standpoint. I heard all of those stories about the Shelton's shortly after they happened. People were still talking about them when I got to Managua.

The House on the Hill, in my view, given its size and everything else, could have been a wonderful example of the form fitting the function. It was a big house, but, obviously, it had been designed, probably around the turn of the century or not long after. The walls were very thick. It was a modern kind of construction. It wasn't adobe, or anything like that. The design seemed to fit into the grounds and context. Architecturally, it was attractive, and the grounds were well laid out.

What was especially good about the Residence was that it was designed to take advantage of the prevailing winds. It was sited to take the best advantage of the sun. It was designed to take advantage of natural insulation and climate control. I read accounts of men and women who lived in that house in earlier days who really wore woolen flannels. They wore gray flannel slacks, flannel blazers and suits, tight collars, and all of those things. They didn't die of the heat. And the reason that they didn't die of the heat was that the house was on an elevated position. Secondly, it was situated so that you got the best out of the wind and the sun. It had a deep, deep verandah on, I guess, the South side of the house and another verandah on the Northwest side. The living quarters of the house were deep inside those verandahs. There was a lovely series of louvered windows, doors, and shutters, so that you could control the air flow. There was no glass. They eventually installed screens in the upstairs area for the short period of the year when you had to worry about insects, because usually the wind was enough to keep them from being a problem.

The roof extended well beyond the house so that when it rained - and there were torrential

downpours - the rain never got into the interior of the house. Everything else was tiled, so that the servants could clean up the rainwater easily. And the house was cool. I saw other houses like it in Managua.

I'm told that Ambassador Shelton never wore anything in public but a black suit, a white shirt, and a black tie. He was a heavy smoker. He and Mrs. Shelton had insisted, and it had been agreed, on sealing the house up. When I got there, I found out that the air conditioning bill for electricity was \$25,000 a month. That's a lot of money, especially in terms of 1970 dollars!

When I arrived in Managua, I guess that Ambassador and Mrs. Theberge had been living there for a year. There was still tobacco grime on the ceilings and the walls which had never been cleaned. It was left over from Ambassador Shelton smoking! I could hardly sit in the car which Ambassador Shelton had used and which Ambassador Theberge inherited. I had stopped smoking six years earlier and wasn't allergic to smoke. However, I just couldn't bear sitting in that car. I told Ambassador Theberge, "I'm not going to ride with you if I can avoid it, because this car still reeks of cigarette smoke." Ambassador Theberge said, "I know. Can't we do something about it?" We eventually replaced the darned car - for other reasons, but nonetheless it was replaced.

The Shelton's were bad news in that respect. Ambassador Shelton had gotten into trouble. He'd wanted to go to Bermuda as Ambassador.

*Q: I think that that was afterwards.*

GILLESPIE: He'd wanted to go to Bermuda.

*Q: He was originally scheduled to be sent to Bermuda, which was a "European" post which, at that time, was reserved for Consular Officers. Bermuda had been set aside as a consular post. I remember that the Consular Officers objected, but that wouldn't have had any effect on Ambassador Shelton. What I heard was that the Governor of Bermuda said, "It's up to the U.S. Government, but if that son of a bitch comes here, I will not receive him."*

GILLESPIE: I think that that was reported in the press at the time. Well, Turner Shelton, being whatever he was, still has a certain reputation because, as far as I know, he is the sole Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America whose image appeared on the national currency of the country to which he was accredited, that is, Nicaragua - while he was accredited there!

*Q: Oh, my God! How did that happen?*

GILLESPIE: There had been a tremendous dispute, dating from colonial days and the time of the Spanish viceroys, about the Quita Sueno or Nightmare Bank. It was a group of keys - little dots of rock out in the Caribbean Sea, about 100 miles East of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and about the same distance from Honduras. Costa Rica and Colombia also had a residual claim to them. Remember, Panama used to be part of Colombia, when it was called Gran Colombia. Sovereignty over Quita Sueno Bank, surrounding keys, and other bits of rocks had been in dispute.

During Shelton's tenure as the Ambassador of the United States in Nicaragua, the United States dropped its claim to those islands, which allowed each of the other parties to the dispute to say, "We win! They are ours!" The Nicaraguans also said, "We win," and Somoza and the other Nicaraguan leaders thought that Ambassador Shelton had arranged for the United States to do this. Along with Somoza, Ambassador Shelton had a number of close friends in the U.S. Congress. You said that Ambassador Shelton took care of visiting U.S. Congressmen, which he did. He'd worked with people in Congress on the idea that, if the U.S. would withdraw its claims, that would allow the Nicaraguans to say that the islands were theirs. It would also allow the Colombians and others to say that they belonged to them. The dispute still goes on between Nicaragua and Colombia, but the U.S. is out of it. In a great fit of gratitude Anastasio Somoza de Valle, the last of the Somoza dynasty in office, put the picture of Turner B. Shelton on the Nicaraguan 20 Cordoba note. This was no mean feat. It was really something, and they circulated all over the place, with the Ambassador's picture on them. Somoza never asked Washington's permission. I don't think that Somoza ever asked anybody's permission for anything. In any case, there was Ambassador Turner B. Shelton in his black coat and black tie looking out at the world from a 20 Cordoba note.

*Q: We're talking about Ambassadors. Who was your first Ambassador in Nicaragua and how did he operate?*

GILLESPIE: He was James D. Theberge, a Republican. The Theberge family came from Belgium years ago. He has a brother, I think, who is a wealthy businessman. Ambassador Theberge had been what I later came to call an "organizational academic" or a "foundation academic." He was nominally affiliated with Georgetown University. However, I don't think that he was ever a member of the Faculty at Georgetown. He sort of operated out of Georgetown, putting together conferences. He may have headed up some sort of study organization or group - it wasn't concerned with Latin American studies. He wrote extensively on the Soviet Union and war and peace issues. He wrote a lot about Soviet naval forces in the South Atlantic Ocean, the Caribbean Sea, and the Americas. He had a lot of short, occasional papers published. He was also the editor of a number of anthologies on strategic subjects which were the product of the conferences which he hosted. People paid to attend these meetings. He was kind of an organizational man.

He was a thoughtful person. You would have to call him an intellectual, and I don't mean to demean him in any way. He saw things pretty much in black and white terms and was staunchly anti-communist. He was not a right wing reactionary. He was a conservative Republican, not a Rockefeller type liberal Republican.

He was married to an Argentine woman, Giselle Theberge. He spoke good Spanish. He had done a lot of consulting for the United Nations, the World Bank, and the InterAmerican Development Bank. He sort of moved in that circle. He had also worked for AID as a consultant or contractor, as a much younger person. I remember this, because when he got ready to leave Nicaragua at the end of the Ford administration, he wanted me to get him credit for retirement for his ambassadorial service so that he could get a federal pension. He wanted us to jump through the hoops. I turned the matter over to the OPM, the Office of Personnel Management, and we learned that there was no way that he could do that. They wouldn't give him credit for what he had done for AID. Jim Theberge died of a sudden and totally unexpected heart attack while playing tennis in Jamaica in about 1988 or 1989. He had left government service and then come back as Ambassador to Chile, where he was one of my predecessors.

In terms of our policy toward Nicaragua under Somoza either Secretary of State Kissinger, President Franklin Roosevelt, or someone else once said of one of the Somozas, "He may be a son of a bitch, but he's 'our' son of a bitch, and let's keep it that way."

Ambassador Theberge was anti-communist. He had done a lot of work in connection with the Bay of Pigs incursion into Cuba in 1961. Nicaragua was one of the places where the brigade which landed in Cuba had trained. During the Cuban missile crisis in 1962 Nicaragua was one of the places where we could do things that we wanted to do. That had all been done with the acquiescence of the Somoza regime. Somozas vote in the UN was always available whenever we needed it. It was one more of so many votes, and so forth. As I said, Ambassador Theberge was a thoughtful person but clearly believed, or acted, as if his job was not to cause problems with the Somozas. I think that he felt that he was following the policy line of the administration in power in Washington in this respect.

During that period from late 1974 onward that policy line had begun to shift a little bit. Interest in promoting democracy in the Western Hemisphere was coming alive in Washington. The whole question of what would best fight communism, repression or democracy, was something that people were beginning to talk about during the Ford administration 1974-1977, if not during the previous, Nixon administration 1969-1974. Certainly, after the Presidential elections in 1976 brought in the Carter administration, this change in policy line was well under way.

In any event I arrived in Managua in mid-summer of 1976. I had learned when I was getting ready to go to Nicaragua and after I had arrived there that the Department of State had instructed the Embassy to begin to establish contact with the Democratic opposition to Somoza. The non-communist, Democratic opposition to Somoza, was perceived to be different from the Sandinista Front, which was considered revolutionary, communist, and Cuban-supported. The non-communist opposition to Somoza was a mix of some business people, and very weakly organized non-*somocistas*, i.e., people who did not support Somoza. They used party labels which had existed for a long time but which really did not mean very much. They were essentially debating societies and gadflies. They were serious men and women but they didn't they didn't count for very much.

Until that instruction came out from the Department in the summer of 1976, I think that Ambassador Theberge and the Embassy itself had not had any or very much contact with the non-communist opposition to Somoza. It turned out, when I got to Managua, as I learned from the departing Political Counselor, Gerry Sutton, that, in fact, the Embassy had tried to establish contact with these people, but Ambassador Theberge really frowned on even informal contacts.

*Q: This is one of the very serious things that we find in the Foreign Service. During this whole Cold War period some Ambassadors - and not necessarily only political appointees because they come from an ideologically oriented point of view - cut us off from quite legitimate opposition or even emerging, political forces which might not yet be quite legitimate, but we still had to reckon with them.*

GILLESPIE: Stuart, I think that such attitudes go back much before the beginning of this century.

I haven't studied this matter in detail, but this is my intuitive, rough view and conclusion. The traditional role of the Ambassador was to represent the King to the King, the power to the power. His job was NOT to represent the King to the Opposition to the King, the rebels or whatever other forces there were in the country. To me, as you say, this tendency may be more visible with political appointees or non-career ambassadors, I've known a lot of ambassadors, particularly to countries which are either not basically democratic or only quasi-democratic. Non-career Ambassadors usually say, "Look, our job is to represent the United States to the people of this country." This may be a change from several centuries ago. These ambassadors often say, "My real job is principally to manage the relationship between the U.S. and this government. I want to influence this government to advance or protect U.S. interests here. I don't think that I can be effective if that government sees me spending too much time with the opposition to it."

I disagree with this view as a starting principle. You may be forced into operating somewhat on this basis, but it seems to me that you should always try to keep your contacts as broad as possible and your contingency planning up to date. You never know what is going to happen. I think that in some of the European societies - the British being, perhaps, the most obvious - you always want to be in contact with the "outs" as well as the "ins." That is accepted behavior in Europe. However, in some countries, which do not have that tradition, there is a tendency to avoid the opposition. That attitude has been changing, particularly in the past decade or two.

*Q: You mentioned Britain. A very interesting thing happened at the end of World War II, when Churchill went out of power. Clement Atlee and the Labor Party came into power. The only person in the Embassy in London who really had contact with members of the Labor Party was Sam Berger, the Labor Attache. He made quite a name for himself because he knew all of the leading figures in the Labor Party. There was no problem with the rest of the Embassy. Other Embassy officers could have had that kind of relationship with Labor leaders, but there was a natural drift or affinity toward the Conservative Party leaders. The conservatives took regular showers. They were regarded as not being as smelly as the Labor Party people.*

*I've often heard that in Latin America our Embassies can easily become the prisoners of the top 10 families, or whatever it is.*

GILLESPIE: Sure. When you're in a country, where the disparities are so dramatic between the elite and everybody else, there is nothing in the middle. The majority of the visible elite, as in the case of Nicaragua, supported Somoza. So a lot of Embassy contacts are with this group. Unless an Embassy officer is told to go out and establish contacts with other parts of the society, at least at that particular time, it didn't seem to me that people were going to do much more. I can tell you that, for my own part, I learned a real lesson from this. I thought back on this experience. I wasn't looking forward or anticipating things. When I got ready to go out as an Ambassador, I went to Grenada and was suddenly named chief of mission. I realized that the society there was not coherent, was not terribly cohesive, and that it would behoove us to make sure that we knew everybody who could conceivably be a player on the political scene. I followed that principle in Grenada, in Colombia, and in Chile.

I believe that I thought back a bit on what I had seen, not so much in Mexico, where two, outstanding career Ambassadors managed a very tough relationship. However, basically, they

didn't spend much time with the outs or what one might call the opposition. They had broad contacts. Today, if you go to Mexico City, as I have, you will find that our Political Section actually has officers who are trying to manage the relationship with not just the principal, political party, but with the other parties that are now coming up. They are trying to keep the Ambassador and the senior people in our government in contact with the opposition. A good Ambassador like our current one, a political appointee named Jim Jones, listens to their views. He's got a good sense of that.

If I may continue, I think that the situation is changing in these countries. As I say, at a certain point, there are limitations when you're dealing essentially with a single power group.

There was a wonderful institution in Nicaragua called INCAI, the Central American Institute for Business Administration, which was run by the Harvard Business School. Interestingly enough, it was established and operated during the Somoza years. It trained people from all over the Western Hemisphere in business administration in Spanish, using the Harvard M. B.A. (Master's in Business Administration) curriculum. INCAI attracted a lot of people who prepared a lot of studies concerning Nicaragua. In a country with a total population of about 2.0 million there were about 6,000 human beings, roughly 1,000 families with an average of six persons each, who really controlled the country. That was the elite of the country. Stop and think of it. 6,000 is the population of a small town! There are probably people who live in towns where 6,000 people live who probably know half of the total population. The 6,000 people include children as well as adults. The majority of them probably at least nominally support the people in power. Just maintaining contact with these people leads you in certain directions.

As I say, if it had been the prevailing view in our Embassy that we had no reason to make Somoza particularly unhappy with us, the inclination would be to stick with the ruling party and try to influence it one way or another.

*Q: When you arrived in Nicaragua, you said that you questioned the caliber of some of the Embassy officers. You were the new boy on the block and had a little different perspective from that of other Embassy officers. Particularly since you were not a Political Officer, you could sit back and be a bit like the fly on the wall on this subject. What was your impression of the Embassy, its contacts, and how it went about doing things?*

GILLESPIE: As I say, I arrived there at a time of transition, so I only saw for an instant what it had been like before. As I said, I think that a policy shift was occurring. Ambassador Theberge had been told, "Open up Embassy contacts more broadly." That was a time in our own life when things were happening. I remember the Political Counselor, Gerry Sutton, who was handing over to Jack Martin. The going away parties - they're called *despedidas* in Spanish - that we went to were really unusual. We arranged to have the heads of political parties invited to the Ambassador's residence, the House on the Hill, who were in opposition, nominal or otherwise, to Somoza.

I vividly remember one of the invitations extended because it caused quite a stir. I think that Ambassador Theberge was nervous but not hesitant about this invitation. This was at one of the very first social events I went to at the Embassy Residence in Managua. The Ambassador had all of the new chiefs of section in the receiving line. A man came in limping - and I can't think of his

name right now. He had been released from one of Somoza's jails only weeks before we arrived. He was an oppositionist who had been arrested, beaten up, and tortured by the Guardia Nacional. I remember on that occasion going out onto the terrace of the Residence. It was a lovely evening. There was a man there who affected a British style. He was, in fact, a Latin American. He took snuff and offered some to me from a beautiful, silver snuff box. He looked at me and with a sort of British accent, with a little bit of a Spanish accent behind it, said, "What on earth is Ambassador Theberge doing, having that fellow at this reception?" This guy was an ultra-conservative.

Another funny thing that happened. Everybody knew that changes were taking place and that one of the changes was the Central Intelligence Station station chief. All of the four, new section chiefs arrived within a couple of weeks of one another. We had to find our own housing. There was no Embassy housing that you moved into. All of us temporarily moved into the Intercontinental Hotel, the only hotel in downtown Managua which had survived the earthquake of 1972. It was a funny building which looked something like a Mayan pyramid. We all moved in there, with our families, and ended up staying almost two months. We became very close friends because we'd have our meals together with our children, and so forth.

In any event, as we all learned later, everyone was convinced that I couldn't be the Administrative Officer. I really had to be the CIA Chief of Station. My Spanish was too good and my knowledge of things was too good for me to be the Administrative Officer. So it was widely believed that I had to be the Chief of Station. Well, the real Chief of Station was delighted to hear this. He was a little jealous but he was really happy about this confusion. He told me later that this was actually good for him, because it took the pressure off him. He didn't have to defend himself. He just identified himself a new Political Officer, or something like that. Those who needed to know, knew that he was the Chief of Station. The ones who didn't need to know, thought that I was the Chief of Station, and so on.

The new Chief of Station was on his first tour as the senior CIA representative. That's a big deal in the CIA, and Managua was considered an important station.

*Q: It followed the Cubans and all of that.*

GILLESPIE: It followed the Cubans. They didn't care about the Soviets because there were no Soviets anywhere near Managua, as far as anybody knew. However, the CIA Station followed guerrilla movements, revolutionaries, Cuban support for revolutionary activity, and all of that. Jack Martin, the new Political Officer, had been on the staff of the Executive Secretariat in the Department. I think that he'd done a good job there. He was not a weak sister.

*Q: The Executive Secretariat was a road to advancement.*

GILLESPIE: I don't know that he was too junior for the position, but he was junior in grade for the position. He'd only recently been promoted. He was kind of pleased to be the chief of a section which, if I remember correctly, had one other American officer and one American secretary. There may have been two American officers in the Political Section, or maybe a junior officer rotated through the Section from time to time.

Jay Freres, the Economic Officer, had another Economic Officer and a Commercial Officer in his Section. He was a solid citizen who was later selected to go to the National War College. He was promoted eventually to the Senior Foreign Service and retired as a DCM. He was never appointed Ambassador.

Mary Marchany Daniel was the Consular Officer. She was from Puerto Rico. She never rose very high in the Foreign Service but was a very capable officer.

The AID chief was there when I arrived. He turned out to be kind of an odd ball, and so was his successor. Both of them were senior AID people. They had a big operation with about 60 Americans, including contractors, plus a large Foreign Service National staff.

I don't remember the comparative numbers of people assigned, but the Administrative Section was the largest in terms of both American and Foreign Service National employees. I had three or four American subordinates and a lot of Nicaraguans. However, I had to support USIS (United States Information Service) and the AID Mission as well.

What struck me was that the quality of the reporting - the written product that I saw going out of the Embassy - seemed to me to be not nearly as good as at the other places where I had served. Not as good as the reporting in Belgium - neither from the Embassy or the NATO Mission - and not as good as the reporting from Mexico. I know that the circumstances were different, but the quality of the product in terms of how and when it was produced seemed to me to be not up to snuff. I don't know whose fault that was. The officers themselves seemed to be pretty good. They worked hard. We had some highly operational stuff in Nicaragua, which we'll get into later. Some of it was really weird, and people acquitted themselves quite well at the section chief level and below. We had serious ambassadorial and DCM difficulties while I was there in Managua - and which affected me and, indeed, all of us, in some ways.

What struck me, particularly toward the end of my tour there, was that the situation in Nicaragua was really deteriorating. I saw some strange things going on between the Embassy and Washington, involving the Bureau of American Republics Affairs, the National Security Council, and the White House. This was some time in 1978 when President Carter and Robert Pastor, his NSC (National Security Council) adviser for Latin America, became personally involved in some of the activities involving Somoza. It was very curious.

It would be a mistake to try to make too many judgments, in view of the way the U.S. operates. In the course of a two or three year tour you deal directly and most often with six or seven people. You can't judge the whole area, the region, or the Foreign Service on that basis. All that you can say is that, in these instances, these people performed well or didn't perform well. You wonder how they ever got into the Foreign Service or stayed in it. However, it's the individual involved and it's hard to judge.

*Q: I know nothing whatever about Nicaragua, but in talking about some of the things that were going on, what about the Catholic Church? This was still the period when liberation theology had a certain vogue. I can't remember now, but are you a Catholic?*

GILLESPIE: I was baptized a Catholic and went through Catholic elementary and high schools.

*Q: So this would be a matter that you have an affinity for.*

GILLESPIE: Sure. I wondered about it all the time.

*Q: Could you talk about the role of the Catholic Church in Nicaragua as you saw it during this period?*

GILLESPIE: This was a time when theology oriented to "community bases" as the essential element of the Church or liberation theology was beginning or, at least, becoming evident to me. In Nicaragua during the 1976-1978 period the Catholic hierarchy was really torn between alternatives. The Church is essentially conservative and takes the long view. The hierarchy in Nicaragua looked out over time and felt that paternalism, dictatorship, and authoritarian governments were not inherently bad, under those circumstances, even if people might like to see change.

What had been going on, beginning in the late 1960s - 1968 to 1970, before the Managua earthquake of 1972 - was that the Sandinista Liberation Front had become more active. There was an attempt to kidnap Ambassador Shelton. I don't think that they actually held him but I think that they came very close to getting him. They had taken over a U.S. Embassy residence, and he was supposed to have been there at the time. I don't remember the details too clearly. The Sandinista base of operations was primarily in North Central Nicaragua, up near the Honduran border. This was mountainous and difficult terrain. As we learned in the late 1970s and later, a small scale rebellion or guerrilla war had been going on. The Nicaraguan Guardia Nacional was involved in attempting to put this down.

The U.S. had a Military Group in Nicaragua whose job was to provide assistance to the Guardia Nacional. We had had a close relationship with the Guardia Nacional for many years.

Nicaragua was marked by corruption. You could almost see it and touch it, all of the time. By the early 1970s, after the Managua earthquake, reports began to come down out of this mountainous region about atrocities, including murders and massacres. Torture by the Guardia Nacional and attacks by the Sandinista Liberation Front were reported involving what we would call today guerrilla terrorism, or human rights violations by the Sandinista guerrillas. The preponderance of the reports was that the Guardia Nacional was the oppressor. The sources of the reports were Catholic priests from that region. They would bring down these reports.

The Catholic hierarchy in Managua didn't reject the veracity of these reports but was uncomfortable with them. The American Embassy in Managua had accepted and, later on, actively sought, access to this reporting by the Catholic priests. The reports were often considerably delayed. You might hear of 150 people involved in an attack on the garrison of 100 troops of the Guardia Nacional in a town. Well, it would turn out that this had happened three months previously. But there would be a headline somewhere - either in the U.S., Europe, or somewhere in Central America - portraying it as if it had just happened. It was very difficult to handle the reporting on these incidents.

As far as the U.S. Government was concerned and, I think, as far as the Catholic hierarchy was concerned, the people engaged in the rebellion against the Nicaraguan Government were godless communists supported by Fidel Castro, the Soviet Union, and other bad people. We later learned of training of these revolutionaries in Libya and Communist China. There was a lot of that going on.

Next door to Nicaragua, on the other side of the Gulf of Fonseca, in El Salvador, where the "14 Families" allegedly ruled, the FMLN (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front) had assassinated government officials and cabinet ministers. I think that the Salvadoran Foreign Minister had been murdered. All of this was happening in the 1976- 1979 time frame. There was a lot of support for the FMLN from Cuba.

Honduras was relatively stable but was a dictatorship. Guatemala was under an oppressive, military regime. Costa Rica, to the South of Nicaragua, was the bastion of democracy in the area. It had no Army as such - just the Civil Guard and Rural Assistance Guard. The Costa Rican Constitution prohibited armed forces.

The Catholic Church in Managua took the long view. It was clearly anti-communist but did not embrace Somoza personally or closely. Later, this developed with the appointment of Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo as Cardinal. He then became known as the anti-Sandinista, but also pro-democracy Cardinal of Nicaragua. He was known as a kind of bastion against the Sandinistas and against the Ortega family who emerged from this situation and took over the country in 1979 as leaders of the Sandinistas, after I had left.

The Catholic Church was not at all united. There were supporters of liberation theology. Nicaragua, by the way, is divided, culturally and ethnically. I guess that you could say that the eastern two-thirds of the country consist of a lot of swamp, mountains, and river basins running into the Caribbean Sea. The population there is Caribbean, composed of Negroes of African descent and indigenous, native peoples, including the Miskito Indians and others. They didn't like people of Spanish descent. It turned out that they didn't like the Sandinistas because they were of Spanish descent. The western one-third of the country is where most of the economic activity takes place, where the people consist of the descendants of Spanish settlers and persons of mixed blood.

There were racial divisions in much of that area: white skin is fairly rare. There was one medical doctor whom I met there, a friend of the man who offered me the snuff and whom I mentioned before. At this point this medical doctor was about 85 years old. He was said to have sired 63 children. Politically, he was quite conservative in his thinking and was of Dutch descent. All 63 of his children wanted to have his name, although only one or two of them were legitimate. There was a lot of that. There were many people of mixed ancestry.

*Q: When you arrived in Nicaragua, what was your impression of Somoza - both your own and that of other Embassy people? Which Somoza was this?*

GILLESPIE: Anastasio Somoza del Valle. He was also known as "Tacho" Somoza. He had a son, "Tachito," who was in his 20s. Of course, "Tacho" had been "Tachito" to his father in turn, who

had also been Anastasio Somoza. "Tacho" Somoza, the man in power when I arrived in Nicaragua and who left when the revolution took place, was later assassinated in Asuncion, Paraguay. He was married to an American woman, Hope. I don't remember Hope's maiden name, but she was from a good East Coast family. "Tacho" Somoza was a West Point graduate. Every year he would attend the reunion of his graduating class at West Point. It would be in two parts. They would go to West Point for whatever the ceremony. Then they would all go to the "21" Club in New York and have a wonderful lunch.

When things started to get hot and heavy between the Somoza group and the U.S. during the Carter administration and as these reports from the mountains kept coming down, it became very evident that "Tacho" Somoza knew the U.S. and could read us politically like a book. He was a very smart, international political operator. This is a truism, but although a lot of these tin horn dictators may be dictatorial, it is a serious misjudgment to believe that they are not savvy, quick, and well connected. "Tacho" Somoza's particular buddy, if I am not mistaken, was Johnny Murphy, a Republican Congressman from New York. He was well connected at that time. Yes, he was in the Republican minority in the House of Representatives but was really well tied in. Somoza also had his hands in the pockets of some Democratic Congressmen. For example, Somoza absolutely captivated Charley Wilson, a Democratic Congressman from Texas, a graduate of the Naval Academy. I got to know Congressman Wilson rather well in Nicaragua. He was absolutely convinced that the name of the game was anti-communism. He felt that Somoza might be a son of a bitch, but he was "our son of a bitch." These guys were very protective of Somoza.

I don't want to make too much out of it, but Ambassador Theberge had a problem with Walker Diamante, his DCM. He had inherited him from Ambassador Shelton. Theberge was not comfortable in an organization. He did not like being a manager. He might like being an executive. For example, he would go to a meeting with Somoza. He would come back and dictate his NODIS (No Distribution Outside the Department of State) cable reporting his meeting with Somoza, usually to Virginia Richardson, his secretary. He would send that cable off to Washington and would not let anyone else in the Embassy see it. His DCM wouldn't see it, and nobody in the Political Section would see it. He did not allow Embassy officers, including the DCM, to meet with certain members of the government. He considered them his contacts, and nobody else was to talk to them.

This practice of Ambassador Theberge was not particularly well received by people in the Embassy. At a certain point there was a blowup with his DCM, Walker Diamante. I don't remember exactly what the issue was. All I know is that I was called in. For whatever reason, Ambassador Theberge said that he would like to pick a new DCM and would I find him some candidates for the position. He said, "Mr. Diamante will be leaving" the Embassy in Managua." By the way, it is the Administrative Officer's job to take care of these things.

I went back to the Department and talked to some people and gave Ambassador Theberge a list. He selected Irwin Rubenstein, a Labor and Political Officer who had been in the Foreign Service for a long time. He was a long-time Latin American hand who was well- connected in the AFL/CIO (American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organization). I thought that it was a strange choice for a Republican academic to make. I thought that Irwin Rubenstein was a very capable officer, but he was right out of the labor mold. He would be right at home down in Bal

Harbor Florida at the AFL/CIO convention. He tended to wear sport jackets. Ambassador Theberge was not a black suit, white shirt, black tie guy as Ambassador Shelton had been, but he was a very careful dresser. He did not wear open collar shirts comfortably. Rubenstein didn't wear ties comfortably. How they got together I don't know, except that Rubenstein was smart and quick.

Anyway, Ambassador Theberge hired Rubenstein. Rubenstein had talked to me in Washington, and I had described the situation. I didn't know Rubenstein from Adam. I said, "You should understand that this is the situation that you're walking into. The Ambassador doesn't confide in anybody. Whether he doesn't trust them or not is irrelevant. He doesn't tell anybody anything about what's going on. There are staff meetings. The Ambassador listens to everybody, but he doesn't tell anybody anything. He doesn't really comment." I found out that he didn't, for example, call the Political Officer in and ask him what was going on.

Jack Martin the Political Officer tried to do his best. The Economic Officer, Jay Freres, would go in to see the Ambassador and talk about economic or business issues. The Ambassador would listen, but there was no two-way conversation. The CIA Chief of Station had pretty good access and didn't much care what the Ambassador thought or said. At least, that's what he told me, and I think that he meant it. However, I think that he was very careful to keep the bread buttered properly with Ambassador Theberge. There may have been a little more, two-way communications there than I was aware of.

Anyway, Irwin Rubenstein hadn't been there more than two or three weeks. He invited me up to his house one night for a drink and said, "My God, it's much worse than you said it was. This is awful! I can't get the Ambassador to tell me anything about what's going on. What can we do?" I said, "What do you mean? I don't know what we can do. You're probably going to reach a point where you're going to have to confront him and say, 'This is or isn't going to work,' if that's what your judgment is. This is something you're going to have to do at a certain point."

That situation went on from some time in the fall of 1976 until some time early in 1977, after the election, when Ambassador Theberge left Nicaragua.

He was replaced by a political appointee of the Carter administration in May or June, 1977, a man named Mauricio Solaun. He was one of the not very many Cuban-American Democrats from Florida. He was born in Cuba. He had obtained an undergraduate and then a doctorate in sociology from Yale University and was on the faculty of the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, IL, as a professor of sociology. He had done a lot of consulting with the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank in places like Colombia, Argentina, and other places. As it turned out, he knew virtually nothing at all about Central America. He had written almost incomprehensible sociological treatises on behavior, but nothing to do with Central America or other parts of Latin America. It seemed to me and to a few others that he had almost no political sense at all. He didn't understand the bureaucracy and had never managed more than, at most, a secretary. His wife was not a Latin, She was just a "house afire." She had managed the international student program at the University of Illinois at Champaign- Urbana. She was a terror - not a tyrant, but a terror. She ran him and she ran everything. God, that would set up a wonderful equation.

Ambassador Theberge had dealt with Somoza. The scuttlebutt that we all kind of kicked around was that either Theberge was supremely confident about his ability to handle Somoza and to deal with these growing, human rights and Guardia Nacional behavior problems, and other difficulties which were growing in late 1976 and into 1977, before he left Nicaragua. Either Theberge was supremely confident of his ability to deal with these problems, and therefore needed no help from the Embassy, or he was totally insecure and didn't want to tell anybody on his staff what was really going on and how he was handling things. We had some feedback on some of these things that seemed to indicate that it may have been more of the latter than the former. There was a lot of the former, but some of the latter as well.

He would come back from a meeting with Somoza in a rather encouraging mood, but we would then hear of things through the grapevine. Everybody heard some scuttlebutt or gossip that Somoza really cleaned Ambassador Theberge's clock in that conversation or that Ambassador Theberge had not really carried out his instructions. By the way, the Ambassador's instructions did not come in from the Department in a NODIS cable. They might come in a restricted channel, but the Political Officer and others saw these cables and knew what the Ambassador was supposed to do. Then we would hear a story that the Ambassador had not made his presentation to Somoza in quite the way that Washington hoped he would do it. In fact, we didn't know what Ambassador Theberge reported about the meetings with Somoza.

It soon became apparent that Ambassador Solaun was extremely "nervous in the Service," dealing with any President, but especially with Somoza. His heart and his head were both in the right place, but I don't think that his spirit or his spine were necessarily there. Or maybe it was just a matter of his experience. How do you deal with a President? Ambassador Solaun, just like Theberge, probably had a confidence problem. He probably thought, "I don't want to do anything to admit that I don't know what I'm doing, but I'm not very sure of myself." What do you say to a President? How do you deliver a demarche? He never took anybody with him to these meetings. Of course, we later found out that the meetings with both Ambassadors had been taped by Somoza. The tapes were released, and it turned out that the transcripts indicated that both of our Ambassadors had been very weak sisters in the meetings with Somoza. Ambassador April Glaspie's problems with Saddam Hussein in Iraq were nothing, compared to these two political appointee Ambassadors, one a Democrat and the other a Republican. So I can say that with a totally non-partisan attitude.

*Q: It sounds as if Ambassador Solaun was not well plugged-in politically. He was a sort of token Hispanic.*

GILLESPIE: He was a token Hispanic. His main supporter in Washington was a Puerto Rican named Mauricio Ferre, who had been the Mayor of Miami, FL. Ferre was not Cuban but was a Latin American who had been Solaun's roommate at Yale University. Ferre was extremely well plugged-in to the Democratic Party organization. He was told, "Look, we want to get a Cuban-American." In those days, like today, Democratic Party leaders said, "We have to get an Hispanic. Send him to Latin America." If you get a black, send him to Africa. If you get a Swede, send him to Sweden. And the Republicans are the same. You know the game.

So Ambassador Solaun ended up in Nicaragua. It was really a sad situation. He didn't like Rubenstein, the DCM. He was unlike Ambassador Theberge, who, I think, was pretty decisive.

When Ambassador Theberge decided that he wanted Walker Diamante to leave as DCM, he did it. He wasn't unkind, and it's never a nice situation. However, he did it. He probably told Diamante, "Look, this isn't working out, and I want to replace you." So that was it.

Well, over a period of weeks Ambassador Solaun discussed this matter with me. I'm compressing this, obviously. He would talk around and around about how things were going. He would ask, "How are things going? What's your view?" I found out that he was talking to other people in the Embassy, doing the same kind of thing. Basically, he never confronted Rubenstein with any of this. It became evident that he did not have confidence in Irwin Rubenstein, but Irwin didn't see this coming. When I finally saw it, I told him that he was going to be replaced. I went to Rubenstein and told him, "Look, you've got a problem with the Ambassador." By that time I think the situation was probably irretrievable, anyway. At that point I blame Irwin, because rather than figure out what to do about the situation, he went into a confrontational mode.

I can vividly remember a conference in the Ambassador's office, a large office in a Butler-type building, a temporary structure. There was a big, long table at one end of the room. We had our Country Team meetings in there. I had studied behavioral patterns at the Maxwell School. I said to Irwin Rubenstein when he got to Managua, "You know, Irwin, one of the things that I learned at Graduate School was that if you're the deputy to the chief, you never want to set yourself up physically opposite him, in confrontation with him. If you ever have to question him or raise something negative in a public way, you don't really want to be head to head with him." He said, "That's a bunch of bull." I said, "Well, you might want to think about sitting next to him." I'll tell you. Ever since my time at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, I sat as close to the right hand of my boss as I could. When I was Ambassador, I insisted that my DCM sit immediately to my right.

*Q: I think of my colleague, Tom Stern. When he was DCM, he sat to the right of the Ambassador. He'd learned the same thing.*

GILLESPIE: I can vividly picture some of these meetings. I don't remember the subject matter, but it often involved little stuff concerning scheduling - should we do this or should we do that? This would involve an open, free discussion. However, here was this DCM and this Ambassador. There was antagonism between them. Rubenstein was in a no win position. The minute he said anything negative, everyone looked away from the Ambassador and toward him. Or at the Ambassador, wondering how he was going to take it, and so Rubenstein was at a disadvantage.

In any event I got a phone call one Sunday afternoon from Ambassador Solaun. He asked me to come to the Residence and have a swim at the swimming pool. Incidentally, Ambassador Theberge had never let anybody into the Ambassadorial swimming pool or on the Ambassadorial tennis court - not even Diamante or Rubenstein, who lived in the same compound! Rubenstein had the guts to ask if he could use the tennis court and was turned down! He was told, "You can play when I invite you to play." That's the way Ambassador Theberge was.

Ambassador Solaun had said that anyone that wanted to could use the tennis court, but the pool was basically the Ambassador's. He didn't say that nobody could use the pool, but that was the result. As the Administrative Officer, I had said to both Ambassadors, "I think it would be a good

idea to work out some kind of program for use when you don't need to use these facilities. Then others could use them." I was turned down flat by Theberge, in both cases. Solaun didn't hesitate to make the tennis courts available but said, "You know, I really need to unwind. Joan and I" - they had a little girl- -"need to unwind, and the pool is just right for that." I said, "Well, it's your call. I suggest you think about it." What he did was to invite people to come to the pool from time to time - and he spread the invitations around. He'd invite secretaries, communicators, and different people.

As I said, I had a phone call to come over to the pool one Sunday afternoon. There was nobody else there. My wife didn't go, because she was doing something with our children. When I got there, I found out that Solaun had gone to see Somoza that morning. Solaun had received an instruction from the Department the night before. I wouldn't have had any reason to know about it. Solaun was instructed to go in and see Somoza about something. Solaun said: "I'm really disturbed by all this. I've just had this meeting with Somoza. It didn't go particularly well." He continued, "I have the feeling that I have not been doing a very good job, reporting to Washington. Would you help me draft a cable reporting this conversation?" He said, "You could help me. I know that you write well. I've seen what you write. You know how to say things." I said, "I don't have any problem with that, but there is a bureaucratic problem with Washington." I said, "Look, you have Irwin Rubenstein just down the road, you have Jack Martin, the Political Officer. That's what these guys are supposed to do."

Ambassador Solaun said, "Well, yes, but I don't want Rubenstein anywhere near this." I said, "Come on, you can't do that. That's not right." He said, "Well, just help me with this." So what could I do? I sat there with a long, yellow pad. He basically told me all about the conversation which he had had with Somoza. All I did was to take dictation. I wrote it down and I said, "Let's just report this the way you say it happened." I said, "However, you're going to make my life impossible with this. You have to tell Rubenstein that this is what you're doing, and we have to have Irwin look at this piece of paper. And Jack Martin," the Political Officer, "needs to know about this. Couldn't we have them come over, and we'll just talk this through with them and then see what comes out?" Well, Ambassador Solaun agreed to do that. Jack Martin, who was a very smart guy, read the situation rather quickly. He said, "Okay, Gillespie, you've got yourself some kind of a new relationship with the Ambassador. I don't think that you created this, but it happened for whatever reason." Irwin Rubenstein, who had a lot of confidence in me, and in whom I had a lot of confidence, too, said, "Well, I guess that this is the way it's going to be. I'm glad you kept me informed about it. Let's see if we can continue to do it."

As it turned out, what I was able to do was to get out of that scene by getting Angel Rebasa involved. He was a Cuban-American, junior Political Officer, and not a Democrat. After talking to Jack Martin and Irwin Rubenstein, I said to the Ambassador, "Look, I could come over and take these notes for you. However, really, Angel Rebasa can do this just as well as I can. But if you want to talk to someone about your meetings with Somoza, if you need someone to talk to, I'll be glad to do so." Ambassador Solaun said, "Would you talk to me about that?" I said, "Yes, I'll be glad to do so, but why not let Angel Rebasa take the notes?" The Ambassador said, "All right."

That was a weird situation. That continued until my departure from Managua. I became a guy in whom this Ambassador had some confidence. I'll be honest about it. There were some things that

happened, where we had some bad situations. We had a problem with the AID relationship. The AID people didn't like the Ambassador. They didn't think very much of him. I protected his relationship with them and made sure that the chief of Mission was deferred to and so forth. There were a lot of things happening on which, I guess, he felt that he could trust me and that I would be looking at the institutional and the Ambassador's interests in the proper way.

I found myself in that situation. It worked out well with Jack Martin, the Political Officer. It worked out well with Freres, the Economic Officer. Eventually, Rubenstein and I became totally estranged, as he was leaving. He couldn't believe it when the Ambassador finally called him in, fired him, and said, "You have to go." At that point Irwin turned on me and accused me of at least contributing to this situation, if not inciting it. I reminded him that this had started long before the Ambassador had fired him. We have never been able to have any kind of a friendship since then. The other people and I have all stayed fairly close.

That situation gave me some insights into Solaun, the Ambassador, Somoza, and the rest of it which were really fascinating. In the long run it probably helped me.

*Q: Sometimes this kind of relationship happens. However, you acted in a professional way in trying to act as a bridge. I have run into some cases where an Ambassador will take a junior officer under his wing, or something like that, and bypass the chiefs of section. And the junior officer glories in this, or brings in a confidant who is a good friend of his from outside the Embassy. The whole Embassy is cut out of the relationship with the Ambassador.*

*In Mexico on one occasion there was this "temple dog" relationship when John Gavin was Ambassador. He had two officers who were called "temple dogs." They basically kept everybody away. They were not in the Foreign Service. The point was that the Embassy was not clued in on what was going on.*

GILLESPIE: Stuart, this situation worked for me basically because of my military experience. I believed then, and I believe now, in the chain of command. Wherever you are, you have an overall boss and intervening bosses. There is a chain of command. In the Foreign Service, in an Embassy, in an Office, or in a Bureau there is a chain of command, or you don't know where you are. I felt very strongly that you ought to follow the chain of command. If you don't do this, you're asking for trouble. You said that I had acted in a professional way, and maybe that's what that was. However, it seemed terribly important to me that I try to get the Ambassador to try to follow the chain of command if I could. But if he wasn't going to do that, I still had to recognize the chain of command. I had to make sure that my immediate boss, Irwin Rubenstein, knew what was going on, or Diamante before him, or the guy who replaced Rubenstein.

Then the Political Officer, who was a colleague of mine, the AID Director, and all of these other people who were in the chain of command somewhere, needed to be kept informed. Otherwise, the organization would fall apart, resulting in a terrible situation. Remember that I had lived with this kind of situation to some extent in Brussels. I mentioned that Ambassador Harlan Cleveland had this practice of giving the same task to different people at different levels. That kind of practice may have some benefits, but if it isn't handled well, it can also be terribly disruptive.

I saw this process happen in Managua, which was a hardship post. It was not an easy place for people to live in. The American School was okay, but life wasn't all of that easy. There was a rebellion going on in the country. We didn't think of it as terrorism in those days or life threatening to us. However, things were happening, bombs were going off, and other problems came up. Later on, in 1978, there were battles going on in the countryside. There were cases of killings, torture, and things like that. It was not an easy place to live and work in. Furthermore, the relationship with Somoza, on the one hand, was not all of that smooth. A lot of people in the Embassy didn't like what they saw. So morale was a factor, and the Administrative Officer has to think about morale in both general and specific terms. So I thought that the way to deal with that was through this chain of command approach. I felt that this was the best that I could do.

As we all learn in life, there sometimes are no other options. You just have to tell it the way it is or the way you see it. That's what I ended up doing with Rubenstein, Martin, and the Ambassador himself. I said, "This isn't right, but this is the way it is, and how are we going to deal with it?"

Eventually, it weighed so heavily on Rubenstein that ultimately it soured our relationship dramatically and finally. That's too bad, but it happened that way. I don't know whether he ever really recovered from that professionally, either. He eventually retired. He'd been Consul General in Guadalajara Mexico. He had always seen himself as ultimately being a Chief of Mission and getting an Embassy somewhere. He fought hard to do that. I helped him draft some memoranda to the incoming people in the Carter administration.

*Q: While you were in Managua, did you see a growing estrangement between Somoza and, now, the Carter administration? Human rights were a very big issue with the Carter administration. For example, did Pat Darien Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Affairs ever come down to Managua?*

GILLESPIE: No. It's interesting, because Pat Darien was always a distant presence. What happened between the departure of Ambassador Theberge and the arrival of Ambassador Solaun, when Rubenstein was in charge, was Somoza's heart attack. Anastasio Somoza suffered a major coronary attack and was at death's door. Terence Todman was the Assistant Secretary for American Republics Affairs in the Department of State. Somoza's son, "Tachito," called the Embassy. Rubenstein was the charge d'affaires. This could have affected his relationship with Ambassador Solaun later on, although I am not sure of this.

There were two aspects involved in this. First, Rubenstein had been charge d'affaires for several months. Secondly, Somoza's heart attack occurred on his watch. We had the option of sending Somoza to Gorgas Army Hospital in Panama or Brooke Army Medical Center in Houston, Texas. Somoza's son called the Embassy, talked to Rubenstein, and said, "You have to help my father. He needs to go to the States. We'll do anything, we'll pay anything, but we have to get him into the hands of De Bakey or one of those heart specialists." We started getting calls from Somoza's West Point classmates. They were big guns in the U.S. I can't remember their names, but they were senior executives in big corporations. They were all older men by this time. Many of them had left the Army. Anyhow, the pressure was really on to take care of Somoza.

Irwin Rubenstein, who was without any doubt a staunch Democrat, and I would say with both a

small and a big D, was torn. He thought, well, on the one hand, it wouldn't hurt the world if this man died. On the other hand, Nicaragua is a friendly country, he is the President, and we have done this for others. So Rubenstein took the ball and threw it to Terence Todman, the Assistant Secretary of State for ARA. I'll never forget Todman. Rubenstein called me over to his home in the evening. He was trying to reach Todman. Finally, he contacted Todman at a dinner party in Washington. Todman didn't know quite what to do. You could tell this from the telephone conversation, as heard from Irwin Rubenstein's end. Todman said, "I'll get back to you."

Todman called back and said, "All right. We'll send a medevac plane from the U.S. Air Force down to get Somoza. But make sure that this is not being done for free. They, the Nicaraguan Government, are going to have to pay the bill." Irwin Rubenstein duly called Somoza's son and told him, "We'll do it, but you have to understand that you will have to pay the tab, and it will be expensive. It will be in the tens of thousands of dollars." Rubenstein had asked me to listen in on this part of the conversation. Somoza's son replied, "Don't worry, we'll take care of it." Well, Somoza went up to the U.S., was treated at Brooke Army Medical Center, and he recovered. He came back to Managua, moved out of the "Beach House," and went into seclusion at a place called Montelimar. This all happened before Ambassador Solaun got there.

Being Latin, whatever else they were, the debt of gratitude of the Somoza family was to Irwin Rubenstein. And Rubenstein didn't mind this at all. He would be called down to see Somoza, who was recovering. This was also a moment when the people in Nicaragua, both those in favor of Somoza and those not in favor of him, saw his mortality. He ended up losing 50 or 60 pounds. He was a tall man but was a shell of his former self. Anyway, they could see him, and there were lots of problems involved. Irwin Rubenstein, as charge d'affaires, had a fair amount of contact with Somoza.

Nonetheless, we had done all of this. This happened during the transition between the Ford and Carter administrations. It was the incoming, Democratic Party administration that had helped Somoza.

Other things were coming up. It turned out that the U.S. had sold to the Nicaraguan Guardia Nacional, as part of the FMS, or Foreign Military Sales, program, and at a subsidized price, but a purchase, nonetheless, a considerable number of M-14 rifles, the predecessor to the M-16 rifle. These were Army assault rifles. The rifles had slings, or canvas straps which are used to carry them over the shoulder. There was a manufacturing defect in the sling swivels. A big, political issue arose as a result, with human rights involved. The Nicaraguans said that the U.S. must replace the sling swivels on 15,000 rifles. There were two sling swivels required on each rifle, so a total of 30,000 sling swivels were involved, at a cost of two to three dollars each. It was not a big deal, but they went on a rifle, and the reports of the conflict between the Guardia Nacional and the Sandinista Liberation Front were bubbling up in the early days of the Carter administration. The first thing we heard from Pat Darien and the human rights people was, "No, we will not replace the rusting sling swivels."

Well, this was silly. We had a colonel who was the commander of the Military Group in Nicaragua, with about ten officers and NCOs. They were saying, "Come on, let's get real. We sold them this, and there is a defect." This was Nicaragua where issues of this kind had not been on the

front burner in this mechanical way. Everybody had been concerned about atrocities and all of that, but my recollection is that Pat Darien and her supporters all of a sudden concluded, "We're going to stick it to the Somoza regime and the Guardia Nacional. We're not going to replace the sling swivels."

So the cables flew back and forth. Ambassador Solaun arrived, and the controversy was still going on. Robert Pastor was the National Security Director for Latin America. He was 29 years old, an academic from Georgia, and was President Jimmy Carter's man on Latin America. He was a major activist. I first met Bob Pastor before Ambassador Solaun arrived. In June, 1977, Rosalyn Carter the President's wife decided that she would make a trip to Latin America. She would carry the human rights word with her. The target was mainly Brazil and a lesser target in Peru. But the first, overseas stop for Mrs. Carter as First Lady was Caracas, Venezuela. Just as they had done with me in Yugoslavia, we received a telephone call or cable that said, "We would like Gillespie to go to Caracas to help to manage Mrs. Carter's visit to Venezuela. The Embassy in Venezuela is not strong in the administrative area, and we'd like to have Gillespie go down and do it."

So I packed up, and in June, 1977, I went down to Caracas and stayed for about six weeks, getting ready for the visit of Mrs. Carter. This is where I found out about Bob Pastor. Bob, who is now a friend of mine, was something out of a book. Everything was changed three times. Something was approved, then disapproved, a new thing was approved, and all kinds of things happened. It was all Pastor, Pastor, Pastor. Here was this young guy going around and making things happen.

At the time Caracas didn't have any major problems. There was a President, Pete Vaky was our Ambassador, a really strong, career Foreign Service Officer. Diego Asencio was his Deputy Chief of Mission, another very strong career officer. Myles Frechette, now our Ambassador to Colombia, was the Political Counselor and a very strong Latin Americanist. So the Embassy in Caracas, on the substantive side, was fine. A little weak on the administrative side, but I was sent there to help them out. The administrative guy was a little slow-moving, and all it took was to say, "I'm here to help you," and we moved it all. Diego Asencio was great. Mrs. Carter had a good stop in Caracas, but there was where I saw Pastor. And I could see how this guy worked. His mind was moving a mile a minute or faster - maybe with the speed of light. Everything was changing from minute to minute and hour to hour. Everybody was tearing their hair out - Ambassador Vaky, the DCM, and so forth. They said, "My God, we just arranged this. Now we have to change it!" Pastor began with, "Mrs. Carter wants this." Then it became, "I want this."

Pastor was the actor in Nicaragua about the time that Ambassador Solaun arrived. Not Pat Darien. Darien's office was in the State Department. The scene of the action was really in the NSC (National Security Council) in Washington. The Nicaraguan situation began to build. In the course of Mrs. Carter's trip to Latin America, after going to Peru and really hitting them hard on the human rights issue in Brazil and, I think, Argentina, she returned to the U.S. and didn't visit Nicaragua. However, at a certain point, Pastor became involved, as 1977 ended and 1978 began. I guess that the first thing that hit us was that the publisher and owner of *La Prensa*, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, was assassinated - gunned down - early in 1978.

Everybody suspected that Somoza was behind it, but there were just enough things "off" that you could not be sure. Some really bad actors had entered on the scene in Nicaragua. They were

Cubans. Not Cuban-Americans, but Cuban exiles. They were running a blood business - literally. They were buying human blood, converting it into blood plasma, and selling it on the international market. The murdered man, Chamorro, had sharply criticized these vampires in the press. There is no doubt that as Cuban exiles who were anti-Castro, they, Somoza, and all of those around Somoza, had a great affinity for each other. But there was some suspicion that these Cuban exiles either got Chamorro because they didn't like the publicity, or it may have been a little bit of "Who will rid me of this troublesome priest?" Perhaps they didn't hesitate and just said, "We'll do it!" The idea may have been that the Cubans wanted to make sure that they would always have a nice home for their blood sucking operation in Nicaragua.

One or two of these Cubans may have either had American connections, or there was a business connection. I can remember that they came into the Embassy. At this point I vividly remember Ambassador Solaun asking me to join him, the Economic Officer, and the DCM, because he wanted lots of people in the room when we met with these guys. I sat in on this meeting. These Cubans were not savory people. They were not nice men. You could tell that these were tough guys and were not in this blood business for any humanitarian reason but because it was a profitable business. Anyway, Chamorro was killed, and Ambassador Solaun and all of us went to the funeral. We met his widow, Violeta, now the President of Nicaragua, and their children. I had never met Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, the murdered man.

As a chief of mission Ambassador Solaun handled himself very well, I have to tell you. He would include people in the Embassy, and not just section chiefs, at social events. He would invite political figures to breakfast. One time he'd have a Political Officer. Another day he'd have an Economic Officer. He'd ask the Consular Officer. He'd ask me to come. Maybe he'd have a couple of us. He'd have a working dinner. He would include people from the Embassy in his guest lists all the time, so we all got to know the cream of the cream of Nicaraguan society, directly through Ambassador Solaun or on our own.

We were trying to sell this House on the Hill. FBO (Office of Foreign Building Operations) had decided that it would be a good idea. One of my constant jobs was whether we could market it. Would anybody buy it? Was it saleable? It was bigger than we needed. There were all kinds of considerations like that.

So Pedro Joaquin Chamorro was assassinated, and that changed the whole complexion of the Nicaraguan political and social scene. This was something that had NOT happened before. And there was Somoza's heart attack the previous year, in 1977. Everything was changing. The Sandinistas were becoming stronger in the North. Municipal elections were scheduled for March, 1978. All of a sudden it sounded as if there might be some kind of political competition for these mayoral and municipal council jobs. In the past Somoza's supporters would just kind of win these elections, mainly because nobody would run against them. So these elections had been half-hearted.

We worked out a way of covering these elections, which were of interest to everybody. It turned out that I was appointed to cover the municipal election in a town called Rivas on the western shore of Lake Nicaragua in the southern part of the country. So one of the FSOs who was doing visa work, one of the military officers from the Military Group, and I went down to Rivas, where we

spent about three days - the day before, election day, and the day after the election. We collected views on everything we could on the atmosphere and how the elections had gone. It was fun for me, because I had not done much of that before. I was the senior guy, so I was in charge of this team of three people. We went back to the Embassy and reported that the elections had taken place but that there probably had been some hanky panky. The Somocista candidate won, as almost everyone had expected. However, it seemed that some fairly strong opposition to the Somoza government was building in Rivas.

It wasn't much later than that, perhaps in May, 1978, that a terrible incident occurred in the town of Masaya, just South of Managua. A detachment of the Guardia Nacional, claiming that it was going after Sandinistas, really shot up one whole, poor section of the town. Ambassador Solaun and DCM Asencio asked me to go out to Masaya with the Political Officer to see what was going on. We got there within hours of the time this had happened. I can remember vividly walking down the street and seeing a child's foot in the middle of the street. We looked into the huts lining the street and found blood splattered around and cartridge casings from the M-14 assault rifles. The bullets had clearly gone through the thin walls and killed anybody who was inside. They had hardly expended any energy getting through those walls. It was really gory. We talked to the people there, the local priest, political people, and residents of the town.

We described this clearly unprovoked incident in a report to the Department which Washington was bound to react to. Things were going bad in Nicaragua. The Chamorro assassination seems to have triggered this deterioration. There had been the show election and then the Masaya incident. The question began to be asked whether the Somoza government could survive. What was really going on? The Sandinistas who had been in northern Nicaragua had promoted the establishment of a group of 12 non-Sandinista members of the National Assembly who were opposed to the Somoza government. It was now no longer just the Sandinistas opposed to the government. There was a non-Sandinista opposition to Somoza, operating in Costa Rica.

One of the political leaders whom I had gotten to know fairly well, thanks to Ambassador Solaun, was a businessman who was also interested in purchasing the House on the Hill. He was now a member of this group of 12 down in Costa Rica. He had, in effect, exiled himself from Nicaragua. There was growing pressure against the Somoza government. The town of Rivas, where I had gone to observe the elections, was attacked by an armed group from across the Costa Rican border. Rivas was on the main road, about 30 miles North of the Costa Rican border. This armed group used rocket launchers to shoot up the military garrison in Rivas. The Army officer from the Military Group went down to Rivas, talked to the garrison, returned, and prepared a report on what had happened. A lot of that kind of thing was going on.

The next incident which I recall must have happened in May or June, 1978, soon after the Masaya incident. Jay Freres, the Economic Officer, and his wife, who was originally German, had a couple of sons, one of them the same age as my son, and a couple of daughters. We were pretty close friends. Marie Freres told her husband that she had been to the dentist, a Nicaraguan bearing a U.S. passport who was living in Nicaragua. I assume that the dentist and his family were dual nationals, with both Nicaraguan and U.S. citizenship. The dentist told Mrs. Freres that his sister, who was also a U.S. citizen, had a son who, with a friend of his who may have had a Mexican connection, were fugitives from the Guardia Nacional in Nicaragua. They had been with the Sandinista

Liberation Front up in the northern mountains of Nicaragua. The Guardia Nacional was reportedly getting close to them. These two young men were staying at the dentist's house. The dentist wanted to know if the Embassy could help them.

So Jay and I went to see Ambassador Solaun and a recently-arrived DCM named Frank, whose last name I can't remember. He was a big, red-haired guy who had been DCM in Malta. Frank was a chain-smoking, heavy drinking, professional Political Officer, an FSO. He was a no nonsense type of person. Mary Daniels, the chief of the Consular Section, was also present at this meeting. We asked the Ambassador and DCM what we could or should do about this. These kids were fugitives, and the Guardia Nacional was after them. Quite frankly, Stu, I don't think that we ever reported this case to the Department. We decided to do what we could to help these young men escape the Guardia Nacional. Jay Freres and I, with me driving, took the Ambassador's Cadillac at night and picked up these two kids at the dentist's house. Meanwhile, I had contacted the Mexican Ambassador and discussed the case with him. With the agreement of the Mexican Ambassador we took the two kids, had them lie down in the back seat, and took them to the Mexican Ambassador's house. They got of the car, ran inside, and had asylum from the Mexican Ambassador, as Nicaraguans, not as U.S. citizens. They were moved out of Nicaragua the next day. I don't know whether this was ever a matter of official record.

*Q: You were right. That's the type of thing you do in the field. If you don't do it there, the news of the incident gets all over the place...*

GILLESPIE: If you don't do anything, you have lawyers inquiring, the Bureau of Consular Affairs gets involved, and by the time you make a decision, whatever it is, you may have lost any chance to be effective. Well, Ambassador Solaun, bless his soul, and Frank, the DCM, reviewed the situation. Frank asked what our options were. If we called the Department on the open telephone, the Nicaraguans might hear us. If we sent a cable, it would be two days before we got an answer. These kids were in the dentist's house, the dentist raised the matter with us, and what could we do? We discussed the matter and decided to contact the Mexican Ambassador to see if he would offer asylum to them. As I mentioned above, I think that the other kid had some Mexican connection. The Mexican Ambassador was the logical person to call. I had previously met the Mexican Ambassador to Nicaragua. He had been in the Protocol Office of the Mexican Secretariat of Foreign Affairs when I was the GSO at the Embassy in Mexico City. I had met him in connection with one of our property deals - maybe the American cemetery matter I mentioned previously.

I called the Mexican Ambassador and asked if I could come and see him. Freres and I went to see him and presented the problem. We asked him, "Would you help? We have not discussed this with anyone." He said, "Yes, if you can get these two young men here after dark and pull into my driveway with a car having diplomatic plates." Ambassador Solaun agreed to this course of action. There was no Nicaraguan surveillance that we knew of at the Mexican Ambassador's residence. So we did it, and that was it, as far as we were concerned. The dentist was always grateful to us, and, I suppose, so was the kid's mother.

Another fascinating thing happened. I mentioned the Intercontinental Hotel, where several of us stayed for a time after we arrived in Managua. It turned out that Somoza and his government, because it was considered so corrupt, was believed to be easy plucking for con men.

*Q: By "con" men you mean "confidence" men...*

GILLESPIE: Yes. They would take people for their money. They want to make some easy money. It turned out that there was a man from South Carolina, whose name was Arthur something. I cannot remember his last name. He had been in the textile business. He had a scheme for some kind of a textile operation in Nicaragua. He had probably come to Nicaragua either in late 1976 or early 1977 and had been living in the Intercontinental Hotel. Initially, he had paid his bills, which amounted to some tens of thousands of dollars, and everything was fine. By late 1978, about the time that all of these other things were going on, he was still waiting to see Somoza and get approval for his investment scheme, which would have required the Nicaraguans to put up some front money. He was now unable to pay his bill at the Intercontinental Hotel, so the hotel people eventually went to the Police or the government. The police arrested this guy, an American citizen from South Carolina. He was put into jail for non-payment of his bill, which amounted to about \$30,000. He couldn't get together the money.

Somehow, he escaped from jail and appeared at the door of the U.S. Embassy - inside the gate and past the guard. I was called to come down to the door because I was in charge of security and all of that. The Assistant GSO was there, because he was also the post Security Officer. Art was a not very attractive human being, from the physical point of view. He turned out to be even less attractive in every other respect. He said, "I'm not leaving. You can't get me out of here. I'm not walking out there. I'm not going back to that jail. They beat me." He alleged human rights violation and said that he wanted "asylum." I explained that we don't give asylum to American citizens. I said, "Get out of here." Anyhow, we reported this case to the Department. He spent six weeks living in the little dispensary that we had on the ground floor of the Embassy. Our nurse, Patricia Jaramillo, was an American citizen married to a Nicaraguan doctor - a lovely woman. It turned out that Arthur had serious problems with diabetes. He needed insulin and all of that. He smoked cigars - couldn't live without cigars. He needed a special diet. We had a little snack bar or cafeteria. He was living at the Embassy. The Nicaraguans were sending us diplomatic notes, requesting that we turn this guy over to them. We didn't particularly like the Somoza government, but Arthur gave us special problems. We went through 2 FAM, the Foreign Affairs Manual, which tells you how to deal with cases like this.

Finally, after six weeks we got the right instruction that we had been asking for, which was permission for the Embassy to give him back to the Nicaraguan authorities. We had considered every option. Could we fly him out? How could he get to the airport? He couldn't leave legally. If we got him out of the country, we would be violating Nicaraguan law. He had no diplomatic immunity. Of course, he was a constituent of some member of Congress. The instruction from the Department authorized us to hand him back to the Nicaraguans. He said he wouldn't leave, which we had reported to the Department. In turn, the Department authorized us "to use whatever reasonable force is required to eject him" from the Embassy building.

We had these instructions from the Department. We had a back gate to the Embassy, which is pretty exposed all the way around. The press wasn't in sight. They were around initially, when they thought that there was a story in this. However, interest had dwindled. We worked it out that we could take this guy to the back gate of the Embassy and turn him over to the Managua Police. Not

the Guardia Nacional, although the Police really came under the Guardia Nacional. We would ask the Police to drive up to the back gate to the Embassy at a precise time and we would turn over this man. We would tell the Foreign Ministry that this was how we proposed to handle the matter.

This was our plan, but at this point we still had not informed the Nicaraguan authorities of what we planned to do. I think that it was Jay Freres, the Economic Officer, who said, "You know, I've been through something like this before, and you'd be amazed at how many unexpected things can happen. Why don't we rehearse what we're going to do before we talk to the Nicaraguans?" We all thought that that was a great idea, so we scripted this show from start to finish. We would tell Arthur that the Ambassador needs to talk to him, because the instructions from the Department stated that, "The Ambassador is to inform him directly and personally that he is no longer welcome at the Embassy and that he has to leave. If he doesn't go voluntarily, he will be ejected." This was all Miranda language cautioning him about his rights. In effect, we would read him his rights.

So we said, "Okay, Jay, this was your idea. You get to be Arthur." We would bring him into the Ambassador's office. He would stand in front of the Ambassador's desk. The Ambassador would remain seated at his desk. Maybe he would stand up to talk to Arthur, but we didn't want Arthur to reach over and hit the Ambassador or do anything crazy. The Ambassador was to keep his desk between them. We had 12 Marines assigned to the Embassy. We decided to have the Gunnery Sergeant the NCO in command of the Marine Guard detachment and three of his stronger Marines in the back of the Ambassador's office and not immediately visible when Arthur walked in the door. I would be there with the Assistant GSO. The nurse would be right outside the door of the Ambassador's office, if she were needed for any reason. When we brought him over to the Ambassador's office, she would put all of his belongings in a bag and bring them with her to the door to the Ambassador's office.

So we started our dress rehearsal. I went to get Jay Freres who was standing in for Arthur and took him to the Ambassador's office, standing him in front of the Ambassador's desk. Ambassador Solaun himself was sitting there. Everybody else except Jay Frere, standing in for Arthur was a real person, standing in his or her appointed position. The Ambassador stood up and said, "Well, Mr. So-and-So, I now have my instructions from Washington. You are to turn yourself in to the Nicaraguan authorities, subject to Nicaraguan law." The Ambassador read from a prepared script. Jay looked around in panic, reached over onto the desk, grabbed a letter opener, and lunged for the Ambassador. He said, "You'll never get me out of here!" Then the Marines ran over and grabbed him. Well, we ran through this dress rehearsal twice more. We made sure that there would be nothing within this guy's reach with which to threaten the Ambassador. We actually practiced with Jay Freres how the Marine Guards would hold him with the minimum chance of hurting him, so that we restrained him but would not break an arm or anything else.

So we told the Nicaraguan Police and the Foreign Ministry what we were going to do, and on the next morning we did it. I went to get this guy and brought him to the Ambassador's office. He sensed that this would not be good news, although I tried not to indicate this in any way. He started running around the Ambassador's office, yelling, "You will not get me out of here! I am a dying man." It was a real drama. The Marine Guards came over and grabbed him. The Nicaraguan Police were at the back gate. We had Embassy officers as witnesses all along the route to the back gate, so we could say that we hadn't hit his head against the wall and that nothing had happened to him. We

had towels on hand so that he couldn't hit his head. Well, that rehearsal really prepared us for what happened. Thank God that we had Jay Freres with the good sense to say, "Let's try this out in advance."

It was truly a traumatic event. We don't like to turn over American citizens to foreign governments. This guy was not going into nice people's hands. They weren't going to let him go easily. Well, as it turned out, we then pursued the matter with the Nicaraguan authorities. We said, "Look, you don't want this guy sitting around your jail. Deport him." And they did.

*Q: The secret story about consular officers is to appeal to the other side and say, "Okay, you've made your point. But if you keep him, we'll be coming in to visit him. We'll be reporting and protesting on this matter." Our objective is to get him out of our consular district.*

GILLESPIE: Mary Daniels, the Consular Officer, did a superb job in this matter.

*Q: I've never heard of anything like this. That was an excellent way to handle it.*

GILLESPIE: As I look back on Nicaragua as a tour of duty, I tend to look at it from the point of view of the internal politics within the Embassy. As we approached summer of 1978, the Sandinista movement had grown. The end of the Somoza administration was coming at some time. In the spring and early summer of 1978 we had the sling swivel controversy which I have described, some shootings and killings, and other incidents. There were Americans in jail. The body of a person who had apparently been killed was found on the street leading up to my house. One of the Foreign Agricultural Service screw worm guys lived with his family over the hill behind us. There had been some shooting up in there. There was a lot of serious business going on, and the Nicaraguan Guardia Nacional, if not out of control, was handling internal security matters with a very heavy hand.

One of the most serious things that happened involved Nora Astorga, the secretary of another potential purchaser of the Ambassador's Residence. Her boss was a very non-political businessman, a building contractor who had worked all over South America, not just in Nicaragua. Nora Astorga, who was rather a nice-looking woman, had been the mistress of a Nicaraguan Air Force general for about a year. He was either the chief of staff of the Nicaraguan Air Force or the number two and was a "toad" of a man in terms of his appearance. She had him over at her house in the spring of 1978 for an assignation. She punctured him a couple of times with an ice pick, and a bunch of Sandinistas came into the house through the doors and windows and finished him off. It was a bloody, gory affair, and Nora Astorga took off for the hills. The businessman, who was a friend of mine by now, said, "My God, I never knew that she was a Sandinista."

The Sandinistas were coming out of the woodwork, and you could just see the whole Somoza government begin to fall apart. The succession issue had come into play because of "Old Man" Somoza's heart attack. He had a half-brother named Jose R. Somoza, who was an illegitimate son of their father. The half-brother was the commander of the armed forces and thought that he ought to be the logical successor to the Old Man. There were lots of things going on. Old Man Somoza kept saying, "No, my successor is my son." There was another brother of the Old Man, who was a wealthy, Yale-educated man. He and his friends were building some political pressure. You could

see all of this happening.

The U.S. Government was saying, "Somoza is going to have to go." What should our position be? About that time there was an exchange of letters between Washington and Managua, which had to do with military equipment which we were not going to give or not going to sell. Then there were letters about Somoza and the succession. This has all been written up by people like Anthony Lake now the National Security Adviser to President Clinton, who was not directly involved in it but did research on it. It was written up by Ambassador Solaun to some degree and by others. I can't pretend to have the facts entirely right, but there were several exchanges of correspondence. What struck me about it was the degree to which coordination within the U.S. Government in Washington was so weak.

First of all, I learned from my own conversations with people in ARA (Bureau of American Republics Affairs) in the State Department that there was a widely held view that Ambassador Solaun did not have a complete grasp of the situation, to put it charitably. According to this view, Ambassador Solaun did not really understand how Washington works, so his communications which he would occasionally send in privately, like Ambassador Theberge, would kind of bounce around back in Washington. Whenever we could, we would advise the Ambassador not to do certain things or to do them in certain ways. However, he didn't always take that advice. I'm not sure that the advice was always right, either. Nonetheless, I don't think that he understood some of the power stuff that was going on. I don't think that he ever really grasped the role of Bob Pastor in the NSC. Ambassador Solaun kept trying to deal with people in the State Department. We would say, "You ought to send that message to the NSC, or call them, or do this or that." Maybe he would and maybe he wouldn't.

In any event the result was that Somoza received very mixed signals about the Washington view of him and the situation in Nicaragua. He back played this through Congressmen Murphy and Wilson and other people on the Hill, getting their views on what was really happening. Somoza was in touch with his classmates from West Point. I remember that, at one point, I suggested that the U.S. Government ought to go to Somoza's classmates and suggest that they tell them to straighten up and fly right. I learned several years later that, in fact, the U.S. military had indeed done that, but to no avail. Somoza didn't listen to those classmates.

The institutional learning part of this was that there was an Ambassador and an Embassy moving in one direction. There was a gulf between what they were doing and thinking and what Washington was doing and thinking. Whose fault this was I wouldn't try to guess. As I say, it's covered in several of the semi-official accounts of the period. That was a key part of it. It was confusing. Ambassador Solaun felt that he was not being supported. I think that Washington felt that it was not being well supported. There was a cast of characters in Washington of varying quality.

In Washington there were, in some order, a career Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central America and a non-career political appointee who was intelligent and smart but not experienced in handling Central America as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. There was a lot of room for confusion, and there was, in fact, some confusion. This confusion was transmitted to the person on whom we were, I think, trying to exert influence, that is, Somoza. We wanted to have the situation

come out the way we wanted it to, which was to have a democratic and peaceful transition to another government. One of the things that we did not want, as a goal, was to have rebellion spread or to have violence in the country. We did not want war, but things were moving increasingly in that negative direction. We were trying to achieve a peaceful solution. That effort went on through 1978.

I left the Embassy in Managua in August, 1978. Just about the time I left, or a few weeks later, one of the revolutionaries, a man named Eden Pastora, and a small group of supporters took over the National Assembly building in Managua and held a number of members of the National Assembly hostage for a number of days. That really signaled the beginning of the end of the Somoza regime. The war or the battles began after that, between the Guardia Nacional and the Sandinistas. I mentioned that, while I was still there, the Sandinistas had attacked Rivas. I think that there was also an attack on Leon a town about 60 miles northwest of Managua. There may also have been an attack on a town called Chinandega about 74 miles northwest of Managua, where there was real fighting. However, heavy fighting was sporadic, with gaps in between. This took place between August, 1978, and July, 1979, when Somoza was defeated and finally left the country. In that interim period the Embassy got into all kinds of difficulties that I was not present for.

When I came back to the United States in August, 1978, I was waiting for an onward assignment. The assignment that I received, because the job that the Department wanted to assign me to would not be available until later, was in the Office of Management Operations in the Department. I was going to be assigned to the Foreign Service Institute to take a relatively new course, called Political Economy or political-economic training. However, just a week or two before that course was to begin, the takeover of the National Assembly building occurred, and I was assigned to be Deputy Director of the Nicaragua Task Force in the Operations Center of the State Department. This occupied me until the course at the FSI started, so I stayed in touch with Nicaragua during that period. That situation solved itself. The hostages were released, but you could tell that everything was going downhill from that point.

I guess that I came away from the assignment to Nicaragua with mixed feelings. My previous diplomatic post was in Mexico City, where I had served under two highly professional career diplomats as Ambassadors. I had a big Embassy staff with some very capable people to handle some very difficult, management problems. There were difficult policy issues involved and difficult policy management issues because of the proximity to Washington and so forth.

With regard to Nicaragua, I haven't even touched on AID.

*Q: We might stop at this point. The one thing that we might touch on with regard to Nicaragua, because we have covered just about everything else, is the AID connection while you were there. Also, when you came back to Washington, in the very short time that you served on the Nicaragua Task Force, you might describe the difference in perspective between a small, beleaguered, and almost dysfunctional Embassy and looking at Nicaragua from the perspective of the Department of State. Let's do that another time.*

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*Today is December 1, 1995. We are resuming the interview with Ambassador Tony Gillespie. Tony, we were going to discuss the AID program in Nicaragua.*

GILLESPIE: I think I mentioned earlier that in the mid-1970s the Agency for International Development program in Nicaragua was one of the largest in the Western Hemisphere, in terms of money in the pipeline flowing through to the recipient. I think that this program was the largest in terms of personnel, including both American direct hire employees and Foreign Service National (Nicaraguan) employees.

*Q: Also, when you were at the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, you said that you learned more than you probably ought to know about AID.*

GILLESPIE: I learned about the Agency for International Development. Just as a quick flashback, the first Minister for Economic Affairs in the U.S. Mission to NATO, when I was assigned to Brussels, was an Italian-American gentleman, whose name I can't remember. He had worked with the original Economic Cooperation Administration ECA, the predecessor of AID during the period of the Marshall Plan. He had told me some things about assistance programs and how they should or shouldn't work. Anyway, when I was at Syracuse University, I looked at assistance programs. I learned that I was going to the Embassy in Managua, Nicaragua, and would be responsible for administering some of the AID activity there. That is, not the AID program as such, but some of their administrative arrangements.

When I got to Nicaragua, I found a really quite complex operation. There was a very complex bureaucracy in place. It was not totally inefficient. I had talked to the AID people in Washington to find what I was getting into. They were suspicious. They did not think that a State Department Administrative Officer was going to do much good for them. They were sort of reluctantly in this joint administrative arrangement which had been set up in Managua. It was in place in just a few Embassies or Missions around the world. I learned that the AID program efforts were basically related to the aftermath of the earthquake of 1972, plus some regular development assistance programs to try to help the poor in Nicaragua to live a better life. On the whole, AID activity was fairly wide- ranging.

This was at a time when AID was still getting involved in what were called "capital projects" - that is, major investment areas, including roads, bridges, and those kinds of things - in addition to social, health, and development areas. So the AID Mission in Nicaragua had a little bit of everything. I quickly learned, and this was not inconsequential, that the AID Mission Director was designated, according to the Foreign Affairs Manual - and I guess that this reflected statutory law - as a principal representative of the United States overseas. As such, he was entitled to the same kind, if not the same quantity, of perquisites that the U.S. Ambassador had. The Mission Director, of course, had housing, at a time when other people in the Mission and Embassy may not have had housing. That involved an Official Residence Expense (ORE) allocation, under which money was available to run his residence and pay the domestic staff. He had a car and driver.

I learned that not only was this the case in fact, but the Mission Directors really saw themselves as virtually co-equal with the U.S. Ambassador.

*Q: That must have been a "comfortable" relationship!*

GILLESPIE: It always was a terribly comfortable relationship. [Laughter] One of the challenges for me was going to be to make clear to the Mission Director that I saluted most sharply toward the U.S. Ambassador because he was the President's personal representative. I was not so much concerned about the Mission Director as the AID representative. However, I appreciated that I also had to serve the AID Director for Nicaragua, who was one of my principal clients. I was supposed to work for him, too. So I was supposed to figure out how to balance...

*Q: This was a period when what we used to call "the Ambassadorial Letter" was in force.*

GILLESPIE: It was.

*Q: You might explain what the Ambassadorial Letter was all about.*

GILLESPIE: President John F. Kennedy had initially sent out what was called the Ambassadorial Letter in which he basically said that the Ambassador was his personal representative and had the authority to direct the efforts and to be accountable for, as it later turned out, the actions of all Executive Branch employees assigned in the country concerned. An exception was made because of relationships, primarily in Europe, though in a few places elsewhere in the world, for military personnel assigned under the Theater Military Commander, whoever he might be.

*Q: This related to NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), SEATO (Southeast Asian Treaty Organization)...*

GILLESPIE: Those exceptions have become more extensive over time because the U.S. military, after the passage of legislation a few years ago, was reorganized, and there now are what are called Unified Military Commands or Theater Commanders in each of the geographic areas. That has created problems since then. However, at that time, the Ambassadors had their letters, which were sort of a license which made clear that they were responsible for all of the civilian employees of the U.S. Executive Branch in the country concerned, whether permanently or temporarily assigned. That letter was supposed to give the Ambassador authority.

Well, structurally, we had, as we know, a Deputy Chief of Mission, who serves as Charge d'Affaires when the Ambassador is not in the country. Ambassadors usually look to Deputy Chiefs of Mission especially to coordinate interagency matters at the post, to make sure that they know what's going on, and to manage the establishment, however that establishment is defined.

The AID Mission Director also has a Deputy AID Mission Director. As it turned out, in many of the smaller posts, when AID was big and strong, regardless of whether the State Department representation was big or strong, the AID Mission Director, more often than not, was either the rank equivalent of the Deputy Chief of Mission or senior to him. At small posts, like Nicaragua, quite frankly the AID Director was a couple of grades senior to the Deputy Chief of Mission in the Embassy. His Deputy AID Mission Director also outranked the Deputy Chief of Mission. Rank, like contracts, is something like contracts. You only need it when you need it. If things are going well, you don't need to worry about it. However, this issue turned out to be a sore point in Managua

because, I think, the AID people sensed, as I think I mentioned earlier, that relations between both of the Ambassadors under whom I served and both of the DCM's were not all of that great. The AID people saw in that whatever they saw. However, the result was that they didn't take the DCM's authority very seriously. On the surface they went along with a lot of rulings by the DCM's, but that didn't make for smooth relations in management.

There were disparities in benefits. If I remember correctly, State, USIA, and other Executive Branch American employees at the post had to go out and find their own housing. AID found housing for its own people, rented and furnished it, and paid the utilities charges. It turned out that one of my jobs was to provide different levels of service to different kinds of people. I was the Administrative Officer for both AID and State. One of my assistants was an AID General Services Officer, who knew all of AID's regulations and made sure that I knew what I had to know. I had the advantage over him, if that's the right word, that I wrote his Efficiency Report. There was no question about that. The Deputy AID Mission Director reviewed my report, but I had some leverage on the man, who turned out to be an excellent officer and absolutely loyal to me and to the Embassy as an organization. So we didn't have any problems. That was the way I saw these differences.

I learned the distinction between program and operations money at Syracuse University, but I came to understand how this worked out in actuality in Managua. The AID Mission had a huge program, amounting to millions of dollars. It was very easy for AID to cover certain kinds of things which, in the State Department, we would consider administration, management, or support expenses, out of program funds. Program funds were fungible. That is, you could move them around. You could spend program money on a lot of different things. That led to some disparities in support levels that were remarked upon occasionally by some of the State Department people. There were morale and institutional issues that would come up. There was not a lot of mixing between the State Department and the AID people.

The AID Mission had one officer who was nominally an economist. However, it turned out that that officer looked to the Embassy Economic Section for a lot of his information, so there was some interaction there. AID personnel included program and project officers, plus a lot of other kinds of people with interesting titles. The reality was that the AID Mission was putting direct hire agency officers or contract personnel - and there were a lot of people working under personal service contracts - right into government ministries in Nicaragua. I learned later on that AID operated in other countries in much the same way. These AID personnel would set up shop in these government ministries, where they would counsel, lead, coach, instruct, direct, or whatever the right verb was, the local Nicaraguan bureaucrats in operating particular programs. I am oversimplifying it. There was a process under which projects or programs would be developed in a collaborative way between American and Nicaraguan personnel. However, there was a tremendous amount of penetration of the local government structure by American Agency for International Development bureaucrats.

It was interesting that in a process like that, in a situation that was politically hot, as it was in Nicaragua, there was, of course, a lot of information collected about what was going on in the government. It was also interesting to see how some of our Development Assistance Officers were able to put on total blinders and ignore a lot of this and focus exactly on the task at hand, which

was, say, to come up with a better system for marketing goods from the country in the city. They were really almost ignorant about what the Nicaraguan people in the country were telling the Nicaraguan people in the market places of the city about what was going on with the Sandinista revolution in the countryside. If you pushed these American Development Assistance Officers hard enough, they would often say, "Well, I just don't want to get involved in that. It will confuse things if I get involved in that. It will interfere with my ability to work with these Nicaraguan bureaucrats and get these programs completed." They would continue, "While I might have some curiosity about these matters and, yes, it is a matter of concern to the United States, it would be counterproductive for me to get involved in that."

Others were not as reticent or withdrawn about this process. They were collecting information and were passing it on to the Embassy Political Officer and so forth. There were two AID Mission Directors while I was in Nicaragua. The first one was a fascinating man whom I got to know rather well. We played tennis, climbed mountains, and did other things together. He was a hard-bitten lawyer from New Hampshire or Vermont. He had been in AID for a long time after graduating from either the Harvard or Yale Law School - I forget which one. He was a very nice guy, with a very nice family. He was very definite about his prerogatives and perquisites relative to the Embassy and the Ambassador. He used an interesting vocabulary, which always juxtaposed the Embassy versus the AID Mission. We talk about a Chief of Mission. The Ambassador is designated as a Chief of Mission. AID doesn't use this terminology at all. What we call the Chief of Mission, they call the Ambassador. He runs "the Embassy." "The Mission" is what the Mission Director directs. We used to joke about that, after we got to know each other. Later on, when I was back in Washington, he was also here in Washington, where we saw each other socially. We would kind of laugh about that kind of thing when we would get together, but always with a little wry note in the humor.

In any event there were real problems with corruption in Nicaragua, in the sense of payoffs and kickbacks. One of the responsibilities of the AID Mission Director was to try and make sure that appropriate precautions had been taken and that U.S. aid money was not being siphoned off into payoffs. Well, the trouble is that money is fungible. If you get aid money for one thing, it frees up government money elsewhere, and that can go into people's pockets. It turned out later on, after the Sandinistas had come in and taken over the government, there were lots of allegations about AID money having been used improperly. I don't believe that any of these allegations ever blew back directly onto any U.S. AID personnel. I think that the succeeding AID Directors did a pretty good job, to the extent that they could.

The problem was that they were running some big programs. They came up with a fascinating approach to low cost housing. They were trying to make sure that the occupants of the housing had some kind of ownership stake in it. Well, it turned out that all of that was working very well. However, later on we learned that the land on which the housing had been built belonged to one of the Somozas. The Nicaraguan government bought the land, using its money. The money was then transferred from the U.S. to the Nicaraguan government for this program. Money then went into private pockets, probably at a rate higher than market forces would have predicted. We got into all of that.

The relationship between the AID Mission and the Embassy and State Department was never

terribly warm. It was always a little distant. I think that it may have characterized some of the operational versus analytical reporting and representational kinds of activities, which we get into everywhere. I must mention that we had similar strains with the U.S. Military Group in Nicaragua. There had been a Military Mission or Military Group for decades in Nicaragua. This was headed by an Army Colonel, a very good, honest, and upstanding man who was not very sophisticated in international relations. He had been sent to Nicaragua to do a specific job with a nice mission statement. He had people working for him who were mostly field grade officers - majors and lieutenant colonels. As I've said, the Nicaraguan *Guardia Nacional* had all U.S. equipment. There were programs to maintain and replace this equipment and make sure it was used properly.

I think that it would be unfair to try to characterize the attitudes of U.S. military personnel toward the Somoza government as anything but highly skeptical and very realistic. Maybe this is just a function of people who wear uniforms, but the U.S. military tends to feel an affinity and to give the benefit of the doubt to another person who wears a uniform. I got to know some of our military officers assigned to Nicaragua very well and still have close friendships with a couple of them to this day. They knew full well that there was corruption and violence and that bad things were happening. However, they were able somehow to deal with that and maintain their working relationships with the Nicaraguan military. They also were very careful to make sure that the U.S. was not tarnished by any of this. They made sure that they were not involved, but they had a job to do, which they were trying to accomplish.

At that time in the mid-1970s the issue of human rights was only beginning to be a concept known very well out in the field, at least in Central America. Some people asked, in effect, "What do you mean that we're supposed to tell these people to stop beating up the Indians or do this kind of thing." But it was a learning process that seemed to be going on.

I had another insight into the AID operation. I mentioned earlier that, while we were at Syracuse University, my wife had obtained a master's degree in anthropology. She had an opportunity to take some of her anthropological technology into the field. She competed for and entered into a contract with a group called the International Center for Research on Women to conduct a base line study of rural women's economic activities out in the countryside in Nicaragua.

This study, which lasted for about a year, involved sending field workers out into the countryside. My wife hired researchers, or field workers, from the local university who would go out into the countryside. She would go out periodically, monitor their work, and stay with them for a time. That was being done under an AID contract. I learned, through her, about the whole AID contracting process and, from that angle, what it was like to be an AID contractor. Incidentally, this also helped us to understand what conditions were like in rural Nicaragua, because both Vivian and I were interested in this. She would go out and be gone for a week, traveling in a four-wheel-drive vehicle, living in a tent, or in these very inexpensive bed and breakfast establishments of a certain kind. The food available mainly involved a diet of beans and rice, and her bed consisted of a plank with her sleeping bag on it.

That program gave us a basis for understanding that AID was up against tremendous, bureaucratic barriers. This came back to me later in Washington, when I was involved in other matters.

I believe that we have 11 volumes in the Foreign Affairs Manual - the regulations under which the State Department operates. We tend to think that they are mostly a lot of words. However, these regulations are important because they provide some guidelines and some rules which must be followed.

AID's regulations covered - I don't know how many volumes. They include, literally, tens of thousands of pages. Everything was covered in them. I had learned at Syracuse University, and then saw it demonstrated in Nicaragua, how different elements in Congress owned different parts of the programs of the Agency for International Development. In the State Department we basically had to be concerned about two authorizing committees in Congress - one in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate, as well as two appropriations committees. Those were the main concerns - four committees. Under those four, principal committees were some sub-committees. You could multiply that by God knows how many committees, which AID had to deal with.

*Q: Could you give a few examples of what you mean by Congressional groups having part of the action concerning AID programs?*

GILLESPIE: Sure. In the House of Representatives the Foreign Affairs Committee was the authorizing committee for both the State Department and, separately and under a different appropriation covering the Foreign Assistance Operations of our country, for AID. Then, in the Appropriations Committee area, there was an appropriations sub-committee which dealt with the Departments of State, Commerce, and Justice. It initially dealt with the Judiciary and then was renamed to cover the Department of Justice.

AID had a sub-committee of the House Foreign Operations Committee to deal with. That was all pretty clear, but then it turned out that, because AID was involved in agriculture programs, the sub-committees in the House and Senate that dealt with the Department of Agriculture on agricultural issues also had their fingers in the AID pot. They wanted to know and said that they had a legitimate right to be involved in decisions concerned with U.S. taxpayer money that would go into promoting or developing agriculture in countries overseas. Similarly, there were Government Operations Committees and Sub-Committees which were concerned with how money is being spent. Money is the honey that draws the flies. The flies, in this case, are not so much members of Congress but Congressional staffers who see opportunities and challenges in these areas - for their Members of Congress or for the policies which they advocate. The Department of the Interior was involved with dams, water, and electricity. Think of all of those things where you'd be developing a nation's infrastructure and economy. Our Agency for International Development took a philosophical and therefore operational approach early on, as we know. Some of the international institutions and some other governments said, "Look, we'll just write you a check. You spend the money and tell us what you spent it on. That's enough for us. That will help your development." Obviously, I am oversimplifying.

For a lot of different reasons we Americans, because of the way we manage our federal funds, apparently cannot do that. We have to follow a hands on approach right down to the bottom level and we can't leave anything alone. That's a Gillespie observation. If there's a chance to extend electric power into a rural area, and we think that that is going to help and it seems to make sense,

we want to be there. So that doesn't merely involve saying to the local government, "You ought to do this, and here are some ways of doing it." It probably means getting some people with spikes on their shoes to go out, climb a palm tree, and make sure that the wire was put up correctly.

It's the same thing with Congress. It involves micro management. I don't remember what the numbers were then, but in 1992 I headed up a special study effort on AID's management or administrative efficiency, operating out of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). If I remember correctly, I think that it would be safe to say that it was something in the order of 12 or 13 Committees and 24 Sub-Committees of the House of Representatives and the Senate which had a hand in the AID budget and operational process. You can imagine AID people trying to respond to that.

That meant that in Nicaragua there was a lot of Congressional interest. We had some visits from members of Congress looking at AID operations. More often, it was Congressional staffers who would come out and look and want to know what was going on. There was a tremendous number of AID contractors and AID officials on temporary duty involved in Nicaragua and a huge turnover of people, as a result.

I was fascinated by what I thought were either the existing or non-existing policies to program the linkages. There had been for years a program which was modified from time to time. However, each AID Mission Director was required to go through a fairly systematized Program, Planning, and Budgeting process. To do that, you have to have a sense of what U.S. policy, objectives, and national interests are in a given country. I found that, by and large, the AID people didn't relate much to the U.S. Embassy people, as they called them - the Ambassador, the DCM, and the Political and Economic Sections. There was at least nominal contact on this, but the AID people really set things up on their own. I did not regard that exactly as a disconnect, but it certainly wasn't the kind of thing that you'd expect. You would think that there ought to be pretty close collaboration between the AID Mission and the Embassy. They ought to have reached agreement on what the short term, medium term, and long term objectives ought to be.

However, the AID people used to say, "Well, the short term objectives really don't interest us." The Embassy people, for the most part, were concerned with what was going on right now. I guess that is why you had these lines which were probably converging but would not meet for a long time.

That was something which I was able to get into during the three missions which I headed. I had AID representation in all three of them. However, that was later.

I didn't like what I saw.

*Q: Looking at this issue from a State Department point of view, I have to say that I've never been really involved with AID in any particular country, except during the wrapping up phase or something like that. I've had the impression that AID tends to be chaotic because it depends so much on who the Mission Director is. Things seem to go off in different directions. Often our aid programs are carried out in countries where these programs go along fairly well as long as we are there. However, as soon as we leave, the system set up under the aid program collapses. But you were looking at the aid program both as an insider and an outsider. How did you feel about the aid*

*program?*

GILLESPIE: Let me put my thoughts in order. I don't think that you can separate what might be called the organizational values from the operations. What I learned at first hand in Nicaragua, which I had not really learned when looking at the aid program from a distance at Syracuse University, was the importance of the personal factor. The premium in the Agency for International Development was how to be promoted and become a Mission Director, because that was one of the career objectives. Everybody assumes that you come into the Agency for International Development to do a great job in promoting economic and social development and growth, or whatever the right word is, at the time. It is also assumed that you are committed to that. Their selection and socialization process does that.

However, when I was looking at AID in the field, I got involved in their personal evaluation process and watched the program evaluation process. What I learned rather quickly was that the premium in the Agency for International Development was on program creation, reflecting initiative, ingenuity, imagination, and innovation in program development. Program management and implementation, while not ignored, took a very distant second place to program development and innovation. The premiums in the efficiency reports, the premiums back in the corridors in Washington went something like, "Joe or Jane has come up with a really innovative approach to the role of women in economic development in rural areas. He (or she) has come up with this idea to enhance the ability of women" and so forth and so on.

Then they would go through the Program Development process, which involved looking at the interests and objectives of the United States. There was an elaborate structure for doing this. Program Design became very important. I found that, for AID, it was nothing to take an officer in Managua, or even a couple of them, put them on a plane and fly them to Washington for a week's temporary duty where they made a presentation to committees within the Agency for International Development on this new program or program design approach.

They would come back, in this case to Nicaragua, hire consultants, and spend a lot of money to refine the program design and work with the designer. Then there would be meetings with various elements of the AID Mission to go over all aspects of program design. It would take, perhaps, a year or even two years to get this program design right.

Then it would be funded. It had to be included in the budget, and they would have to go through all of these defensive mechanisms, committee meetings, and so on - whatever the size of the program, whether for one dollar, five dollars or \$10 million. During this time the program designer and his or her colleagues who were working on this proposal were being praised for being innovative. The proposal was called wonderful, and so on.

AID used the system of tours. In the State Department we talk about a two, three or four year tour of duty. AID also talked about tours, but they were always two years long. We had AID people in Nicaragua who had been there for two, three, or four "tours." A lot of the younger, brighter people stay for only two years. Well, it often took two tours, or four years, to get a program designed and approved.

At that point the officer who designed it left Nicaragua, and a new officer replaced him or her. I'm really short handing this process, but I'm afraid that it's true and have had it confirmed since then. The new officer would say, "That is a really fascinating, innovative program design. I certainly hope that it works well. Meanwhile, my job is to design the next new program."

The problem was that not very many people spent much time managing or implementing this beautifully designed program to accomplish this or that, at a cost of so many millions of dollars. Money was allocated, and people in the local government were involved. The AID Mission Director would ask, "How is this program going?" They would have people come in to evaluate the program. Well, the evaluations were always positive. Nobody was ever very negative on these kinds of things. The fact was that there was no ownership, as I use the term, or perhaps investment by very many people in the AID Mission in that project because the original designer of the project had come and gone, and that was it.

I know that I'm oversimplifying this process, but I know that there was, and still is, a lot of that in AID. As a person who thought of himself as a manager and as a taxpayer, I didn't think that that was a very good approach. It is one of the continuing, main points of criticism of AID.

*Q: There seems to be something more. I may be wrong, but what this whole Oral History Program is about is to give the academic world a taste of the real world. You rehearse before you push somebody out of the back gate of the Embassy. So often, on the academic side, they prepare these paradigms, or whatever they are. They build up a wonderful construct which is often dead wrong. It is logical and so forth, but it has no relationship to what really goes on in the field. I'm talking about the U.S. Government and the State Department. It sounds as if these programs are developed by very bright people, but they're looking at them from the academic, rather than the practical point of view, that is, "Is Juan Perez going to get some water?"*

GILLESPIE: Well, that may not be totally accurate. There is a deep sense of mission and concern on the part of the AID people involved in these programs. I think that it's just the system and the way it works.

We had a very large Peace Corps program in Nicaragua at that time. The Peace Corps was out there making sure that "Juan Perez got his water." They were really trying to do that. It was all hands on stuff. The thing is that the AID people are NOT Peace Corps volunteers. They are not out there to make sure that an individual person gets water. They are more concerned that there is potable water available in a broad area or that the money invested by the government in water is well spent. The AID people were looking at the problem in macro terms.

Now, I've given you a view of the way AID functions, from my perspective.

*Q: Obviously, you've been Chief of Mission in various places. But was this the impression you were getting as a recent student at the Maxwell School of Public Administration now stationed in Nicaragua?*

GILLESPIE: This is what I saw in Nicaragua. What came later on was something else. Ambassador Solaun, who had previously been on the faculty at the University of Illinois, was a

sociologist. Both he and Ambassador Theberge, his predecessor, had done contracting work for the Agency for International Development. My observation was that I never saw Ambassador Theberge get too deeply involved in AID matters. However, he knew a lot of the terminology. When the AID Mission Director would be at a staff meeting on AID matters, Ambassador Theberge knew what was going on. He watched AID activity carefully, because he, too, was sensitive about where all of this money was going, what was happening to it, and what were we doing with it. Was this money serving the general U.S. interest? The general conclusion was, "Yes, it is."

I'm not saying that the AID programs were bad. There was the public housing program. Developing markets where people could sell things was important. Rural development projects were all positive and good. It is not my intention to criticize the substance of it.

However, Ambassador Solaun really wanted to get in on the details of the AID program. He wanted to be the Ambassador who was helping the AID Mission Director to run the Mission. The AID Mission Director didn't always like that!

The important lesson which I learned from both ambassadors was that they saw the AID programs and the AID presence as they saw other programs - as important parts of the U.S. programs in Nicaragua. The ability to go out and visit AID projects and be photographed doing so, to talk to the press about AID projects, to meet with the Ministers of Health, Mines, Energy, and so forth regarding an AID project were reasons for getting into the Nicaraguan government in other ways. However, the United Nations also had a Development Program in Nicaragua. I became a little bit involved in it because I was sitting around, listening to all of this at the AID staff meetings.

I had to go to the Ambassador's Country Team meetings, the AID Mission Director's meetings, and I would sit in on a lot of the AID operational meetings, where there might be some administrative consequences. I learned that the fact of our AID program really opened up parts of the country and its bureaucracy to the Embassy, by virtue of the AID program being there. If the AID program hadn't been there, we probably wouldn't have gotten into some of the things we got into or learned about some of the things that we learned about or had some of the contacts we had. In many ways the AID program gave the Ambassador, and, therefore, the U.S., a seat at tables where we might not otherwise have had them. I have since had that confirmed over and over again. If you talk to our Ambassadors in countries where we had AID programs, they will confirm the benefits of those programs. One of the reasons why many Ambassadors do not want to see the AID programs cut out or terminated is that with these programs in existence we have a purse or pocketbook. The pocketbook buys us a seat at the table. You may get the seat, or another seat, in different ways, but that's a sure way to get it.

*Q: Did you see any effort to put the screws on the Somoza regime on human rights, using the AID program?*

GILLESPIE: There began to be talk about using the AID program in this way. I would take January, 1978, as a watershed date in this respect, because of the assassination of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. This showed the fragility of the Somoza regime and, I think, gave a lot of life to the Sandinista movement. However, I think that our efforts to affect that situation were not focused or

coherent. There was talk of cutting off AID money. Then we found out that you can't easily cut off AID money, in the sense of money in the pipeline. In fact, the way it is set up, we have an obligation to pay for certain things and to do certain things which are now going on. It is not easy. You can't just turn a key and stop it. You have to be very careful how you do that. Payments are scheduled and fall due. Money is available. I learned that stopping an AID program is complicated, once it gets started. I don't recall all of the details.

On the military side I mentioned the military sales transactions which had been started. Basically, and for human rights reasons there was the question of whether we should sell these sling swivels to replace other, defective swivels on rifles sold to the Nicaraguans. There was more to it than that - grenades, ammunition, and so forth.

All of those issues were coming up for decision. However, remember that this happened during the first year or two of the Carter administration. Prior to that the issue of human rights existed conceptually, and, I think, there was legitimate concern about human rights in our government. It was not as if everything started with a blank piece of paper during the administration of President Jimmy Carter. The fact is, however, that the emphasis on human rights really began under President Carter. This gets into the question of why there was confusion about what our policy ought to be toward the Somoza Government and the transition, as it turned out, to something else in Nicaragua. So there was talk about what to do with assistance to the Somoza Government.

Then you could see the difficulty that arises if the Ambassador and the AID Mission Director are not pretty close in the sense of what U.S. policy is and where it is going. You can find operations in support of policy diverging or you lose the possibility of a coherent approach to the issue of what to do about aid policy toward the Somoza Government. If, as I'm afraid was the case, Ambassador Solaun's ability to walk the halls in Washington and to get things done was not very great, that compounded the problem. I think that, when I returned to Washington from Managua, I saw all of that more clearly than I saw it from the viewpoint of Managua. There was a sort of disconnect between the Embassy, the AID Mission Director and his staff, and the Washington establishment on what was going on in Nicaragua. And there were also differences within the Washington establishment.

*Q: Let's talk a bit about your time with this task force in Washington. Could you put in the dates when you were there, who else was involved in it, and what were the issues and relationships?*

GILLESPIE: I left the Embassy in Managua on August 17 or 18, 1978. I haven't checked this, but it was about mid-August when we boarded the plane and flew out to Washington.

I returned to Washington, after taking a week or 10 days of leave, getting settled in the Washington area. I was looking forward to entering training at the Foreign Service Institute and then working out an onward assignment. This had not been arranged, but it was looming in the management area. However, at this point Somoza took over. When a crisis of this kind happens anywhere, the solution in the State Department is to set up a "task force." You take a group of people often from different agencies, and they spend as many hours a day as necessary to deal with that crisis from the Washington end. The next step is that the Executive Secretary of the State Department approves the formation of the task force and assigns responsibility to the appropriate Bureau. In

this case it was the Bureau of American Republics Affairs (ARA.) The bureau was designated to form and staff such a task force and to draw on other organizational elements in the State Department to provide resources and people. That task force was given space in the Operations Center of the State Department - with phones, typewriters, and other things that it needed to do the job.

Usually, the task force has pretty direct and quick access to points of power and action interest in Washington and overseas that might get involved in this. If I remember correctly, one of the Deputy Assistant Secretaries in ARA was named the overall coordinator, and the Director of the Office of Central American Affairs was named to be the Task Force Director. He was told that he ought to have people staffing this task force, initially, on a 24 hours a day basis. There was one Deputy Director in charge of one 12 hour shift and another Deputy Director in charge of another 12 hour shift. The Office Director could then work at other things. In many cases these task forces are staffed by volunteers. Obviously, the Nicaraguan Desk Officer, who is usually a middle grade officer, would be involved on the task force. Then you draw from within the bureau other concerned people who come in and handle political, economic, and other matters. The Bureau of Consular Affairs is concerned about American citizens in the country involved, as well as law enforcement and security people and Central Intelligence Agency personnel.

What you're really doing is trying to provide a short cut, a direct line of communications between the place in the field which has the problem and the people at the Washington end or elsewhere who can do something about it to help them. That is the whole idea, as I see it. The object is also to make sure that the leadership of the State Department, the foreign policy establishment, and the administration, have good and current information about what is happening and that decisions are made, if they need to be made, in a timely way on the basis of good information. So if the Secretary of State runs into a reporter who asks, "What's the situation in Nicaragua," the Secretary will have something to say about it and won't be caught short by the question. He doesn't have to say, "What do you mean? Where's Nicaragua?" [Laughter]

The task force has lots of administrative requirements. It prepares situation reports two or three times a day, it prepares "Flash" reports to the Secretary. It keeps a detailed log of developments. If you go into the task force office, there are usually maps of the country and maybe maps of the city. In the case of Managua there was a map of downtown Managua and a drawing of the National Palace. There was a sign showing where the Embassy was in relation to other places.

The U.S. Embassy was not involved in this takeover. There were no Americans present. Nevertheless, it was considered to be the first, real crisis of the Somoza period. I've mentioned that there had been attacks on Rivas, a town South of Managua, and on Chinandega and Leon, northwest of Managua, as well as some bombings. These were real attacks. People were killed in them. However, Americans were not involved. Later on, there was a second attack on Rivas. It sounded like an American Civil War battle. There was "First Rivas" and then "Second Rivas," like "First Manassas" and "Second Manassas" during the American Civil War.

So for a period of two to three weeks I worked on the Nicaragua Task Force, since I was waiting to go to a course on political economy at the Foreign Service Institute. I was a kind of Deputy Director of the Task Force, since I had been in Nicaragua, knew the people, and all the rest of it.

Basically, we monitored events. What I saw was that the data base on which Washington was operating was really not very good, in terms of what had been going on. The Embassy's reporting had been all right, but not very thorough. There was no substantial understanding of what had happened and why it was happening.

Other people were involved in reporting on this situation - in Costa Rica, for example, where, as I mentioned earlier, the "Group of 12," a sort of Nicaraguan dissident, political group, had set up shop. There was also reporting from our Embassies in Honduras and El Salvador about what was going on. Others were concerned, particularly the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington - the regional political organization. There were meetings there about what was happening in Nicaragua.

It turned out that the ability of the Embassy in Managua to affect the thinking in Washington was limited. The reason may have been the leadership of the Embassy. Ambassador Solaun didn't really know how to go about reporting on the situation. I don't know whether I drew the lesson there, but I am certainly convinced that Ambassadors are important. One of the things that an Ambassador does, and I think that no one else can do - that is, if he or she is capable - is to pick up the phone or put pen to paper and tell the people in Washington, "This is what I think is going on. This is what I believe we ought to be doing." He or she may be right or may be wrong. However, the Ambassador's view becomes a key point in evaluating the situation, and everything can be tested against it.

To provide that kind of evaluation, the Ambassador needs to know who's reading the mail at the other end in Washington and how they're likely to interpret it. The Ambassador should not write his evaluation of the situation to suit the reader, but he needs to know what is important to the reader. This raises Kissinger's point that, if you start talking about Pan Americanism and Simon Bolivar, when what people in Washington are really concerned about is how this may detract from our ability to deal with a problem involving NATO, SEATO, or something like that, you are missing the point. The Ambassador should know that and be sure that the arguments which he or she marshals are arguments which are of interest to and will help the Washington people understand the situation.

Well, I had seen enough from Managua to have a sense that Ambassador Solaun simply did not know what to do. When I was in Managua, he would ask me, at times, to say what he could do better. I was not a Washington expert. I had had one, two-year tour in administration in the Department. I talked to him about the Washington situation and had friends in the Department of State. However, I was the Administrative Officer in Managua. I couldn't tell him "who was who" and "what was what" and how to deal with it. As I mentioned before, Ambassador Solaun didn't have a good relationship with his Deputy Chief of Mission, so that made it awfully difficult to rely on the DCM. The Ambassador just didn't have a good sense of how to deal with the situation in Nicaragua, and that showed.

There were questions of confidence in the ability of Ambassador Solaun. Was he able to evaluate Somoza and the situation correctly? Could he be relied on to take the message in the right tone to Somoza that Washington might want to send? There were real questions about that. That was the view I got. All of these other things were happening. The U.S. was not really making policy

decisions at that point. We were just monitoring a crisis. The really tough issues came later. I can't remember exactly when this happened, but William Bowdler, who had been our Ambassador to El Salvador and to Guatemala and later was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for ARA, was assigned to a mission which involved the OAS, Nicaragua, and the U.S. My interpretation of this was that Ambassador Bowdler was brought on the scene because of a lack of confidence in Washington in Ambassador Solaun. Ambassador Bowdler had to carry out this mission very, very quickly.

Ambassador Solaun eventually asked to be relieved of his assignment to Nicaragua after I left the Nicaraguan Task Force. There began to be questions about Ambassador Solaun's own safety. There was some question whether the Sandinistas and/or others might be about to cause harm to the American Ambassador. I think that that led to his departure from Nicaragua. However, Ambassador Bowdler was also involved in this.

There was a time - I don't think that it was in that August-September, 1978, time frame. It was later than that when the Department decided to evacuate American Embassy dependents. To me this decision was just dumb. The problem was that Ambassador Solaun's wife and the DCM's wife didn't want to leave. So they kept their wives there and made all of the other Embassy wives leave. That was not a good decision. I think that Washington wasn't tough enough to bring down the axe on their heads and say, "You get your wives on the airplane or else get on the airplane yourselves." That's what you sometimes have to do.

Anyway, it was a very messy situation. I mentioned earlier that Robert Pastor was by then the director of NSC (National Security Council) operations for Latin America. Pastor was really an activist. He knew or quickly learned about President Carter. And Carter, as we knew, was a micro-manager. Pastor would prepare memoranda and slip them through or get Zbigniew Brzezinski [National Security Adviser] to deliver them. President Carter would write all over them. He would change things and do things. Pastor would say to the Assistant Secretary for ARA, "This is the way we're going to do this" or, "Let's do it this way." Everybody would agree. He would say, "Don't worry about it," and people would begin to operate on that basis. Word would get to President Carter, and he would say, "No, don't do it that way. Do it this way." There was a lot of correspondence between Washington and Managua at the government to government level, in which there was confusion as a result of the different approaches. Letters were written to be delivered to Somoza. They would be delivered, and then somebody would rewrite the letter after it was delivered.

This is all documented now in a couple of books. I think that I mentioned a book by Anthony Lake, who is now our National Security Adviser. He wrote one of these books. A woman whom I've gotten to know rather well since then, Shirley Christian, a "New York Times" Latin American expert now retired from the "Times," wrote an outstanding account of the past and then carries it forward. She had excellent sources for that and really did a wonderful job of writing it all up.

Interestingly enough, President Carter visited Colombia in 1986, when I was Ambassador, to take part in a U. N. inoculation program. It was part of a global inoculation program against polio, diphtheria, and whooping cough. He stayed with us in Bogota at the Embassy Residence for three days and two nights. He came by himself, accompanied only by his security people - no staff, no

one else. Of course, we talked about Nicaragua. I was really impressed by the fact that he remembered so many details about Somoza, Nicaragua, and the 1978 period. This was 7-8 years later. His understanding of the facts and his analysis were just off from what a number of people saw then and have seen since then, about what was going on. He was absolutely imbedded in his view and would not see it any other way. He was just fixed on that, and that was the way it was.

*Q: This is one of the feelings that one has about President Carter. He was very bright, very knowledgeable, and a good learner. Then he would put it through his own algorithm or something like that. Out would come something which, as you say, would be off the mark and not very practical.*

GILLESPIE: We had a wonderful time. We talked about Nicaragua at least twice. He was fascinated by the experience of Vivian, my wife, there and was glad to talk to somebody who had really been out in the rural areas and had a sense of them. We were in no way supporters of the Somoza regime, but she also saw, I think, that rural Nicaragua was not much involved in this whole crisis. The people in the countryside were largely ignorant of the politics in Managua.

I came away from these conversations with President Carter thinking, "Boy, he made up his mind, probably in 1979 or 1980, about the way he wanted things to have been," and that's the way he is going to remember them from now on. [Laughter] Who are we to argue with that?

**DAVID JICKLING  
USAID  
Nicaragua (1977-1978)**

*David Jickling was born in Michigan in 1927. He received a B.A., and M.A., and a PhD from the University of Chicago and served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1963 to 1965. His postings abroad included Guatemala, Bolivia, Nicaragua and Ecuador. Mr. Jickling was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1998.*

*Q: What year was this?*

JICKLING: It would have been in '77.

*Q: What was the situation in Nicaragua at that time?*

JICKLING: Terrible. It had gone from bad to worse. There had been 30-40 years of Somozas, father, son, brother. Absolute dictatorship, little concern for development other than private aggrandizement, just profiteering, greed of the worst sort. We put up with it. Somoza who was president at the time had supporters in Congress like I had never seen before with any foreign government. He was an anti-communist. This was during Carter's regime when anti-communism wasn't a great thing, but he still thought of himself as a Cold War warrior. He had support from individual members of Congress. One was Congressman Wilson from Texas who kept coming to Nicaragua because Somoza wanted him there for this or that. Then there was Congressman

Murphy from New York that also was a major supporter. He had been a classmate of Somoza. Anyway, we went into a situation where Somoza was doing his thing. He had very close relationships with the American embassy all during the Cold War.

Carter wanted to commit his foreign policy to support for human rights. Warren Christopher, who was number two in the State Department, became head of a committee to review foreign aid in relation to human rights. We would use foreign aid as an implement to improve the human rights situation, and Nicaragua would be our case in point. I was there for two years in Nicaragua as Program Officer, and during that time we didn't get one project approved. We went through all the motions and every time we came up, the Christopher committee and their people said no. We were not going to cooperate with this SOB. For example, in '72, about five years before I got there, there had been a horrendous earthquake. Managua was leveled. We gave 40 million dollars to restore Managua. We found out in the course of administering this money that Somoza is profiteering from almost all of it. He has the factories that are making the blocks that are being used in the reconstruction of the city streets. He owned the areas where the new commercial development was taking place; where roads were being built. He took advantage of the earthquake reconstruction money hand over fist. We are told that we can not go forward with that. So, we got in a complete bind on the most important project in Nicaragua at the time. At the same time we were coming up with agricultural projects and education projects. We were a fully staffed little mission and each one of these technicians wanted to create his own little project while he was there and make a contribution, to have a project that works and makes a difference and gives him the basis to go on to bigger things in AID. Meanwhile, Washington is saying you can have no project unless you show that you are bypassing the government and are not helping Somoza. He won't profit from it, and that you are helping the poorest of the poor. We got no projects approved at all while I was there, so it was a case study in frustration.

I sat at the Ambassador's table and during all that time, and I since have seen the Ambassador, Mauricio Solaun, a Cuban-American, an academic out of the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana, a specialist in coups d'état, overthrow of governments in Latin America. Behind the scenes he was told let's get rid of Somoza. The Assistant Secretary of State, Peter Vaky, said, "Let's get rid of Somoza." This story has been told in two or three major accounts publicly in the last 10 years. The "Last days of Somoza" is one of them and the others have to do with the same period. Vaky was unable to get the movement in Nicaragua that the State Department wanted. Solaun was there, if not to overthrow the regime, at least to nudge and let Somoza know that now is the time to leave. The Sandinistas were in the wings, coming up. One of the most popular newspaper publishers was murdered on the streets and the finger pointed to Somoza. In fact, he didn't order the killing, but one of his friends did. The fact is we were trying to distance ourselves because of human rights, because of Somoza's greed, and all the rest. I sat at Solaun's staff table, it was so sad for him. It ended up that the State Department ignored and abandoned him, and he quit. The whole transition to the Sandinista government is a great misadventure. America's role in that process, whether we could have done it better is a story which will be studied for years to come.

*Q: Why was it a misadventure?*

JICKLING: Because we did not help the progressive elements in Nicaragua move forward. We left

in 1978, a year before the fall of Somoza, but the lines were clearly drawn for him to go. The question was how to do it, how to ease him out, how to help. The big theory and this is your question, what should we have done? We should have helped the dissidents, the people who were against Somoza; find a non-Sandinista middle ground that we could have supported. The Sandinistas were clearly aligned with Cuba and in many respects were fiercely anti-American. There were other elements, such as the Chamorro group. His wife subsequently became president. Our goal should have been to find the basis for a non-Sandinista center government and supported them and gone to Somoza and said now is the time to go. Solaun could have done that, but for some reason it didn't work. We left with a great sense of tragedy. Solaun was replaced by a new ambassador. The new Ambassador said to the Sandinistas, "Let's work together." He had 75 million dollars to help with the transition. The Sandinistas said no thanks, and we left.

*Q: They closed the mission?*

JICKLING: They closed the mission. It was 10 years before it came back. Now they are back and doing well, but the situation is much the same if not a little poorer than when we were there.

*Q: You were there just when the lines were being drawn. You could see that in your own staff and work situations?*

JICKLING: Absolutely. Well, the problem was the country was being divided down the middle between those who supported Somoza, which included the army, and some of the wealthy people who were sharing in his greed. He let people run the airline or run the beer works or run the steamship line if he shared in the profit. It was a little series of monopolies that he controlled. So he had his followers, but the other people who were against him were the progressive elements, the Sandinistas and other people who were anti-Somoza. We were not able to politically find a middle ground and to help build support for a new government group.

*Q: Did you find that manifested in your staff? The split?*

JICKLING: Oh definitely. We had people on our staff, a lady worked in the controllers office for example whose husband you would say was a henchman of Somoza. He was in the military and very close to Somoza. We had others like my secretary, who was a fervent Sandinista. She eventually left Nicaragua and went into exile in the United States because she did not want her teenagers to be exposed to the Sandinista value system they were teaching in secondary school.

Whatever, when I reached the magic age of 50, I had the opportunity to retire. My wife was teaching, so we didn't leave until her contract was over. Her contract ended on the third of June at 5:00 and at that hour we crossed the border, driving back to Guatemala. We left foreign aid exactly 20 years after we joined. It is all kind of symmetrical because we joined AID in '58, retired in '78 after 20 years of AID. I went on to some other activities and now it is 20 years later. It's been 40 years since I began in AID and 20 years since I left AID.

*Q: There was no program in Nicaragua while you were there?*

JICKLING: We continued trying to do the Managua reconstruction without success. We had a

brilliant health officer and education officer that I worked closely with, both very well intentioned, and an agricultural officer and a community development officer and technicians in a couple of other fields, all had good intentions. None of them could get new projects, but they all had old projects which they were trying to carry forward.

One was a very imaginative program which was responsive to our new initiative. The people who were our counterparts were among the ablest people I have met anywhere. The program was called INVIERNO, which is the word for winter. The purpose of it was to reach poor farmers with two crops a year. They raised corn, but then because of the dry season, they could only raise one a year. How to reach and produce a second one during the "winter" was the purpose of the program. It was a masterful program, well designed. It was as though the people from development studies, the theoreticians had gone down to Nicaragua and designed a perfect program to reach the small farmer with a perfect rural development - small farmer project. The people who proposed it were all Nicaraguans and were able, articulate, wonderful counterparts. So, we all got behind INVIERNO, and the government gave lip service to it because the people who were head of it said to Somoza this is the price you have to pay for American cooperation. Before, you were anti-communist, now you've got to be small farmer. He said fine we'll support small farmers. Show me how to do it; I'll sign. So, he signed up for INVIERNO and it was a model small farmer program. I doubt if the program had any long-term effect, although there may have been, but in terms of design and the way it was operating it was excellent.

*Q: It was effective at the time.*

JICKLING: Right. Because of good leadership, good resources on our side and particularly good talent on the Nicaraguan side, and because it was a game that Nicaragua supported even if the leaders didn't believe it - they said okay we'll play it. The amount of resources that went in to it were adequate and the program moved forward.

*Q: Was it fairly widespread in the country?*

JICKLING: INVIERNO was concentrated in certain areas as a pilot project. You can't apply a new technology countrywide, so it was decided to do it in a selected area and then replicate it. You know, the "oil spread" concept. We talk this and so often it doesn't happen, but that was the theory of INVIERNO.

*Q: Any other ongoing projects?*

JICKLING: Family planning really hadn't caught hold. Malaria, however, was a major health program. Within the city of Managua, the capital city, there were areas where we were told not to go because of malaria. When I was there a couple of years ago on a TDY looking at decentralization of education, I went to a club meeting. When I was there 20 years ago I had belonged to the same club, and we picked up exactly where we left off. It was a wonderful experience, except one of the members my age had a terrible case of malaria. Malaria was one of our big programs. This is back in the '70s. Today in the '90s it is still a major problem because the mosquitoes are immune to the sprays we use. We have not been able to figure out how to eradicate malaria even in the capital city. It is a tragic thing, but that was one of our big efforts at the time.

In education we supported activities like schoolbooks, teacher preparation, and school construction. The Sandinistas came in and threw out all those textbooks, printed new ones. Now the Sandinista texts have been thrown out because of their value systems and symbols. Now, in the new texts, we are back to family values of the Catholic Church. That is an interesting little story: how school text books represent changing political regimes.

When the Sandinistas fell, the new government, the elected Chamorro government, had to fill its positions in the government. They went to the church because the church had supported the fall of Somoza and of the Sandinistas, too. They asked the archbishop what ministry he would like. Education! The new Minister of Education went back to traditional values, family values. The Sandinistas were committed to social betterment, to community consciousness, and service. You remember their great literacy program? They took every secondary student out of school for a given period and went out into the country to help poor rural people learn reading and writing. Adult literacy was a major effort of their outreach. That was the kind of Sandinista values reflected in their textbooks. Those went and this new set of Catholic family values were substituted.

In each of the areas we continued to do the projects. The sad one was our inability to move forward with Managua reconstruction. That city today looks like the earthquake came last week. It is still devastated; it's tragic.

**LAWRENCE E. HARRISON**  
**Program Officer, USAID**  
**Managua (1979-1981)**

*Lawrence E. Harrison was born in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1932. He received a bachelor's degree in American literature from Dartmouth College in pursuit of his undergraduate studies and later a master's degree in Soviet studies and economic development from Harvard University. Following college, Mr. Harrison spent several years in the U.S. Navy. In addition to serving in Nicaragua, Mr. Harrison served in Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on December 12, 1996.*

HARRISON: The Nicaraguan revolution broke out. I had gone home for home leave and was visiting my brother in New Hampshire when I got a phone call from Washington, asking if I would go to Managua. Seeing nothing but frustration in Haiti, I was pleased to take on a new assignment. The AID mission was pulled and the Embassy was pulled when the fighting became intense around Managua. I arrived one week after the Sandinistas had been installed. This was in late July of 1979. There was no ambassador. Larry Pezzullo had been named and he was coming, but he arrived after I did. The guy that I was aware of was somebody from the Disaster Relief office of AID, who had come down to do an assessment of how much hardship there was and what needed to be brought in. Actually, I flew in on a Flying Tiger stretch DC-8 that was filled with food.

I just want to digress for one moment to a book that I came across while I was in Haiti. I read it in

Spanish. It was lent to me by an Arthur D. Little professional who was a friend, a Cuban American. It was written by a Venezuelan by the name of Carlos Rangel. The title of the book was, in Spanish, *From the Noble Savage to the Noble Revolutionary*. It subsequently was published in English in the United States. All of these accumulating ideas on the importance of culture that I had built up over those years of working in Latin American countries were captured in this book. It gave enough coherence to my own ideas that the idea of perhaps writing a book on the subject first entered my mind. I might add that Haiti is a country where culture is overwhelmingly apparent as the root of the problem. I should mention, by the way, that my new book is dedicated to Carlos Rangel.

*Q: Your new book is titled what?*

HARRISON: *The Pan American Dream*.. So, culture was on my mind when I went to Nicaragua, too, although I didn't have much time to think about those things after I got there. The basic posture that we adopted (and Larry Pezzullo did a really superb job in orchestrating it) was to show these leftists that they were wrong about the United States. We would show them that by doing everything we could to be helpful to them. This, of course, was during the Carter Administration, and there were still a large number of people, mostly Democrats, who were unhappy about the way the first months of the relationship between president-elect Allende in Chile and the U.S. Government was handled, and the general hostility that characterized that relationship. We were going to make sure that that was not repeated.

So, it really fell to me importantly to produce all of the things that they needed of us to make the revolution work according to what they said it was going to be, which was a pluralistic revolution, a mixed economy, and non-alignment. At the start, we were heavily involved in emergency food distribution. When I got there, the U.S. policy had been to go through the Red Cross. The Sandinistas came to me and said, "We think this is unseemly. We're the government now and we'd like to handle it." We did it. We distributed it through the government, taking it away from the Red Cross. We provided a lot of financial assistance. Very quickly, we got a substantial grant and we started building towards a large program for a small country like that, \$75 million. It was designed in its fundamentals during the visit of Sid Weintraub, who was an assistant administrator. He came down for a few days, and he and I drove around the country and talked to a lot of people. We came up with that package. This was late in 1979. I also developed close working relationships with a number of the Sandinistas, foremost among them the leader of the proletarian wing, Jaime Wheelock, who was the Minister of Agriculture and Agrarian Reform. I remember, towards the end of 1979, hosting a dinner in my home for a group of renowned experts, mostly of the Left, whom the Sandinistas had brought in. We arranged a relationship between the University of Wisconsin Land Tenure Center and Wheelock's ministry that unfortunately brought to Nicaragua a Jesuit who was highly sympathetic to the Sandinistas and very anti-imperialist himself, which led to some difficulties. In any event, I think we did a really very good job. I take my hat off to Pezzullo, who was extremely creative.

But the reality was, and it's one that we simply couldn't really do anything about, that in the minds of the Sandinistas, what they said in their anthem (which was only very recently changed), "We will fight against the Yankee, enemy of humanity" was what they really thought. They were convinced that Nicaragua's history of poverty, authoritarianism, injustice, inequitable distribution

of income, land and opportunity, was the consequence of Yankee imperialism. As you know, we had intervened in the early part of the century at the time of the First World War. Nicaraguan history, long before the U.S. was involved, is filled with the antecedents that told some Nicaraguans what the real problem was. This guy I mentioned, who earlier in the century wrote about the reunification of Central America, Salvador Mendieta, wrote a brilliant book in the first decade of the century entitled *The Sickness of Central America*. It was a cultural interpretation, with a whole set of prescriptions about what to do to change the culture, importantly focused on child rearing practices. Anyhow, we tried to do everything we could to make the relationship work. But they couldn't live with a positive image of the United States. We were at the root of their problem.

*Q: Did you feel hostility in your day to day relationships?*

HARRISON: In some cases I did. My problem was particularly acute in that regard because it became apparent that they were convinced that I was the CIA station chief, which led to a lot of unpleasantness, including efforts to penetrate my personal staff at home, quite possibly successful efforts to recruit my chauffeur, growing hostility on the part of some of the Sandinista officials that I dealt with. Total nonsense, but...

*Q: But they accepted the assistance?*

HARRISON: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.

*Q: And what it was used for? How was it used?*

HARRISON: Part of it was used to sustain the balance of payments and the budget in the face of economic policies that were increasingly irresponsible. This followed Allende's failed policies. We did a lot of project work as well, in education, health, and agriculture, for example. We tried to bring in large numbers of Peace Corps volunteers to work in education. The Cubans had sent in hundreds of Cuban teachers. We finally did get a Peace Corps co-director and his wife in, but the Sandinistas would never let any volunteers in. We were responsible for feeding large numbers of people. There's no single thing that was done. Let me put it this way: we succeeded in presenting the best possible face that the United States could to a government that was convinced that we were devils, notwithstanding our pretty faces.

They were clearly involved with the El Salvadoran guerrillas. We did get the \$75 million appropriation from Congress after a very tough struggle. Pezzullo and I went to Washington repeatedly to lobby for it. But the Congress put on a condition which was a killer, and that was that, if there was any evidence that the Sandinistas were helping the guerrillas in El Salvador, the \$75 million loan would be called and they'd have to pay it at once. In the fall of 1980, it became apparent to our intelligence that the Sandinistas were deeply involved. James Cheek, who was then the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central America and who had worked in Nicaragua and had impeccable liberal credentials (he is today our ambassador in Buenos Aires), came down to tell them that if they didn't cut it out, it was going to lead to a confrontation. They didn't cut it out and, in his last days, Carter almost cut off assistance himself. When Reagan came in, there was a genuine effort made to try to work out something. When the Reagan Administration, in April of

1981, felt compelled to do something, what they cut off was quite limited and they left a lot of other things going. There were continuing efforts to try to work out some modus vivendi that would avoid confrontation. The Sandinistas couldn't deal with that.

*Q: Apart from the hostility of the Sandinistas towards the United States and American "imperialism," were there particular views about the Sandinista's development policies or strategies or reform?*

HARRISON: The whole idea of redistribution in the Nicaraguan setting was something that we were sympathetic to, the whole idea of, for example, the crash literacy campaign. You can say about the Sandinistas what you often hear about Fidel Castro, who was, by the way, their principal mentor (he came to Managua while we were there and was treated like a god), that is that what they wanted to do about the inequities in the society with respect, for example, to health and education were laudable. They were Marxists. To this day, some of them still are. It was government that was going to be the principal instrument of change. There would be a small private sector that was going to be very tightly watched and even controlled by government. The whole idea of sane fiscal policy, monetary policy, was alien to them. I remember, shortly before I left, which was in July of '81, that it was apparent to them that they were having serious economic problems. We offered, consistent with our basic posture, the best economic advice that money could buy in the United States. They rejected it and preferred to take their economic advisory team from Bulgaria.

*Q: Obviously, they didn't trust us and our views.*

HARRISON: Well, it was stronger than mistrust. It was a deeply rooted emotional enmity. We had a real problem just before the vote on the \$75 million package that was to take place in Congress. A couple of the Centrists left the government junta, which was outside the military directorate of the Sandinista party. It included a businessman and Violeta Chamorro, who is currently the outgoing president. The businessman was attacked rhetorically by the Sandinistas. It led to a crisis. Quiet negotiations took place that were supposed to put the revolution back on the centrist, pluralistic track, the results of which were supposed to be confirmed in a speech that was to be made at the ceremony marking the completion of the literacy program.

The literacy program, by the way, turned out to be substantially a hoax. The Sandinistas announced, "We have now achieved 99% literacy" or something like that. The reality is that today, I think, the World Bank estimates show something like 66% literacy. In any event, we put some resources into the literacy campaign. The Ambassador and I were invited to the ceremony. This was the ceremony in which a speech was supposed to be made confirming the arrangements that had been negotiated with the opposition. Instead, what we had was a diatribe by Humberto Ortega, who was the brother of Daniel Ortega, who subsequently became the president -- an attack on the United States. A flat out attack on the United States. It was so violent and so repugnant that both Pezzullo and I -- we were seated in different parts of the platforms that had been arranged for the event -- walked out.

*Q: Apart from history, do you have any understanding of why this hatred? Was it a genuine ideological view or was it a power play?*

HARRISON: You have to understand that it was symptomatic of the Left throughout Latin America. You can find roots of it going back to a book that was published by an Uruguayan by the name of Rodo in the early years of this century, the title of which is *Ariel*, that took the characters from Shakespeare's "The Tempest" and presented Latin America as beautiful, spiritual Ariel and the United States as money grubbing, ugly, materialistic Caliban. Most of the intellectual activity in Latin America in this century has gravitated around Marxist- Leninist ideology. This, of course, was central to dependency theory. "We're underdeveloped because the United States is rich and they've gotten rich on us." Where you have the ostensible evidence of an intervention, as in Nicaragua, our alleged support of the Somoza dynasty and so forth, it becomes deeply rooted not only in your intellect, but in your emotions and you develop very intense resentments. That was the case. There were a large number of Dominicans in the Dominican Revolution who had similar feelings. We also had intervened in the Dominican Republic.

*Q: Did this have a religious aspect at the time?*

HARRISON: In the case of Nicaragua, you had a splinter anti-Rome left wing group that embarrassed the Pope when he came to visit in the 1980s. You had a couple of priests who were Ministers in the Sandinista government. They basically were of the liberation theology wing of the Church. I believe that part of the authoritarian view of the world that has characterized Latin America since before independence has been influenced by the authoritarian traditions of the Catholic Church. The Church is quite different today, particularly at a time when there are very substantial Protestant incursions that are being made in Latin America. But a lot of the Sandinistas, and Fidel Castro, too, I believe, were educated in Church secondary schools, some of them in the Church primary schools as well. Anyhow, it was extremely frustrating. I mean, we went in with the very best of intentions. What we basically ran into was the same fundamental misdiagnosis of a national pathology as Fidel Castro's. All of Cuba's problems were the Yankees. All of Cuba's problems were, in reality, deeply rooted in Ibero-Catholic culture. The way he has run Cuba since underlines the continuities of that authoritarian, intolerant culture. He's a representative of it.

*Q: We'll come back to that a little more, but are there any more specifics about the Nicaraguan experience?*

HARRISON: In terms of development programs, we were much more involved with solving problems. It was very difficult to do any kind of long range development work within a policy structure that was so strongly influenced by Marxism, by statism. They had a number of emergencies that we responded to. There was a major flood on the Atlantic coast, and we brought in all kinds of help for that. We were their principal source of assistance for the first 18 months.

*Q: Were there other donors involved?*

HARRISON: Sure. The Europeans became enchanted with the Sandinistas, as many of them were with Allende. So they put up fairly significant amounts of money. The IDB did. The World Bank did some. The IMF was not involved very much. The very limited degree of their involvement in economic policy became apparent from the galloping inflation that was experienced. When we arrived, it was something like seven or eight to one and when we left it was hundreds of thousands to one. That was in a two year period.

I left almost exactly on my second anniversary. I arrived in July of '79 and I left in July of '81. Tired and frustrated and now convinced that culture was at the root of the problem. I was now within nine months of my 50th birthday. Otto Reich was the assistant administrator for Latin America in the Reagan Administration. I'd spent some time with him before. He's a Cuban American who was very sensitive to the ideas that I was talking about with respect to culture. So, I was permitted to start at Harvard in the fall of '81, I think, because they judged that what I was doing there wouldn't be developmentally useful.

Anyhow, during those four years, I also did a fair amount of writing, particularly of articles for *The Washington Post*, on Central American issues. By that time, the Contra phenomenon had reared its head. I'm a lifelong Democrat. I supported aid to the Contras. I also had the very gratifying experience of seeing the first book make some impact. It was published in 1985.

*Q: We want to come back to your books in a minute. But on that particular point, your support for the Contras, this grew out of your Nicaraguan experience?*

HARRISON: Yes.

*Q: And what you understood about the government?*

HARRISON: Yes. Yes, I believe that there was no way short of armed conflict of stopping the Sandinistas from making a Cuba out of Nicaragua and possibly extending their revolution to other countries in Central America - not just El Salvador, but possibly Guatemala, which is the country in which social rigidity is the greatest, in which the injustice is the greatest. I feel I was right about that, by the way.

*Q: Do you think that the Americans' fear, the Administration's fear, of Nicaragua and the Sandinistas was well founded in terms of a threat to the United States and to the region and so on?*

HARRISON: Yes, I do. I think the Administration may have exaggerated it and some of their rhetoric was vastly excessive, but there was enough of a threat. Also a threat to Central America's hopes for a democratic-capitalist future. There was enough evidence of a Cuban-style structure of controls that would keep them in power that I saw no other way out.

Let me add that, a few years later (this was in '90 or '91), I did some consulting for AID in Nicaragua to design a democratization program. I did it with a Costa Rican, Farid Ayales, who had been Oscar Arias's ambassador in Nicaragua. Arias, of course, won the Nobel Prize for his role in bringing about the Nicaraguan elections. Ayales, who is currently the Minister of Labor in the Figueres government in Costa Rica, said flatly, in an article that he subsequently wrote, that Arias would never have gotten the Nobel Prize had it not been for the Contras, because it was the Contras that forced the Sandinistas to accept the elections. I believe that's substantially true.

*Q: We'll return to your books in a minute, but let's wrap up this career in AID. What was your experience of AID as an agency, what it was trying to do, and its development policy or lack of it over those years you were there?*

HARRISON: In the early years, it was really a very exciting place to be, particularly in Latin America. The fatigue started to set about the time Moscoso made his speech in 1966. By the time I came out of the Dominican Republic in 1968, I was experiencing some of the symptoms of fatigue. Fatigue in the sense of "We've miscalculated. The problems are so vastly greater than we thought they were." But, in terms of a place to work, resources available, support from the White House and other Executive departments, it was a wonderful experience. It was also a wonderful experience to be so intimately linked to the foreign policy apparatus. As you know, we had this sort of marriage with ARA, with the Latin American bureau of the State Department, in which a lot of AID people served in diplomatic functions and a lot of diplomatic people served in AID functions. That was an enriching experience. I personally have never found the conflict between foreign policy objectives and AID objectives to be nearly as oppressive as some of my colleagues have.

*Q: I was going to ask you, did you feel that the foreign policy objectives, political, security interests, impeded the development effort or reinforced it?*

HARRISON: From my point of view, it was a very rare case where there was a conflict between the short term political objectives and the long term development objectives, importantly because, if you didn't solve the short term problems, you could forget about the long term problems. People can say, "Well, in Nicaragua, you didn't focus on long term development." That's nonsense. Our problem was, first of all, to try to rebuild a relationship with a hostile government; second of all, to make sure that human suffering was reduced as much as we possibly could; and to do whatever building of institutions was possible within that.

**LAWRENCE A. PEZZULLO**  
**Ambassador**  
**Nicaragua (1979-1981)**

*Ambassador Lawrence A. Pezzullo was born in New York, New York in 1926. He received a bachelor's degree from the University of Colombia in 1951. He served in the U.S. Army from 1944-1946 and joined the Foreign Service in 1957. Ambassador Pezzullo's career included positions in Uruguay and Nicaragua. He was interviewed by Arthur R. Day on February 24, 1989.*

PEZZULLO: What happened was that Nicaragua was starting to get ugly, and I got a call one day, and they said, "We'd like you to go to Nicaragua." Harry Barnes called me one morning, and said, "Can you give me your answer?" And I said, you know, "Let me at least talk to my wife."

*Q: He was the Director General?*

PEZZULLO: He was the Director General. And I agreed. I left shortly thereafter. And went up to Washington, and off to Nicaragua.

*Q: Let me ask you about that period in Washington, because you must have been immersed in the development of what became our policy toward Somoza, and his retirement, and what that all led to. What was the scene in Washington when you arrived?*

PEZZULLO: Well, the two main actors in the State Department were Pete Vaky, who was the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs; and Bill Bowdler, who was the head of INR. Both former ambassadors, both very experienced, very competent officers. The reason they were the two principals was that about seven months before there was a negotiated -- what they called a mediation effort -- that was organized by the OAS (the Organization of American States). And Bowdler, who was in INR at the time, was assigned by the Secretary to represent the United States.

Now that effort was an attempt to get Somoza to step down. It didn't begin that way. What had happened was that in early 1978 -- you probably have heard this -- one of Nicaragua's major editors . . .

*Q: That was Chamorro?*

PEZZULLO: Pedro Joaquin Chamorro was shot down in the streets. Even though I don't think Somoza did it, the country went up in flames. And what had been a slow deterioration in his position over a long time, suddenly became untenable. Somoza over-reacted, brusquely using the National Guard to attack towns, firebombing and the like. It got so bad that by the middle of 1978, the OAS met to decide whether it could play a useful role.

After a particularly brutal attack by the National Guard in a town called Esteli, the OAS called a special session. They passed a resolution which led to the naming of a three-member commission: the United States, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic. And they were to go to Nicaragua to see if they could help in some way to bring about an end to the hostilities.

Well, they got in there -- Bowdler headed our delegation -- and they found that the Nicaraguans were completely polarized: Somoza with a few cronies, and the National Guard, on one side; and everything right, left, and center in opposition. And that recognition came to them very quickly, because the three delegations had spread out and had spoken to all sectors: newspaper editors, politicians, church leaders, campesinos, everyone. And it was, you know, just a repetition of the same message: "We've had enough, we've had enough."

Well, that led to a period in which the OAS mediators were dealing with Somoza on the one hand, and on the other with this multi-partied opposition, to try to see if there was some way to resolve the conflict. The opposition organized itself, ultimately, into a national front -- a coordinated front -- and demanded that Somoza leave, and that they would form a transitional government that would lead to general elections.

Well, negotiations went on and on for about three and a half months, ultimately were thwarted by Somoza, and collapsed. And when they collapsed, Pete Vaky and Bowdler, who had put a tremendous amount of effort into it, were exhausted. They had been fighting back and forth with the NSC and at the White House, because they thought more pressure should be put on Somoza by the United States. They thought if he'd leave the Presidency, there was a chance for a peaceful

transition to some, yet undetermined, kind of democratic government.

Well, anyway, it failed. Pete, I think, was exhausted. Bowdler was exhausted. And we (the U.S.) sort of retracted from the scene, a bit. In historic terms it's very interesting, because the Sandinistas -- who were divided into three divisions, three factions -- once the mediation effort failed, came together into one faction, with the aid and assistance of Fidel Castro. In fact, they went to Cuba to sign a unity pact and formed the FSLN.

And then they began planning the armed overthrow of Somoza, with the assistance of Cuba, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Panama. And I think it's fair to say we in the United States, and the State Department, and the intelligence services, were just not watching too carefully. I mean, everybody knew something was amiss, but you know, the antennae were not all that attuned.

*Q: So we didn't realize that the Cubans had succeeded in pushing them into a . . .*

PEZZULLO: That was known, but that they were now building up for a major military campaign against Somoza, I don't think was known. In fact, when I was called back, and I went to a meeting in Costa Rica in which they were discussing Central American policy . . .

*Q: When was that?*

PEZZULLO: The meeting was held in early May of 1979.

*Q: You were still in Uruguay?*

PEZZULLO: Still in Uruguay. I went up to this meeting. It was a three-day meeting to look at Central America, because Central America was clearly in crisis. We reviewed the same kinds of problems we face now, only then they were a little more subdued. And the report on Nicaragua basically focused on how we would convince Somoza to step down at the end of his term in 1981. And not a whisper about impending civil war. In fact, the reports from all sectors indicated some buildup as well as fatigue. But nobody was talking about imminent attack.

Well, by the end of the month an imminent attack was real. And I get into Washington the first week in June, and the war was on; we had a civil war. I mean, they were starting to topple cities. And that same fatigue in Washington was evident. There's no question about it. You just sensed the fact that everybody was down.

Now another thing had occurred, which made it even more disappointing for us. And that is that our ambassador to Nicaragua, a political appointee -- who I think, unfortunately, was ill-chosen for the job -- had picked up and left Nicaragua in the spring. That's why they called me; because he just picked up and left, without authority, or so much as by your leave. So they had no ambassador, and a very inexperienced staff. There was no reporting or analysis coming out of Managua. They were in a bind. Here's a civil war going on; no ambassador, and an embassy which isn't operating.

And within the next three weeks we were meeting almost daily, either at the NSC, or in one meeting or another. And what we put together was basically a policy that said the only thing the

United States can do now, given the circumstances, is go in and hasten the departure of Somoza -- end the war. And if we can end the war, then there is a certain amount of political capital we'll get for having stopped the bloodshed. And perhaps we can use that political capital to have some effect on the new government.

And the basic outlines of it -- without getting complicated -- were that we, as I say, we thought if we could end the conflict -- and we probably were the only nation who could do that -- we could get some political momentum to bring about a transition that was somewhat democratic, or participatory. I don't think anybody had high hopes, because in the middle of a civil war it's hard to figure out what's going to come after. And most of the discussions almost sounded like something about cleaning apartments, because everybody was talking about vacuums. I'll never forget this period. You know, what do we do about the vacuums, and this vacuum, and that vacuum.

And indeed, it becomes a fascination with people who are analyzing things to death, while events are changing quickly on the ground. And this followed me into Nicaragua. I mean, I was dealing with the war, and I kept getting the commentary from Washington, you know, by people who are sitting there dreaming up new schemes.

*Q: Did they have the thought, perhaps, that if they got Somoza out early enough the Sandinistas wouldn't actually win the war, and that therefore there would be a possibility of a non-Sandinista government?*

PEZZULLO: Yes. Well, one of the crackpot ideas -- it's crackpot in hindsight -- was that we could suddenly construct a new transitional government of "wise men." It borrowed from a concept considered eight months earlier during the mediation effort. Simply put, we would approach people who had already been identified as leaders in the community, and say, "Suppose we end the war, could you walk in and become president of Nicaragua?"

And one of my first jobs was to go in, in the middle of a civil war and find these people, who were all hiding -- some of them had left the country -- and propose to them that they form this group of wise men. Well, the problem is they didn't trust the U.S. government anymore. They had exposed themselves eight months before, when suddenly -- when the moment of truth came, to get Somoza out, we couldn't deliver. I mean, that's how they saw it -- to put it in the bluntest terms. And they weren't about to expose themselves again in the middle of a civil war.

But in Washington's mind, especially the NSC, it was doable.

*Q: Was this Brzezinski himself?*

PEZZULLO: It was Brzezinski and some of the people around him. I think people were groping for straws. They were hoping you could come up with some sort of a miracle, in the middle of a very distasteful situation. And what I was concerned with, as this thing started to deteriorate -- because what was happening is that the war was coming in closer and closer into Managua -- is that if we failed to remove Somoza, after all this chipping away, we'd end up with nothing. I mean, the only thing we had to deliver, and I kept saying this in various forums, was Somoza. And if we failed to get him out, and stop the bloodshed, then we had nothing.

The other idea, which I thought was more, at least, possible, was to preserve some elements of the National Guard; so that you would have a transition with some members of a security force that were disciplined, and capable of retaining some balance. Now again, in hindsight, that was illusory.

*Q: When you arrived in Nicaragua, did you find that as possible?*

PEZZULLO: I thought it was possible. What made it impossible was Somoza, and that was hard to calculate. One thing I really miscalculated was how frightened he was. I think what happened at the end proves that he thought that the National Guard would kill him. Unfortunately, I couldn't get to the Guard directly, naturally; there was no way for me to do that, and my military attaché couldn't get to the guard, either, because they were fighting a war.

I was discussing the future of the Guard only with Somoza and his son. The planning was being done in a vacuum, to the extent that the officers in the Guard were not involved. I worked out a scenario with Somoza in which he would step down under his own constitutional processes; so there was no interruption in that -- and turn over power to a member of the congress, who would then invite in the junta in San José. They would begin deliberating on the transfer of power. The new head of the National Guard, who was going to be named, would do the same thing with the Sandinista forces. And there would be a cease-fire and stand-down, and the initiation of discussions about merging forces.

While we were talking about this with Somoza, Bowdler, who was in San José, was talking to the junta. So everything we did -- everything I negotiated -- the junta was party to, even to the naming of the new National Guard commander.

The problem, we know in hindsight, was Somoza never relayed this, honestly, to his own Guard. Because he was afraid that if he did -- if they ever thought he was leaving Nicaragua, and not getting what he ultimately promised them (that the United States was going to come in -- once he got out -- to support them) -- they would kill him. And that's what frustrated this entire play. What happened was that Somoza left. We didn't come in to the support of the Guard, because we'd never promised that. But the Guard, deceived by Somoza, didn't know that. They suddenly found themselves without Somoza, and without U.S. assistance, and they broke down.

*Q: They collapsed very quickly.*

PEZZULLO: They collapsed within -- within twenty-four hours they were gone; they had all run up to Honduras, or to other places.

*Q: You met with Somoza quite a few times. Had you met him before that time?*

PEZZULLO: I'd met him years before, during the earthquake of 1972.

*Q: What were these meetings during the civil war like? Were they one on one?*

PEZZULLO: The first one was; I figured I owed it to him, just from a courtesy point of view, to make it one on one. So I went in alone. And that's when he had Congressman Murphy with him, and his foreign minister.

Q: *Murphy was a congressman from New York, wasn't he?*

PEZZULLO: Staten Island. In fact, Somoza remarked surprisingly: "You're alone?"

I said, "Well, I thought that would be a courtesy to extend to you, if you wanted to speak to me alone." After that I was accompanied by a team. Usually I brought somebody with me from Washington, and then later I had a DCM who was with me -- a new DCM. So it was usually myself, a DCM -- and another advisor; there'd be three on our side, and he'd have anywhere from three to six; it varied.

And they were very business-like meetings. I mean, he would -- we knew he was taping, by the way. But he would go through these rhetorical diversions every once in a while, I guess it was time for him to make his little speech -- and he'd go through a long speech about, you know, how much he liked the United States, and you know, he said, "I'm a Latin from Manhattan." He spoke beautiful English and knew the United States better than I did. He'd been every place. And I think he honestly liked the United States of America -- there's no question in my mind. He was a very charming rascal.

So he'd regale with stories of how he'd helped the United States here, there, and the other place. And he'd done our business for us. And how could we be doing this to him? And you know, the Communists were going to come in, and so on. And he went on, and on, and on. And he would belabor people in the Carter administration, who he really had a burn against -- and Carter himself. So you had to listen to all of this, because this was all for the tape.

But then he'd get down to the business at hand, and talk about various things. My concerns were the timing of his departure; this National Guard issue -- setting it up, getting the right commander. And part of the time, waiting for Washington to agree that we had to start the countdown. I was trying to push the countdown -- you know, the 72-hour countdown.

Q: *Because you saw things coming apart?*

PEZZULLO: Yes, and naturally being in the middle of it, and hearing it... I mean, you know, Managua at night was like being in a battlefield -- firing, and so on. And then you just had the sense of this thing closing in on you. And we were getting constant reports on how much ammunition the guard had left. Somoza was making excursions -- or trips out -- for resupplies.

See, we had cut off supply to the Guard. We had stopped some supplies that were coming from Israel; on the high seas we stopped them -- diverted the ships. We were telling his former suppliers in Central America -- Guatemala and others -- to cut it off. They did. So his materiel was slowly running down. We knew that. We also knew the opposition forces were building up. So you could just sense a closing in. There was no way of knowing when it would break, so you tended to want to get the darn scenario in place.

Plus, as I say, there was -- I think there was a lot of lyricism on the part of Washington, as to what you could do under the circumstances. And maybe it's natural, when you're sitting up at Washington, you figure you have more options than you really have. I didn't see the options, and I kept saying, "I don't see these options -- not now." I mean, these things are not going to be realizable, except for the National Guard, which we went down the line with. And then it folded in on us.

So it was a very interesting -- I mean, I've never seen so many flash, top-secret cables. I never saw that many in my life. We would have these drills, as you know, overseas. But I was sending three or four flash cables a day, and getting six or seven in return. It was just incredible. It was an embassy under siege; we had no women there and no families. We had a small security detachment from Panama, for emergency.

*Q: A marine detachment?*

PEZZULLO: Well, for an emergency evacuation, because we were sitting in a compound.

*Q: Was there fighting in the city of Managua?*

PEZZULLO: Yes, when I arrived there I couldn't land in the city -- I couldn't land at the airport because the airport was cut off from the city. The Sandinistas were in-between. So I flew in, in a small airplane, that dropped me off at a landing strip on the coast and took off.

*Q: And there you were!*

PEZZULLO: Yes. And they picked me up in a car, and drove me up to the capital. That lasted for two days. Then the siege ended because the Sandinistas had really put themselves in a very exposed position, and they retreated one evening to the city of Masaya. But there was constant firing -- shooting. The major battles were out, away from the city; although there was a constant closing in on the city. You felt as if you were in this little enclave, which was not going to hold too long; and that if you were going to strike a deal, and get this thing done, you had better get on with it.

And what struck me then was how -- and I think it's true, and I'm sure from your own career you'll see the similarities -- the field tends to have a different view of the world from Washington. And it's just a natural reality. You're sitting one place, and they're sitting in another.

*Q: It takes about two days for the transition to occur, when you got from the headquarters out to the field.*

PEZZULLO: And of course, under these circumstances it was even more dramatic -- the differences.

*Q: Your sense that things were moving very fast and you didn't have a lot of options, whereas in Washington, there was a sense that we still had things we could accomplish, and time to do it.*

PEZZULLO: And time to do it. And that you could sit down and go through this in a very orderly manner. It just wasn't there. But it was an exciting -- it was just a very fascinating period.

Q: *Were you in touch with others besides Somoza? Or did you have to deal primarily with him?*

PEZZULLO: No, I talked to a lot of people. I met most of these wise men, who were squirreled away around the city, and we'd go out and find them. I spoke to the Archbishop as much as I could. In fact, the two of us were caught in the middle of a fire-fight. I was talking to him and they started a fire-fight around us, and we had to break off our discussion.

Q: *What was his name?*

PEZZULLO: Obando y Bravo.

Q: *The present one?*

PEZZULLO: Yes, he was then an archbishop. He became a cardinal, I guess, about four years ago. I had known him before, and he was one of the first people I called on.

Q: *Obando y Bravo?*

PEZZULLO: Yes. A very nice gentleman. He's gotten harder as time has gone on, because life has become difficult for him. But he's a sage old gentleman, who watches, and listens, and was very, very critical of Somoza for a long time. So I conferred with him just to get a sense of what he saw happening. And I told him what we were doing; I wanted him to know. I said, "This is what I'm doing, and I want you to understand if there's any question in your mind. This is the route we're on."

He said, "Well, that's a fine route. Try to get this war ended. This country is bleeding to death. And anything I can do I'll be glad to do."

Q: *He would have liked to see Somoza leave, I suppose?*

PEZZULLO: Absolutely. Oh, he was working hard eight months before, during the mediation effort. He was trying to do everything possible to get the mediation to succeed. He saw it for what it was: the last really peaceful chance to end that conflict.

And I met with other politicians. I met with the few diplomats that remained; there weren't many left, because it was a war zone. But we'd meet for lunch, or we'd meet one another in the office. But it was not the kind of place you could go out and wander around in.

Q: *And the National Guard you didn't meet with, because they were out fighting the war.*

PEZZULLO: They were out fighting. And then they had curfew from five o'clock in the evening, until -- I think it was eight o'clock the next morning. So you were buttoned up in the evening. It was very restricted.

*Q: And you had no contact, I assume, with the insurgent forces?*

PEZZULLO: Oh no. Well, one of the things interesting is that in this -- remember I told you about this meeting we had in San José, in May. I asked then what we were doing with this leftist group -- the Sandinistas then had a name; because before then they weren't called the Sandinistas, it was just sort of a mélange of different leftist groups. I was told that we had no contacts. We had never talked to them, which just shocked the pants off of me. I said, "I can't believe this. You tell me we're not talking to these people?"

*Q: At a time when you physically could have, before the war actually began.*

PEZZULLO: Oh sure, sure. Well, it turned out that a lot of the people that we had been dealing with before were closet Sandinistas, but we didn't know that.

*Q: It just sounds as though we didn't really have a very thorough understanding of what was going on.*

PEZZULLO: We didn't have our ear to the ground. That embassy, I think, was a failure. I don't know why, but we never considered Nicaragua a very important country.

*Q: But they must have had a station there, and CIA people?*

PEZZULLO: The station was not too active in Nicaragua, interestingly because they didn't trust Somoza. And we had an ambassador -- back during the early seventies, up through the time when Nixon left office, and then he was removed -- who used to pass things to Somoza all the time. So the station was very concerned about too much information going through.

Somoza -- you have to keep in mind was really wired into our system in a way that's hard to understand. Well, you can see that from Congressman Murphy. But he had very good intelligence on what we were doing at the highest levels. And, you know, for that reason a lot of people were very intimidated by Somoza. Because he could pull levers. In fact, one day he -- I think it was about the third or fourth conversation we had -- he called Washington, and tried to open a dialogue there. And he was told, "You've got our man, you talk to Pezzullo."

Washington called me and said, "We just wanted you to know that."

And the next time I walked in he said, "Hey, you've got a lot of power, don't you?" He said, "They told me from Washington I've got to deal with you."

*Q: But he was used to being able to . . .*

PEZZULLO: Sure, always did.

*Q: . . . to go over the head of the embassy.*

PEZZULLO: Yes, sure. He did that all the time, I think. He always had somebody in Washington

he could appeal to, and then he could play with our ambassador.

*Q: Were these people in the executive branch of the government? Were they congressmen?*

PEZZULLO: Well, certainly Murphy -- Murphy I knew. But no, he had people in . . . I'll tell you a very interesting story, that shows you how good this guy was. The day before I left, when it was finally decided I should go in . . .

*Q: The day you left Washington?*

PEZZULLO: Before I left Washington, yes. We were in the White House situation room, and the military man there -- I think it was -- I can't think of his name now, but he was the head of the Joint Chiefs at the time. He said, "Larry, why don't you take in a military officer with you because, you know, Somoza was a West Pointer, and maybe we can get you somebody who knew him."

And I said okay. He called my office when I got back, and he said, "There's going to be a Colonel so-and-so coming to see you." I said fine.

In walked this colonel within two hours, and he said, "I understand I'm going to go into Nicaragua."

And we started to talk, and I said, "You know what we're going to do?"

And he said, "I understand."

I said, "I'm going in there to get him out. If you have any problems with that, I mean, if that causes you any grief let me know, because I don't want you to have any questions."

He said, "No, no. I'm a career man, and I'll do whatever you tell me. I'll follow you right down."

I said, "Fine." So he went off to get his affairs in order, and we were supposed to meet again the next day, and prepare to leave.

And the next morning I'm walking down to Christopher's office, with Pete Vaky walking along, and he said, "Larry, why did you agree to take in a military man?"

I said, "Pete, I wasn't thinking and you know, I thought it was okay."

He said, "Do you really want anybody?"

I said, "I feel more comfortable alone, to tell you the truth. I don't know this guy."

He said, "Well, let's tell Christopher."

So we walked into Christopher's office, and Pete said, "Look, Chris, you know Larry doesn't really want this colonel with him. He met him yesterday, and he'd be better off alone." He said, "I can

give him somebody." And he did. He gave me one of his people who was very good and helped me a lot.

Q: *Pete Vaky gave you one of his people?*

PEZZULLO: Yes, an officer in the Latin America Bureau named Barnaby.

So we called off the colonel; Christopher called right then. It was General Rogers -- Air Force General.

Q: *Was the Chief of Staff?*

PEZZULLO: Chief of Staff. So I go in and see Somoza. And remember, I told you the first time I went in, he commented, "You're alone?"

Q: *Yes.*

PEZZULLO: It didn't strike me then. Four days later -- about the fourth meeting later, he said to me, "Where's Colonel . . ."

I said, "I never heard of such a colonel."

That's how good he is.

Q: *Yes. He had a lot better intelligence than we had.*

PEZZULLO: Yes, very good. And I think one of the unfortunate things in all of this is that there were times when people talk about possibilities, and options -- you know how this is, you start talking and throwing out ideas. There were some people who said a few things about the possibility of a U.S. input of troops under certain circumstances. And I remember Vance, at the time, got furious. He said, "I don't want to hear that. That's something the United States is not going to do. That situation does not warrant it."

I think -- I think that sort of wove through the bureaucracy somewhere. I think somebody, somewhere said, "Look, as a contingency, can somebody just do..." You know how these things are -- "Can you do sort of a contingency plan, if in case..." That's enough. That, I think, would have been known, and I think a guy like Anastasio Somoza would have found out about it. Because it made sense. I think he thought that at the eleventh hour -- he kept saying it in different ways: "Are you people really prepared to do this?" I think he thought when it came to the crunch, we couldn't face the possibility of losing him, and his regime, and we would bring in troops.

Q: *So your job, really, was to convince him that that wasn't so.*

PEZZULLO: I never thought, you know, that he held that as deeply. I thought it was something he was trying to get us to consider. But I think it was a stronger -- I'm saying, if -- and it's a strong possibility -- this was made in a casual way, and somebody said, "Well, let's make a contingency

plan," and it was done in the Pentagon -- given his ties into our military, which were historic...

You see, he was a West Point graduate. He was very close to a lot of military officers, and cultivated them. It is altogether possible that somebody was available to tell him that kind of thing. "Look, Tacho, I just want you to know that these plans are in place." And that would have been enough to convince him that if push came to shove, the United States was going to take some military action, which would have given him a certain comfort, that he had friends up there who would take care of him.

See, he'd lived through scrapes before. Don't forget, this man had grown up as the son of a dictator. There were ups and downs. There were administrations that were more, you know, critical than others. But they'd always gotten through them. And he was right in saying he'd always been a friend. During the Bay of Pigs, where did we launch aircraft from? From Nicaragua. Where did we train? Nicaragua. He'd been a friend in need; he'd carried our water. You couldn't deny that. He felt that he was America's friend, and to some extent he was perfectly right. So why not, in this hour of need, have some people push these crazy guys in the administration -- who didn't understand his value -- to ultimately come to his rescue.

*Q: What finally convinced him that nobody was coming to his rescue, and that he ought to step down and leave?*

PEZZULLO: I don't know. I think he may have carried it right to the end, and then he finally left. And I'm not even saying that I could prove -- because we'll never prove -- he died, he was killed several years later -- that that was even in his mind. But given the type of person he was, who had lived this charmed life and had had a good relationship with the United States, there's no reason to think he didn't feel that we could not live without him.

*Q: But I suppose it was the deterioration of the local military situation, finally, that convinced him there was no option.*

PEZZULLO: There was no option. I mean, he had no supplies. What happened in the conflict was that you didn't have a war, you had a popular insurrection, which is much worse than a war. The Sandinistas did not win a military victory. What happened was cities and towns just rose up and went after the Guard. Little kids, mothers, and daughters, and so on. And pretty soon the Guard was caught in their barracks; they couldn't move, and then they'd starve them out, and fire bomb them, and so on.

Where the Guard met the Sandinistas as a military force, they beat them. They did it in the southern zone, where there was really a set-piece battle. And there was no movement on that front, ever. You know, they established a front -- the Sandinistas couldn't move. That's where Eden Pastora was the commander.

So he was facing the most impossible of circumstances. The populace had really risen up against him, and were aiding and abetting these young people. So there were a lot of illusions here. I mean, the illusion indulged in by the Sandinistas is that they won a military victory, which was not true. The Nicaraguan people rose up against their leader and threw him out, and they happened to be --

they, the Sandinistas -- the armed vanguard of that. But they never overthrew Somoza. They alone would never have done it. It was the Nicaraguan people who overthrew Somoza. And that's what -- no guard -- no national force can ever combat -- you just can't combat your whole country: the little kids, the wives -- impossible.

*Q: You were called back before Somoza actually left, to participate in a meeting in the White House?*

PEZZULLO: I was back twice.

*Q: Twice?*

PEZZULLO: I was back twice.

*Q: July 1 and 2.*

PEZZULLO: Yes, the first time was because one of these ideas about forming this wise men's group had reached the point where people thought that it should be considered again. And I went back to tell them it's no go -- this thing is not going to fly, and to forget it. So that was one crucial point.

Then there was another meeting, shortly thereafter that -- I'm not sure of the date -- which had to do with the expansion of the junta. The junta was announced in San José -- a five-member junta. And the concept began to develop within Washington circles, that we should expand it to include more moderates. And I was called up to take part in those discussions.

I found it, again, to be sort of a nothing discussion. I mean, what's the difference if you have five or seven? Anyway, this is the kind of thing that Washington was putting a lot of attention into. So they talked and talked and talked.

*Q: This was Carter, and Vance, and Brzezinski?*

PEZZULLO: Vance and Carter were really outside of this. It really came out of the NSC.

*Q: I see.*

PEZZULLO: It was Brzezinski and his staff that really were very hot to trot.

The second visit was for the purpose of discussing the enlarging of the junta, from the five that they had begun with -- to a larger number, to include more moderates. And again, I felt that this was, sort of, a marginal issue of no great consequence, because the key was going to be that the people with the guns were going to have the power, and whether you now had five people in the junta, or seven people, or all moderates, or all leftists -- you know, I didn't see that this was a major issue. But again, there was a sense of a great deal of urgency about this.

When I went up on it, there was a long discussion, and Carter then addressed it to Torrijos, who

had come in to meet on this particular issue.

Q: *Who was that?*

PEZZULLO: Torrijos, the President -- well, the dictator from Panama, who had been in and out of this issue all along; conferring with us, and doing some of the negotiating, and some of the helpful work, at the same time that he was supporting the Sandinistas in military assistance.

And what happened out of the whole thing is that we did recommend that some -- I know I, myself, Pete Vaky, were not all that hot on it, but it was recommended to Carter. He recommended it to Torrijos. Torrijos raised it with the Sandinistas, and they turned it down. And then when they turned it down, he told them it was an American plan. So the whole thing was a bust.

Q: *End of. . .*

PEZZULLO: End of episode, yes. In the meantime we had put together, basically, the scenario for Somoza leaving. And the scenario was, fundamentally, that he would turn over power, constitutionally, to a senator. He selected a fellow named Urcuyo, who was an unknown sort of hanger-on, with no great consequence.

But Urcuyo, then, was to go through the process that we had laid out; he was to invite the junta from San José to come to Managua. The junta was going to come in, accompanied by the archbishop of Managua, as well as members of the international community. Which were going to include Ambassador Bowdler, the foreign ministers of Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Costa Rica, and whomever else.

The idea was to have a goodly number of people present from the international community, to give it a -- make it a moment in history. At that point there would be a press conference right at the airport, and they would discuss the process of transition, which would take place over the next several days; where Urcuyo would hand over power to this transitional government -- the junta in San José.

And then they would follow through on the promises they had made to the OAS, that they would begin -- they would take power, and then call for early elections, and so on, which they of course failed to do. In the meantime, the military commanders would meet, and talk about stand-down, merging the forces, and so on.

Well, this was explained to Somoza in a very detailed way. By this point in time, the commander had -- the new Guard commander had been selected by us, with Somoza's concurrence, and the concurrence of the Sandinistas, through the junta in San José. The new Guard commander was a lieutenant colonel, unknown to anybody -- a fellow named Mejia. All the Guard officers who were tainted by Somoza, which included most all the lieutenant colonels, and colonels, were all retired in one official act, and Mejia was made commander of the National Guard. So that was taken care of.

So Urcuyo was to take charge of the country; have it turned over to him. He was then to invite the

junta from San José, and a whole series of things were to happen. Somoza left at three o'clock in the morning -- the morning of the 17th.

*Q: Did you see him off?*

PEZZULLO: No. Before that he had had the ceremony in which he had passed the baton to Urcuyo. Urcuyo, then, was supposed to do a series of things. By about six-thirty in the morning -- or six o'clock in the morning, we saw the thing unraveling. I got to him. And he had been through two meetings, where we went through every one of these issues. He claimed to be ignorant of all these things, and said, "I don't understand this. I'm the President of Nicaragua."

I said, "Well, that's understood . . ." Well, anyway, it was then that I made that -- told Washington that Somoza had backed away from the agreement, and this triggered the call from Christopher to Somoza in Miami. Somoza then quickly chartered two yachts, and got out of the United States. But he had clearly given Urcuyo the other message, that you know, he was to stay on; not let the Communists come in, and goodness knows what.

My theory is that Somoza was afraid that if he ever went to the Guard and said he was leaving, and they were going to turn over power to the Sandinistas, they would have killed him. And he lied to Urcuyo. Now, Urcuyo was just a plain liar, because he sat in on two meetings when I explained the scenario step by step to him, and then I had my DCM -- Tom O'Donnell -- go over to his hotel, and go through it with him again, minutely. And he was just a plain, bald-faced liar. Mejia was duped. I went to tell him that very day. Then I went up to see the President with him, and we had a pretty stormy session. This was the second meeting.

*Q: You and Mejia went to see Urcuyo -- the President?*

PEZZULLO: Yes, and he denied all of this, and said he was insulted, that I was telling him what to do, and all this kind of nonsense. By this time I think Mejia was starting to smell a rat, plus the National Guard was starting to collapse. I told Urcuyo. I said, "My friend, you're going to be a president without a country. What are you talking about? This thing will not hold. It will only hold under the scenario we set up. That's all agreed -- with the Sandinistas, with everybody. You can't do this."

So it began to collapse. A day later he ran out of the country. Then because it was collapsing, I made the recommendation to Washington that I had to be pulled out right away, with some part of the embassy, accompanied by a public statement, criticizing Somoza for having broken the pact. Because if we didn't do that, it would look as if this was our plan all along. They agreed, and I left on the morning of the 18th.

*Q: That's the next morning.*

PEZZULLO: That's right, the next morning -- afternoon actually -- well, it was about eleven o'clock. Tom, then, was there to just hold this little group together. He met with Mejia -- by this time Urcuyo had fled the country -- Mejia said, you know, "Can I meet with Humberto Ortega, to see if we can work this out?"

Q: *Ortega was considered, even then, to be the head of . . .*

PEZZULLO: The head of the forces.

Q: *The head of the junta military.*

PEZZULLO: The military arm. But it was too late, and Mejia had nothing to deal with; he had no armed forces left. His air force had run away, his infantry had run out to Honduras, and the poor devil was stuck. So he eventually got on a plane and flew to Guatemala. It was over. I mean, there was no -- the National Guard had disappeared. And then you had the Sandinistas just drive into the country, and drive up to the capital on the 17th, and take over.

Q: *What were you doing at that time?*

PEZZULLO: I went to Panama. I took part of the embassy to Panama.

Q: *As a demonstration of . . .*

PEZZULLO: That we had been betrayed by Somoza. We put out a public announcement stating that the plan that we had put together with Somoza, and had coordinated with the Sandinistas, had been aborted by Somoza. That was clear.

Then they asked me to come to Washington. And when I got to Washington, I asked Pete to request agreement from the new government in Managua. Because I never submitted my credentials to Somoza; I went down there without anything. That was Bill Bowdler's idea. He said, "You shouldn't be dealing with him as ambassador; you should be dealing with him as a special . . ."

Q: *Envoy from Washington.*

PEZZULLO: Special envoy. So I went without the courtesy of any presentation of credentials, even though I had bought a white suit. You used to want to present -- I still have the damn white suit. (Laughs)

So I demanded that we get approval from the new government, because I didn't know what their attitude would be, and I felt -- you know -- since we're going to start anew, we'd better get this clear right from the outset. And they accepted right away. And I went down.

In fact, I flew down on a C-141, out of Andrews, that was filled with food. Because there was a food deficit, and we began flying food in right toward the end, and kept flying in. So it was sort of a dramatic act to go back in with a plane-load of food. So I flew in with a C-141. Landed. Met at the airport by Tomas Borge, of all people.

We had a conversation at the airport. And I presented my credentials, I think, two days later. They had a date for me right away. And I told the junta -- they were all there, except one -- that we

looked to a period where we could develop a relationship. The United States understood the trauma the country had gone through. We thought we had played a role in trying to prevent any further bloodshed. We took it upon ourselves to feel a certain amount of pride in that. But we want to help, in a meaningful way, the new administration. And we were prepared to look at aid packages, and so on and so on.

And shortly thereafter, we gave them some money. Their treasury was bare; we gave them some hard cash right away. And we started opening up some programs that had been frozen during the Somoza period. And slowly began . . . Well, the food was coming in all the time, by the way. And then we began working on the longer-term programs.

You're right, in the sense that what was portrayed in the press was exactly what people were saying. "What are these? Aren't they Communists? How do we deal with them?" In fact, when I came back to Washington shortly after the fall of Somoza, they put me downstairs with the spokesman. The first question was, "Are these people Communists?" And the position we were taking at the time was, "Look, we don't want to prejudge something like this. Let their actions speak for what they are. These people have gone through a terribly painful period. The Nicaraguan people have suffered. And we're going to take them at their word, that they're going to put a democratic administration into being. But during this period of need we're going to be as helpful as we can. And we're not going to be driven to make judgments about it."

And we held to that. Pete [Vaky] and I were up in the Congress, shortly thereafter, giving testimony. And this is basically the line Pete took, and I took.

Now, confidentially, when we talked to people, and what I was reporting back was: first of all there was no question there was deep-seeded animosity toward the United States in this group. I started getting around to see all the commanders -- nine commanders -- and the foreign minister, who was a former Maryknoll -- well, he was a Maryknoll at the time. Escoto, who bore a tremendous amount of resentment against the United States, even though he was born in the United States, and speaks English as well as anybody. Viscerally anti-American, in almost an emotional way. Interestingly, because his father was a Somoza diplomat, and a slavish Somoza diplomat.

You felt it all through this, this rebellious quality. A young man resenting the failings of his parents. And what I tried to do was to show that, you know, a mature power -- a major power can understand change, can understand young people wanting to transform a country. That we thought we were not the ones to judge that. But there were certain things that had to be understood, in terms of a relationship.

So I kept the tough issues to a very bilateral kind of thing. And in public we were supportive, and we were trying our best to give whatever assistance was needed. They responded, I thought, quite well, given what they thought we were; you know, suddenly finding themselves in a governing role. They were -- and Nicaraguans in general -- are very gracious people; they happen to be that kind of people. So you can meet with them, and the conversations will always be at least civilized. Even though they got heated, they were civilized. And they really respected the fact that we had done some of the things we did; they respected that. But they resented, very much, the long-term support of Somoza, and so on. So you'd have to go through that.

And the questions that arose early were, you know, what are these bunch of guys? I mean, are they going to work themselves into a lather? Are they going to ever turn over power to anybody? And what's the role going to be of the Cubans, and so on.

Well, it wasn't too long before it became clear that the Cubans had an in that nobody was going to compete with. The Cubans had fought with them; the Cubans were their military advisors. The Cubans are very good at ingratiating themselves because they know the culture. And Castro was bigger than life to them. To them there were very few heroes that they could think of that would supersede Castro. So that quality was there. And I think all of them, sort of, aspired to be pint-sized Castros.

So you saw that at the same time you were hoping that there was a learning curve here, and that these people would understand that governing is not just a question of, you know, making speeches, and acting like a popinjay. But the chances of this thing ever moving democratic were very slim. And that I reported early, even though I thought we should constantly push on it, constantly remind them what they promised, constantly talk about the human rights, and free press, and so on. And we made a big fetish of that. I mean, I never had anybody come into that country that we didn't go past La Prensa and visit. And they knew exactly what that meant.

And we made a big to-do about human rights. I went to their independent human rights commission, which was investigating every abuse, and so on. I went out to their jails early, to look at them. You know, I just made a big, major effort to have them understand that we didn't have our eyes closed. And when we spoke, I used to speak quite honestly about it. That they made a hell of a mistake by having so many people in jail. That they'd taken on a burden that was going to leech them for no good reason. And over the long term, it was going to cost them more than they'd ever be able to recover from -- whatever security concerns it addressed.

I lectured them about security. I said, you know, "I've been around enough security people to tell you they give you bad advice almost all the time." And I said, "Watch the intelligence people that you're getting from Cuba. Because you think they're wiring for you; I'm telling you, they're wiring you for sound." And you get some interesting responses back.

I found two things that we had to worry about. One was their export of revolution. Because they were fascinated by the romantic idea that they were the new revolutionaries. Castro told them, "You're the new generation." This guy is a -- you know, he's a world-class snake oil salesman. He really is a mesmerizer.

Q: *You met him, didn't you?*

PEZZULLO: Yes, he's a mesmerizer.

Q: *The first anniversary . . .*

PEZZULLO: He's a real, real article; but he's a snake oil salesman. No matter how good he is, he's a snake oil salesman. He convinced these guys that they had brought about a new concept of

revolution. His (Cuba) was almost an antiquated model; this (Nicaragua) was the new model, see, and the new model had two new elements in it. One was religion; it had the church. And the second -- it had people from the private sector. In other words, it was a total societal overthrow. And it had all the elements of a new revolution. But this was baloney. They were just taken in by this. And they were taken by the idea that they could play a role way beyond Nicaragua.

In fact, I remember one of them was telling me -- I think it was Humberto Ortega. He said, "You know, you are very fortunate to be here at this time. Because you can see from us, you know, how things are going to play out all through Latin America." He said, "We're going to be the model all through Latin America." Well, you know, when you get a young guy -- 32 years old, who has just become all blown up with euphoria, who attained power because of the fortunes of the draw -- I mean, the Sandinistas didn't win a victory, they just slid in on a series of circumstances, that just were fortuitous for them. Nonetheless, it gave them this heady feeling that the whole gosh-dang continent was going in their direction, Chile, and all the rest of Latin America. They felt, "We are the center of the universe."

Now what was happening, which made this thing very credible to them -- every cuckoo nut around the world was there. We had extremists from Peru. We had the Montoneros from Argentina. Miristas from Chile. The Tupamaros from Uruguay. We had the PLO. We had North Koreans; it was the first time I saw the North Koreans. We had revolutionaries from Africa. I mean, you walked around -- especially at the Intercontinental Hotel -- and it looked like some sort of a Hollywood stage.

Then you had all the people who were looking for happenings. You know, Hollywood starlets, and musicians, and goodness knows who else. They were all there. And these guys were booted up to stardom. They were heady as hell. They really believed they were supermen. It was very dangerous; it seemed to me it was very dangerous for these people to think that they could do these things, when they couldn't even run the country. Nicaragua was in terrible shape.

And I used to talk to them about relations with their neighbors, and relations with us. Basically the line I took was that they should attend to their own needs at home. That became problematic. I mean, it was there right in the beginning. And they would argue at great length that, you know, you don't understand that there's sort of a harmonic feeling here, throughout this region. And all these other societies are not going to make it; they're going to topple. And I'd say, "You're going to pay a price. We are not going to sit idly by. Forget it." You know, "If you want this regime to survive, you better tend to your own business. As long as you tend to your own business, at least people can be tolerant of some of the screeching. But if you start fooling around . . ."

"Oh, well, we're not doing quite that." Well, this became central, and I think it's always been the central issue; just how much they were going to intrigue and get themselves involved in other countries. And ultimately, I think it led them into problems that have beset them ever since.

Now, they come to power in July of 1979. In March, 1980 the presidential campaigns began in the United States. The Republican platform contained a plank identifying the Nicaraguan Sandinistas as Marxist Leninists, and so on and so on -- that we would not tolerate them, and so on. So you had that in the mix right away.

Then, of course, Reagan wins in the election, and that starts to turn events even further than they would have gone, I think.

*Q: What kind of a position did that put you in personally, with your contacts there? This seemed to show a face of an America that you hadn't been representing to them.*

PEZZULLO: At first nobody understood what it would mean. I didn't have any idea, either. The only people that ever came down there were some real creeps, that had been tied up with groups out of Arizona.

*Q: Right wing?*

PEZZULLO: Right wing, yes. This was the Santa Fe group, and they had people who went out, did some writing. A couple of, sort of, agency people, who had been in the agency; and a couple of other people wandering around. People from Helms's staff came down. But you didn't have any sense of where it was going.

Then, of course, things appeared in the press in early December, that there was a hit-list of ambassadors, who were going to be replaced. And one was Bob White, and I was on the hit-list, and so on.

You know, I could feel there was some wave sweeping through Washington, that was going to make this damn thing impossible. I did get hold of Haig. I went up to Washington in December, and met with Secretary Muskie. I just happened to walk by his office, and I wanted to say goodbye. And he invited me in and wanted to talk. And we talked at length. And I told him about this business. And he said, "Oh, you've got to talk to Haig." He said, "Let me call him. I find him to be a reasonable man."

Eventually, I got to Haig, and spoke to him. And I told him I would retire, resign. I mean, I was not going to be party to this, if they wanted to do that. He said, "No, no, no. I don't want you to do that." He said, "I know about your work, and I want you to stay there, and I want you to give me your best advice."

And I said, "Well, fine, I'll stay there." I didn't want to stay there long, because I had gotten a commitment -- even from the Carter administration -- that I'd leave in August -- the summer of 1981. I mean, it was an exhausting job. You were really a grind, you know, putting up with the propaganda, and then trying to get these people to behave rationally. Then fighting in Congress for money, and having them traipse out all the stupid statements these people were making all the time. You were fighting on all sides all the time. So I figured two and a half years was enough. And I had asked to be relieved in the summertime, and they said fine.

So when I saw Haig, I said, "That was the commitment, I'll stay through the summer." And he was fairly decent. And I went up in February, again, when they were in office. And already the State Department had transformed itself. They were already changing positions. I went up, and they had cut off all the assistance. And I went to Haig, and I said, "Look, what the heck are we doing? You

know, let's do this . . . You know, if we want to sanction this bunch, then you don't need me. I mean, I think we can still work these guys. That's what I like to do, sort of angle them a little bit. I'm not saying they're going to turn Nicaragua into Connecticut, but I think we can deal with these fellows. And I think we can prevent them from doing stupid things, and causing problems in the hemisphere. I think that's a cheaper way to go about it, than to get into some sort of John Wayne approach. You're going to lose going down that track."

He said, "I buy that."

*Q: He did? That's interesting.*

PEZZULLO: He did, in February. What I didn't know, was that he was, at the same time, agreeing to begin this covert program. I suspected it, because I'd heard some funny things were going on. The complete openness I enjoyed before was changing.

*Q: In Washington?*

PEZZULLO: In Washington. I mean, Vance was great. Muskie was great. People around him were very forthcoming. Even the NSC, that was a little problematic at first, understood that this was an antsy situation. They really gave me my head. They said, you know, "Follow wherever you think you can go with it." Nobody knew where the hell to go with it. (Laughs) You sort of had to move it along.

Well, then suddenly I could see this was not going to continue. I mean, the week after I went to see Haig, and he tells me, "Look, I'll follow you. Just keep me informed," I went to see a member of the junta one day, on something, and he said, "Why do we have to get insulted by you people?"

And I said, "What do you mean, insulted? What happened?"

He said, "Well, there was a diplomatic reception in the State Department. And our representative was there, and your Secretary of State went up to her and put his finger in her face, and said . . .

*Q: This is a Nicaraguan saying this to you?*

PEZZULLO: Yes. This was one of the members of the governing junta. I think it was Sergio Ramirez. He stuck his finger in her face, and said, "You better tell the boys down south, you know, your government, that they better behave themselves, otherwise they're really going to be in for it." Allegedly, Haig had made the threat in front of other diplomats.

I said, "I can't believe this." Then I checked it out; later it turned out that he did insult the Nicaraguan Ambassador. And, you know, what the hell?

Ramirez said, "You know, we've had a tough enough time just working this thing through." I called up, and I asked -- I don't know who was there, I think Enders at that time, or somebody -- and it was true.

I said, "What the hell was that for? What do we accomplish by sophomoric insults?"

He said, "Well, you know, the Secretary . . ." But Haig was like that. You never knew what he was going to say.

*Q: This was Haig himself who . . .*

PEZZULLO: This was Haig. And he'd go off and have a press conference, and blow off some steam. So it was clear to me you just couldn't hold this baby. I mean, this was going to be some sort of a showboat up in Washington, playing for some other game, and you were just some sort of a popinjay. I started pressing hard to get out of there. I called Enders, and... But they didn't want to respond. I mean, Enders was busy with other matters.

*Q: He was Assistant Secretary then?*

PEZZULLO: Well, he was delayed in being confirmed for a long time because he had problems with -- I think he had problems with Helms. But he was held up. But he was sitting there. But he was not official. And he had Steve Bosworth, who is just a first class guy. And Steve became, basically, the guy I worked with. I didn't know Steve, but Steve was a pro. And I used to tell Steve, you know, "You tell Tom that I'm leaving here." Nobody was talking about orders. I figured this is crazy; I'm just going to be left here, and they'll work around me, and I might just as well be in Ohio, for all the good I'm going to do.

And then, the relationship really started to go sour. Because the Sandinistas realized that I wasn't playing a major role anymore. They could see -- the Sandinistas -- that before, at least, I was representing an administration; the administration was in line with what I was saying. Now, I was just somebody who was representing the United States of America, but I was not representing the administration. So the whole things became less real, and it wasn't any fun anymore. So I wanted to get out, and I pressed hard.

And finally, I called to Washington, and made the arrangements to go to the University of Georgia. I mean, nobody was doing it for me. I called. I said, "Do you have one of those Diplomats in Residence slots? I want to go off for a year."

They looked around, and said, "Yes, we can get you to Georgia. How's that sound?"

I said, "Fine, cut the orders. Tell Tom." And I called and said, "Look, they have offered me this. I think it's good. And I'm going to be leaving on this date." And I encouraged Tom to come down -- well, I encouraged somebody to come down, and he decided to come. And he was good. And he saw that you could deal with the Sandinistas.

So I kept pushing for someone to come down. I felt someone -- they were not naming an ambassador. I mean, I was going to leave, and there was no movement to name anybody. And I felt at least someone from Washington should come down, and get a sense of this. So I urged Bosworth. I said, "You come down, Steve."

And finally, he called me one day, and he said, "Tom is coming."

And I said, "Great." And he came down, and you know, Tom can speak for himself on this . . .

*Q: That's Tom Enders?*

PEZZULLO: Tom Enders. You know, he's a tough cobbler, but he's an intelligent man. And he came down, and I'm convinced he thought it would be something different. And he found that you could hit these guys right between the eyes with a bat, and they'd come right back and talk to you. I mean, they're not the kind that get up and walk out of the room, which I like. And he laid it out for them. And, in effect, said, "You know, we're coming to a crossroads with you guys. And if we don't reach an accommodation, it's going to be a problem for you. Because we're a big country, and I'm just telling you. I don't want to threaten you, but the fact of the matter is, we can hurt you."

And they went back, and you know, all the recriminations about you people are doing this, and that, and the other thing; you don't understand, and you accuse us of this, and that, and the other thing. And all these statements you made in Washington -- your President, your Secretary of State. So it went back and forth, back and forth.

And that evening we -- we went through a real day, and at the end of it we were at the DCM's house -- we had a little reception with the business community. And they left. And he said, "What do you think?" I said, "What do you think?" He said, "Interesting." He said, "You really can talk with these guys." I said, "I told you that." I said, "I think you can cut a deal, Tom." And he said, "What's the deal?" I said, "Well, the deal is very simple. You know, they're scared to death that we're going to come down on them. And we don't want these guys fiddling around in other countries. And we don't want to see them building up their armed force any bigger than it is. They're becoming a police state, and they're becoming a threat to everybody around. They've succeeded in giving their neighbors the jitters." I said, "The deal, very simply, is they make a commitment to stop exporting revolution of any sort. And they contain their armed forces at a level we mutually agree to, which has to be in conformity with other armed forces in the area." And they were all about, you know, 15,000, or 17,000. I said, "You know, you pick a number out of the hat."

"And we on our side, make a commitment that we will not mount any attack on them. In other words, a mutual security type of agreement."

He said, "I'll try it." So he went to see Ortega alone -- Ortega wanted to see him alone. And he told him, he said, "Now, how does that sound?"

Ortega said, "I'll buy it."

So he left, and two days later I left. And I went to Europe for two weeks. Came back through Washington. And Tom had a tough time getting -- he had committed himself to sending Ortega a draft of an agreement -- something down on paper which could then be negotiated -- something they would negotiate. And he had a devil of a time getting anything cleared, as you can imagine. Now, how much he knew about what we were starting to do, in terms of covert action -- I don't know. I mean, Tom can speak to that. I don't know. I think it was in the wind then, and . . .

Q: *The Contra . . .*

PEZZULLO: Yes. What he ended up putting on paper was damned insulting, and crass. When I looked at it, I said, "Holy crow." I mean, you know, "You're asking these people to close up shop and go away. I mean, it's a little strong. But maybe, you know, as a negotiating position, they can handle it. I think it's tough."

Well, they showed it to Arturo Cruz, who was then their ambassador to Washington, and he said, "This is an insult." Arturo is no hard-line man; I mean, he's a very reasonable man.

Well, Enders couldn't get anything through the administration in Washington, that resembled anything like the beginning of a negotiation. It was really an insulting attack.

Q: *They just wanted the Sandinistas to disappear.*

PEZZULLO: Yes. I mean, that was clear that early, and it's still clear. I mean, what the Reagan administration has wanted for the past eight years was to have the Sandinistas disappear. They had this obsession that the Sandinistas were the cause of all problems in Central America. That the Sandinistas were a problem, there is no question. But they certainly were not at the core of all the problems in Central America. The Sandinistas, by coming into power as a revolutionary force, destabilized Central America. Their inflated rhetoric and their support to other guerrilla groups were destabilizing; no question. However, that was containable. But not by pursuing the Reagan administration's line.

What we've done in the process is turn this thing into some sort of a mindless crusade, where other people now question our sanity, including our allies in Europe; for a kind of a game that should have been played at a different level, with a different tone, with toughness, hardness with these guys, with Fidel Castro, with the Soviets. I think you had to talk tough turkey, and no fooling around. But you needed pros to do it, and not ideologues, and people who think diplomacy is rhetorical overkill.

I mean, we went from a careful, calculated attempt to move a revolutionary leadership a bit -- to some sort of a circus. And that's deplorable. I mean, that to me is the end of diplomacy. You've moved from professionalism to a theatrical Hollywood spectacular. So now I don't know where you're going. I don't even know how you'd begin the dialogue anymore.

I was up at the Council (Council on Foreign Relations) last night, with a bunch of people -- including Elliott Abrams. There's no way to begin this discussion anymore. And I went home just feeling, you know, where the hell do we go as a country anymore? I mean, I don't want to defend anybody. I don't mind looking at a problem; I'm not going to defend anybody. But I will look hard and honestly at reality, and I think I can do it as well as the next guy.

And that's what we need, you know, in diplomacy. We don't need brilliance, we need people who are willing to go in and deal with the facts, and work with the realities, and hopefully once in a while have an inspiration, or a little sense of something. We don't need this, this is embarrassing.

We've become a Banana Republic.

And what it does is take the play away from what I would consider the art form of diplomacy, which I think is one of the more fascinating things you can do. This weird game of one-upmanship, and vindictive sparring is degrading. I really don't know -- it takes us away from our strengths, as a people. I mean, our country was made by guys who knew how to move things. I mean, that's what this country was -- you know, you brought people over here who came from countries that didn't have a break, and they knew how to cut a road, and they knew how to plant crops, and they knew how to do things. And half of them couldn't even speak well; it didn't matter. You know, they opened shops, and worked. They were doers. They were people that worked with their hands and raised families. It was not this blasted rhetorical baloney. I mean, we're turning . . .

*Q: This is what they left behind in Europe.*

PEZZULLO: This is what they left behind; all the trappings, and all the phoniness. It turns your stomach. I mean, I found -- last night -- I haven't been that depressed in a long time. I went home last night, and I said, "Where do you go from here?" I mean, I'm not going to engage in that kind of stuff.

I wouldn't even hazard an honest comment to those people, because they're not dealing with the kinds of things which I think are fundamental to understand other societies and dealing with them. And that is, beginning with some sense of, you know, what makes them pulse; and where the other personalities fit into this. That's the intrigue to me.

You know, how these things fit together, and how you can move them, and shape them. And have them see where your -- your country's interests, and your country's attitudes can somehow find some common ground with theirs. I don't care whether you're talking to Israelis, or Jordanians, or Chileans, or whomever. If you can't reach that point of connection, there's nothing to talk about. If all I'm going to do is call you names, or say you're a good guy and go home, you don't need a diplomat. You can do this by telephone. (Laughs) Well, the end of that speech, but it's just deplorable.

One word about congressional relations, which I thought was a fascinating sort of accident I fell into. Because Bob McCloskey, who I went to work for in '74, suddenly became Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs, because Kissinger was upset with the then-incumbent, who was a former governor of Maryland -- no, Virginia, I'm sorry. Bob had never done this kind of work, but Bob has a natural sense of public affairs, and dealing with people, and institutions. He's just a natural.

And I went in with him, and we really changed the composition of H, because H before was a little group of people who really didn't know much about the Foreign Service, and foreign policy. These were people that had come in for one reason or another over the last 15 years or so.

*Q: H was the . . .*

PEZZULLO: Congressional Relations Office. But you had no substantive people in H, who knew

anything about policy, or the concerns of the bureaus. So what we did was enlarge it, to bring people in from each of the geographic regions, and IO, EB, and so on. We brought in first-class officers to do congressional liaison. They came with substance and could relate to bureaus with substance. Then they could go out into Congress, which they didn't know, and start to feel their way. And pretty soon they could relate to the processes on the Hill because they were tied into the substance in the Department.

And they became instructors, really. Because the Foreign Service has a reluctance to deal with the Congress. Foreign Service Officers tend to be that way; they don't really see the Hill as their natural habitat. But once you make them understand that, you know, the way a committee's behaving, or questions it's raising about whatever -- the minute you start relating to them, and talking to them, and providing them with some insight into what's going on -- you do reach a point, unless they're really antagonistic, where you satisfy their needs, and you know, further your own purposes.

So it was a very interesting period, and you get a sense of a branch of government, which is unique. And each congressman is, sort of, a private businessman. And they become -- each one of them becomes somebody you've got to study a bit, to get them to move for you. And the committee processes, and these interminable discussions, and the torturous way bills move through the system -- it's just another world.

But my point is, that the Foreign Service -- and certainly people in the executive department -- should be exposed to the Congress. Because without that, our country -- especially on the foreign policy side -- doesn't work. If you don't have something resembling bipartisanship -- and you can see how the Contra issue has become such a mess, fundamentally because people just ignored what the opponents on the Hill were saying. They thought that the President could move Congress, and he can, but you pay a tremendously high cost. If you can't develop a consensus there, that this is the direction in which the United States should go, you're lost. You're just always going to be expending more energy trying to fight the case than it's worth. And you're going to lose the policy in the process. So I think it's fundamental, and it's fundamental to Foreign Service Officers.

And the last thing I'd like to say is that I really have -- maybe it's old age -- but I'm starting to get a real concern about where the Service is going. When I came in -- at a period when the Foreign Service was, I thought, a glorious group of capable people; when you didn't have to say a hell of a lot to have people accept the fact that you had chosen a profession of quality. That was understood within the government; you just -- it was true. There happened to be a little bit of snobbism, and elitism, which I never thought much of; but I think it goes with that other. But there was a sense of esprit in the organization.

I think it's gone through hard times, and I think when the Service forgets that -- you don't have to reward people for good performance all the time, but you just can't cut them off at the knees and expect that kind of example not to be read for what it is within the Service. And I think things have happened in the last decade which have been deplorable. And you don't recoup easily. I mean, courage is tough to come by in any profession. It's a scarce commodity. And integrity is even scarcer. You just don't find that -- you don't pay for it, you don't build it overnight. And that's exactly what you need; you need courage and integrity in FSO's.

Because the Foreign Service does not have a big constituency. It doesn't have a big budget, with a lot of goodies out there that you can sell to Congress. And it's always fighting the kind of things -- or presenting the kinds of issues that people in Washington -- particularly your political leaders -- don't want to hear. So you've got to be better than everybody else, to make the case; you've just got to be better. It's not a question of -- you don't have anything else, but integrity and quality to go up and say, "Look, this is the way it is. I'm not saying it's good, bad, or indifferent. This is the way it is. And these are the kinds of things we're going to have to face. You know, we're going to have to make the best of four lousy choices here. And this is the least lousy."

And then you're going to have to understand that those are the kinds of things that are pressures to whatever administration -- whoever walks into that White House. But once you start cutting it in a way that people become echoes of whatever they think the top guy is doing . . . As I say, this may be a little bit of old age, and I don't deny that. But I just think it's deplorable to see people who can't sit down and be honest about what's going on. And the minute you lose the honesty of your sense of what is happening in a country, and how the United States should be relating to it, then the rest goes with it. End of sermon.

Q: *All right. Thanks very much.*

PEZZULLO: Not at all.

Q: It's been very, very interesting.

**JOHN A. BUSHNELL**  
**Deputy Assistant Secretary, ARA**  
**Washington, DC (1977-1982)**

*Mr. Bushnell was born in New York State and educated at Yale University and McMurray College. An Economic Specialist, he served primarily in senior level positions at Latin American posts, including Bogota, Santo Domingo, San Jose and Buenos Aires, dealing primarily with Economic and International Trade issues. An assignment to the Staff of the National Security Council was followed by tours as Deputy Chief of Mission at Buenos Aires, Chargé d'Affaires at Panama City, and subsequently as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Mr. Bushnell was the recipient of several awards for outstanding service. Mr. Bushnell was interviewed by John Harter in 1997.*

*Q: Habib had a massive and crippling heart attack in March '78 just as a lot of these issues were heating up. He was pretty quickly replaced with David Newsome. Did that make any substantial difference? Newsome said in his interview for the Association for Diplomatic Studies that he spent a great deal of time on these issues, especially on Nicaragua.*

BUSHNELL: I don't recall that Newsome was any more active on the Christopher committee than

Habib had been. But Nicaragua became a major political issue after the middle of 1978 and continued to be a major issue through the rest of my time in ARA. There was a major intelligence side to Nicaragua even under the Carter Administration, and Newsome was the senior State person for these matters. I was not the action officer for political matters in Nicaragua as both Vaky and Bowdler were the prime movers in ARA and devoted a great deal of their time to Nicaragua. Once the negotiations started soon after the arrival of Vaky in mid-1978, human rights issues in Nicaragua got little attention. Even before that economic assistance was removed from the Christopher Committee agenda. HA and ARA had been in agreement on cutting back bilateral aid and opposing many IFI loans, but the Congressional pressure I mentioned earlier caused the White House and the Secretary to continue most of this assistance.

The only human rights issues I can recall in which Habib was involved were military assistance issues, not economic assistance. Phil came back to work after his heart attack; I remember going up to his office more than once, probably three or four times, when he'd want to see me and he'd say, "Come up when you finish lunch." He'd apologize because he was laying down on his couch, and he'd say, "You know, the doctors tell me I have to lay here for so many hours a day, so come over here and talk to me." That I think went on for several months before Newsome came in.

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*Q: This is Tuesday, July 21st, 1998. John, during our last session we discussed the approach of the Carter Administration to human rights as a foreign policy issue. Would you say perhaps a corollary of that was the departure from a more traditional tolerance, if not support, by the United States for anti-communists dictators.*

BUSHNELL: Yes, this trend away from dictators was not new in the Carter Administration, but Vance and Christopher accelerated it. We had been gradually focusing our diminishing bilateral resources of foreign assistance on more democratic regimes or regimes that were moving to become democratic. In part this was driven by the 1974 amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act and the views of Congress. Perhaps the change in the role of our intelligence agencies in the wake of the Church and other reports was most dramatic. In Latin America intelligence operators had usually been the Americans most supportive of anti-communist dictators, and many of these dictators were past masters at using the intelligence folks. By 1997 our intelligence presence and its role in Latin America was greatly reduced. Stations were even completely closed in places like El Salvador. The Linowitz Commission report and the Vance November 1976 letter to Carter emphasized moving away from dictators in general more than economic and other sanctions on them. Certainly the establishment of the Human Rights Bureau also accelerated this trend. However, I understood our policy not as just distancing from the dictators but as trying to work for a return to democracy in all of Latin America. Sometimes, too much distancing was the enemy of getting movement to democracy.

Quite independent of anything we were doing or not doing, most Latin American countries were moving rapidly back to democracy for their own reasons in 1977-80. In the Kennedy Administration just the opposite trend was underway, not because of our policies or actions but because of the internal dynamics of the Latin countries. Under Kennedy one after another Latin country had a military coup or takeover. Often the military justified their actions as

anti-communist, but in most cases this was just an excuse for the more conservative right and its military friends. As I mentioned earlier, there was much frustration in the Kennedy Administration with the trend to military governments in Latin America beginning with the coup against Frondizi in Argentina. Statements were made, but the bully pulpit then, as now, had limited effect. Moreover, the big issue in Latin American in the Kennedy Administration was Cuba and Castro's efforts to expand his influence and communism through insurgency in Latin America. Although there were many of us in the Kennedy Administration who certainly didn't want to welcome with open arms the human rights violating military governments that were taking over, policy was restrained by concern about what was seen as a bigger menace to long-term US security – expansion of communism and Cuban influence in the Hemisphere. Also the coups in the 1960's generally did not result in people being killed, tortured, or imprisoned. On the one hand the lack of widespread individual rights violations suggests that in fact the Cuban-supported insurgents and communists were weaker than we thought. On the other hand the Kennedy Administration stressed the importance of economic and social development through the Alliance for Progress as the route to stable democracy, and this strategy often could be implemented with military regimes as well as with democratic ones.

By 1977 when Carter came in, Castro's expansionary efforts in the hemisphere had mainly failed, partly because of policies the U.S. adopted but mainly because of the natural resistance to communism in most of these countries. Castro was turning his efforts more to Africa, which was a big policy problem for the Administration, but not a Latin American problem. In 1980 candidate Reagan criticized the Carter Administration for allowing Castro to expand his influence greatly, or, as he put it, to take over Nicaragua and Grenada as well as influencing events in several African countries. I would agree we were very slow to see the extent of Cuban influence with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The curtailment of intelligence collection and its diversion away from Cuban targets to less important internal gossip undermined the ability of the Carter Administration to see what was coming. We did try very hard to build a non-Cuban alternative to Somoza; he continued his claim that there were only two alternatives in Nicaragua – Somoza and Castro, but we did not believe these were the only alternatives, and they weren't. However, as the guerrilla warfare in Nicaragua spread in late 1978 and 1979, none of us pressed the point that the longer Somoza held on the more likely the Cuban elements of the Sandinistas would take over.

One of the ironies of human rights policies in the Carter Administration was that much of the sanction focus was on those countries where progress in improving human rights was being made. There was only a delayed focus on what might be called the hopeless cases. For example, in Central America, Somoza's Nicaragua had already responded to earlier US pressures to reestablish a quite free press. Somoza had elections; they were stacked in his favor, but his control was subtle not brutal. He preferred to buy support rather than force it by human rights violations. There were not many political prisoners. People were sent or encouraged into exile but not imprisoned; there was not much torture except in response to violent attacks on the government. In other words, the trend was toward improvement. In Nicaragua, this trend was helped by a basically vigorous economy recovering from a devastating earthquake with a good investment climate and a frontier to which the poor could move and open up their own land. When the Nicaraguan newspaper editor and Somoza enemy Pedro Chamorro was assassinated in January 1978, the Nicaraguan climate was sufficiently free that a general strike and massive demonstrations went on for a week or so with little or no repression by Somoza and few people injured. In El Salvador next door there was

little movement to improve human rights, and killing and torture were a continual part of the landscape to a degree not found in Nicaragua. In Guatemala the military and what we might call the economic oligarchy had been in control for a long time, and they maintained absolute power by brutal methods, killing labor union leaders and students in the cities and peasants who caused any trouble in rural areas. HA, ARA, and the 7<sup>th</sup> floor principals focused on such countries as Nicaragua, Chile, and Argentina where there were domestic political pressures driven principally by the NGOs and exiles instead of on the countries with the worse human rights and much less sign of improvement.

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*Q: Perhaps that was reflecting the debate that was generally escalating in the United States regarding the role that the United States should take in terms of dealing with other countries including the so-called more repressive regimes. How do you explain that kind of debate was developing in this period? Was the long shadow of Vietnam relevant?*

BUSHNELL: Probably Vietnam was relevant. Most of the senior policy makers in the Carter Administration had either personal negative experiences on the Vietnam situation [Vance, Lake] or had at least been in opposition fairly early to the degree of US involvement in Vietnam. They were not isolationists – that was another group of people who just wanted the U.S. to stay home – but rather saw the U.S. playing a different role. My problem was that I could not understand what this role was and how the line between intervening and not intervening was drawn. The Carter Administration somehow saw cutting off aid, voting against IFI loans, breaking military relations, condemning governments in the press as not being intervention, but to provide good offices to bring two sides together in a compromise was intervention. I think there was a lot of fuzzy thinking about intervention and a failure to recognize that various elements of the private sector and the Congress would “intervene” even if the government somehow did not. Nevertheless, the desire for nonintervention was at the heart of the policy debate at several key points, particularly in Nicaragua.

The most extreme and probably decisive example of this intervention concern was with Somoza. Many of us saw that Somoza was getting signals from his friends in the US Congress, several of whom were powerful chairman, and from other friends and lobbyists in the U.S., that were very different from what he was getting from the Carter Administration. His Congressional, lobbyist, and military friends were telling him that Christopher, Pastor, Derian, Vaky, and perhaps Bushnell were just leftish activists trying to make trouble for him and perhaps even help the communists take-over Nicaragua and he should hang tough but pacify these activists by releasing a couple of prisoners or other minor actions. His friends showed they had more power than the activists, for example by forcing a continuation of AID lending in 1978. He had good reasons to believe his friends would win the internal US battle about Nicaragua. We thought we would change Somoza’s perception if the President of the United States were prepared to personally communicate to Somoza that it was time for him to make way for other leadership in Nicaragua. This message could not be delivered by another envoy who would be painted as part of the Christopher/Vaky gang; it had to be done personally by President Carter. There was considerable opposition on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor when Vaky proposed such an approach because it would again be intervention. Why was it intervention for President Carter to say what Vaky, Bowdler, Derian and Christopher were

saying if what they were saying and doing was not intervention? I was confused, but I was not a player in high-level Nicaraguan policy.

Finally, when OAS mediation – the Bowdler mission – was failing, it was agreed to ask the President to place the call. President Carter felt, I was told, such action on his part would cross the line of proper US action and would be intervention, in which he was not prepared to participate. The same approach was raised later as the situation was deteriorating with the same result. To most people in Central America – to many people in Central America I talked with at the time and since – President Carter was engaged in massive intervention through the many actions the U.S. took at this time, not least of which was organizing the political opposition to Somoza. Everyone knew that Somoza was a graduate of West Point, that one of his best buddies was Congressman Murphy who headed a key committee in Congress and who visited Nicaragua frequently and certainly showed no sign of distancing, and that the Nicaraguan ambassador in Washington – a Somoza brother-in-law – was the dean of the diplomatic corp and was often at the Carter White House as he had been with Roosevelt and every president since. Thus they assumed that, if Carter really wanted Somoza to leave, it would happen. When Somoza did not leave, most thought he still had US backing. All thought the U.S. was pulling the strings. In Latin America we will be blamed for intervening whenever the situation does not suit the speaker.

Personally I think the campaign I organized to delay Nicaraguan drawings from the IMF was at least as big an intervention in Nicaraguan affairs as a presidential phone call with some friendly advice and the offer of safehaven in the United States. Nonetheless, worry about intervening drove a lot of Latin policy during the Carter years, and one of the Administration's proudest accomplishments was that there was no military intervention in Latin America. Distancing was minding our business, and I guess the use of the bully pulpit was just saying what we thought, not intervening in the business of the government we verbally attacked. Perhaps we are not intervening as long as they pay no attention to us!

*Q: But why did so many influential Americans over such a long period of time--as you say, from the late '20s to Reagan--consider Nicaragua key to Central America?*

BUSHNELL: I don't think many Americans considered Nicaragua, let alone considering it key to anything.

*Q: They seemed to. Remember some of the Reagan speeches.*

BUSHNELL: Ah, once the Sandinistas took over in July 1979 and their Cuban friends appeared in every ministry with Russian military equipment arriving at the docks, many, especially critics of the Carter Administration, saw Nicaragua as falling, if not fallen, into the Cuban/Soviet orbit. Nicaragua was the foothold of the evil empire on the continent of the Americas – Cuba being an island. Communist footholds are key. That was candidate Reagan's point, and President Reagan's too. Central America is a small place, and arms and other assistance can, and did, move easily from one country to another even when there is no land border as between Nicaragua and El Salvador. Because communism endorsed and supported violent means to gain political control, it was a virus that spread easily to neighboring countries unlike democracy which tended to offer only an example. I don't believe I ever heard anyone argue an open prosperous democracy in Nicaragua

would be the key to such reforms in Central America. Costa Rica has been such an example for nearly 50 years, and it doesn't seem to have affected neighboring Nicaragua. To Reagan Nicaragua was one of several places where the communists had broken decades of containment and were on the move thanks to the inadequate policies of Carter.

*Q: Before that we had FDR and all these people who were paying special tribute to Nicaragua. They all seemed to regard this as central.*

BUSHNELL: The Somoza family sent a very capable and loyal ambassador to Washington and left him here for almost 40 years. Guillermo Sevilla-Sacasa got FDR to single out Nicaragua, and the Somozas worked hard on their relations with each President. Nicaragua singled itself out by being the first Latin country to declare war on Germany and Japan [Sevilla-Sacasa told me this, and it may not be true just as FDR's supposed summary of Somoza's father, "He's a son of a bitch, but he's our son of a bitch," apparently was never said by FDR and may have been invented by that very cagy ambassador].

*Q: He was a relative of Somoza, wasn't he, a brother-in-law or something?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, he was a brother-in-law of the first Somoza, Anastasio, an uncle of his son. He charmed many Presidents and spoke not just for Latin America but for the whole diplomatic corps.

*Q: He was the dean of the diplomatic corps for...*

BUSHNELL: The dean of the diplomatic corps for some 20 years.

*Q: Of course, Nicaragua had been an ally in World War II.*

BUSHNELL: All Central America was. But Nicaragua presented itself as a great US ally. Its vote was more reliable than any other in the UN. That was part of Somoza's game, of all the Somozas, not just the last one but of the father, who was perhaps even better at it than his sons. But cultivation of the United States and of certain people and groups here gave Nicaragua, although it was a small country, a higher profile perhaps than many the other countries.

*Q: But was this enough? So many Presidents, especially Nixon for example, blinked their eyes to the corruption and oppressive proclivities of the Somozas.*

BUSHNELL: Corruption was a problem in Nicaragua as in many Latin American countries. The Somozas got rich basically by controlling land and certain industries which became efficient and prosperous, not by the usual stealing from the public till. As I recall, Somoza family members were big producers and exporters of cotton, a product they helped introduce to Nicaragua. But others in Nicaragua also did well financially, even some not associated with the Somozas. More important the middleclass grew rapidly and even the rural workers were better off as they got regular work and in many cases some land. Nicaragua was not a rich country, but its economy was growing fast and the benefits were widely distributed. Up until the time of the earthquake in the early '70s.

*Q: '72.*

BUSHNELL: Yes. The quake set the economy back, especially as world markets for their exports were weakening at that time. There was much international aid, and accounting for it was not good. Many accuse Somoza of stealing the aid, but there is little proof. I suspect there was stealing of aid by many people at all levels of the government.

*Q: Well, all of Somoza's friends and family became rich, but most of the country was quite poor.*

BUSHNELL: Nicaragua was a poor country in the 1970's although not as poor as it has become since, and I don't think its income distribution was worse than the Latin American average. Neither income nor land was nearly as concentrated in a small group of families as was the case in El Salvador and Guatemala. That the Somozas owned Nicaragua is a myth promoted by the human rights NGOs. There were rich families that were rich before the Somozas came to power, such as the Pella, Sacasas, and Chomorros, and there were businessmen who became rich by their own enterprise. Most of these families were intermarried, and the Nicaraguan elite was small as the total population was only about two million in 1970. Some members of the elite families strongly supported Somoza and took positions in Somoza governments; others opposed the Somozas; many stayed out of politics. In general opposing Somoza politically had no economic consequences. Traditionally Nicaragua was divided between liberals and conservatives. There were just the two major political parties, and Somoza was a liberal. But there were conservatives who, all during the decades of the Somozas, maintained a political opposition. Most of the time a Congress functioned. Somoza's Liberals won a majority of the seats, but the Conservatives were there. Remember Somoza's power was centered in the National Guard, which his father had done much to create with the help of the Marines. His son also commanded it. For awhile a Liberal civilian was even president. The Somoza family had lots of power and wealth, but Nicaragua was not the one-man show or one-family show pictured by the opposition in the United States, perhaps to simplify perhaps to galvanize opposition.

During the Somoza period from the 1930's to 1979 much of the low lands in the west were opened up for cotton production. Cotton became a more important export than the traditional coffee which was grown largely on family farms in the highlands. Cotton was capital intensive and was developed by the rich and a few foreign investors, including the Somozas who took a leading role in promoting this cotton development which greatly expanded the country's economy and provided many jobs. Nicaragua became a big competitor of the U.S. in cotton, particularly high-quality cotton, and went from nothing to exporting hundreds of millions of dollars worth a year, but I never heard any anti-Nicaragua noise from US cotton interests during my time in ARA.

*Q: Some of the so-called leftists in the U.S. claimed that Central American policy was dominated by the interests and influence of organizations like United Fruit in which the Dulles family had important interests. Do you think that was a factor?*

BUSHNELL: It certainly was not a factor in Nicaragua. Nicaragua had only a small banana industry, and it wasn't owned by United Fruit. In Honduras and in Guatemala, the much larger banana interests had been forced, almost by the nature of their business, to play a political role and forced to pay-off politicians. Banana workers were among the first to organize in these countries, and at first the companies worked with the unions fairly well. But these unions were targeted by

international and local communists. Once the communists gained control of a banana union, the objective seemed to be to put the company out of business, not to improve lasting worker benefits. Thus in some cases the banana companies were forced into political battles to stay in business.

*Q: That was not relevant to Nicaragua?*

BUSHNELL: It was not relevant to Nicaragua, and I think the supposed role of the banana companies in Central America has been considerably exaggerated.

*Q: How about the Congressional influence? Sally Shelton, for example, in her interview for the ADS, said John Murphy and Charles Wilson – we've already referred to this – were among those who made critical comments about remarks she made in Congressional testimony about Somoza, and they were both very influential members of Congress. But to your knowledge, did that strong Congressional interest have significant impact on the thinking in the White House or State?*

BUSHNELL: Yes. Murphy, Wilson, and a few others had strong views on Nicaragua, and they were basically the opposite of the views of the human rights NGOs and activists. Moreover, Murphy and Wilson were also Democrats. Murphy said he had known Somoza since they were both at West Point, and Murphy was close to Somoza. I wondered if Somoza had not over the years provided some friendly funding of Murphy campaigns in New York. Murphy thought Somoza was doing a great job for the people of Nicaragua expanding the economy and providing jobs and education. He could not understand why the human rights activists picked on his friend when other rulers in Latin America and elsewhere were so much more brutal and were often destroying their countries economically as well. Wilson saw Somoza as the block to communism to which he was strongly opposed. Wilson even infiltrated Afghanistan after the Russian invasion to take money and supplies to the resistance. He was a strong supporter of Carter's Afghanistan policy, but he thought Carter was being deceived by the human rights gang at the State Department which wanted to give Nicaragua, in our own hemisphere and close to the Panama Canal, to the Russians and Cubans.

*Q: How did they work?*

BUSHNELL: They did all the standard things to influence policy: they wrote letters to the President and to Secretary Vance [ARA was often drafting replies]; they called or attended Congressional hearings where Nicaragua could be raised; they made their views known to the press [although neither had a strong carry with the Washington press corp, I would see them quoted in stories or op- ed pieces from around the country, not just from their states of New York and Texas]; they lobbied their colleagues on the Hill; they lobbied the Administration; finally they threatened and used their power as committee or subcommittee chairmen and as Congressional leaders who could move the votes of many colleagues who might not care about an issue. Murphy met at least once, I think more than once, with President Carter to try to change Carter's view of Nicaragua and of Somoza – unsuccessfully. Finally they threatened to reduce overall AID appropriations substantially if aid to Nicaragua were cut. As two conservative Democrat leaders, they could move quite a few essential Democratic votes; in short their threat was credible; they could disrupt the worldwide AID program, and their feelings about Nicaragua were so strong that most of us thought they were not bluffing. In 1978 the White House agreed to make new AID loans

in Nicaragua even though ARA, HA, and AID all favored curtailing such lending. Of course this AID loan approval signaled Somoza that his Congressional friends had more clout than the Christopher gang, as he thought of us.

Early in 1978, the Administration made a decision to cut off military loans to Nicaragua. I was still new in ARA, and this did not strike me as a very interesting or important issue. As I recall, Wade Matthews, the Central American country director had argued for military assistance primarily because we were not stopping it for countries with worse human rights. Todman supported him, and that was the ARA position although Sally Shelton favored cutting military aid. Nicaragua's economy was not in bad shape, and the proposed military assistance loan amount was tiny. It was important to our military because, they claimed, it gave them influence over what weapons Nicaragua bought. I was worrying about needs for military assistance throughout Latin America, and we were very short. Thus stopping the Nicaragua program meant I could reprogram those small amounts to start small programs in the Caribbean. The close relationship of the Somoza National Guard to our military seemed to me excessive. We had one of our closest military relationships, maybe the closest military relationship in Latin America, with Nicaragua where the main role of the Guard was to assure Somoza's power. Such a military-to-military relationship didn't make any sense. Only later did I begin to understand how hard Somoza had worked to build his relationship with the US military and how easily our military could be used by a cagy military strongman.

Once the decision to stop military assistance loans was made, we were at war with these friends of Somoza on the Hill, who went all out to reverse any policy negative to Somoza. Intelligence suggested that Somoza thought he was caught in the middle between the Administration and his Congressional friends. These friends visited Managua even more frequently. Somoza seems to have believed that only State with Christopher and Derian were against him; the military, Congress, and perhaps CIA were with him. He intensified his lobbying efforts. Ambassador Sevilla-Sacasa told me this rough spot in the road would pass as had others before. He probably told Somoza that, if they played their cards right, Somoza would survive and the Christopher gang would be relegated to the dustbin of history given the influence of Murphy, Wilson, and other friends.

*Q: And Wilson chaired an Appropriations Subcommittee.*

BUSHNELL: Wilson was on the Appropriations Committee; I'm not sure he had a sub-committee. He wasn't the chair for Latin America, but he was very influential because his was a key vote for Administration proposals and several conservative Democrats followed his lead. Ninety-eight percent of the US Congress wouldn't have ranked Nicaragua among their top 20 concerns, so when some member ranks Nicaragua as his first concern, despite whatever his constituents in Texas or in Brooklyn think about Nicaragua, he makes Nicaragua an important issue, and he can do a great deal of damage. As Wilson said to me, he couldn't understand it. Nicaragua did not really matter to the Administration except to a few human righters who could constructively direct their energies lots of other places. The Administration should be willing to give him what he wanted at the snap of a finger. Perhaps he had not considered that President Carter might be among the human righters. Well, the first round essentially went to the Administration, and military credit was frozen, but the second round went to Murphy and Wilson, and AID lending continued. During

the first half of 1978 we had to get the Panama Canal Treaties through the Senate. They had to be ratified before they could be implemented, so the House battle was somewhat delayed, although the implementing legislation was introduced. It wasn't crunch day yet with Murphy, although he tried to get the President to change his Nicaragua policy unsuccessfully during this period.

President Carter had a very full plate in Latin America. Perhaps no US president has tried to do as much. Not only was the Carter Administration changing the emphasis of US policy to promote human rights and to reduce the military and business elements including such initiatives as the Caribbean Development Group, but it also signed the Panama Canal Treaty, as domestically controversial a treaty as there ever was. In 1978 after the Senate ratified the Treaty by the narrowest of margins, these Latin issues came together in an unexpected and extremely difficult way. Ratification of the Treaty was not enough. It was not self-implementing; we needed a complex implementation law. The main House committee with jurisdiction was Merchant Marine and Fisheries chaired by John Murphy who had earlier chaired the Panama Canal subcommittee, and he opposed the Treaty. As the senior Democrat he was supposed to be the President's man to lead the fight for the implementation bill, and he was furious with the Administration because of its Nicaragua policy. At almost any other time in our history opposition to Nicaragua policy from the Chairman of a relatively minor House committee would not have been a big deal.

I had a first hand experience with the intensity of this problem although I was normally just an interested bystander to this battle of the most senior figures in our government. One day at lunchtime I got a telephone call from Christopher who said that I should immediately go up to the hide-away office of House Majority leader Jim Wright. He told me where the office was. Wright wanted to talk about Nicaragua and Panama, he said. I said, "Alright. I guess I know our position." He said, "It's a problem. See where the maneuver room is," something like that. I jumped in a taxi. Wright was there with Murphy, Wilson, and a couple of others, and they were having sandwiches.

*Q: Assistant Secretary Todman was away?*

BUSHNELL: It was toward the end of the Todman period. I don't know now if I was acting, or it may have been that Todman had already left for lunch or something. I think this came up suddenly, and they obviously had called for Christopher. Maybe they had called for Vance, I don't know. I guess I was the senior person present in the ARA front-office at that moment. I don't know whether Christopher particularly wanted to send me or if Todman was just out. I have no recollection that I went and talked to him first, which I would have done, at least for a minute, if he had been there.

I listened to Murphy, Wilson, and the others. The pitch was that there were lots of problems with canal legislation and there were lots of problems with the aid legislation and budget numbers and there were lots of problems with the Administration's position on Nicaragua. If the Administration couldn't find a way to have a more friendly position toward Somoza, then the canal treaty implementation and the aid levels were in trouble. Wright said he wanted to support the Administration but, as I could see, the Administration needed to adjust to keep Democrats together.

*Q: Wright's office, and they made this very crude picture.*

BUSHNELL: It was pretty crude, yes. It certainly came across clearly. What words were used, whether it was stated as an explicit *quid pro quo*, I don't remember. It was not an unpleasant lunch. Wright took the lead to get into Nicaragua, "What is the problem with Nicaragua?" I explained some of the things that were human rights issues. They said, "Here's a guy who's won an election. What's wrong with that?" I explained some of the things that were wrong, that it wasn't really a free and open election. I remember Wright said, "You haven't had too much experience with some elections for the US House," or something like that, and there were other remarks to the effect that we at State had our heads in the sky. I recall Murphy at one point asked how well I knew Somoza. I'd never met Somoza, and I said, "I don't know him personally." He said, "Well, I know him. I've known him for 35 years or something, since we were both 19 years old. He's a great guy," and so forth. "I can speak for him. I don't think anybody in the Administration, all you in the Administration put together, don't know him as well as I do."

*Q: You did not argue with him?*

BUSHNELL: In terms of how well he knew Somoza, I certainly did not disagree. They implied that there were a few fixes around the edges in Nicaragua that were possible. They said they could talk to him, and he'd be willing to do things. He opened up to the press, and he had had elections. He said he wasn't going to have another term, and what did we want? He was elected, and he wanted to serve out his term. What is the big deal? Why were we against this guy who was one of the biggest friends of the United States? He hasn't done anything to anyone except those that have been shooting at his people. Of course, as I said, the things that you could point at in Somoza's regime were not dramatic sorts of things. He didn't go around shooting people. The Majority Leader finally summed up by saying, "When it comes to Nicaragua, the people who are interested in Nicaragua are here. But, these people you can see are very strong about this, and frankly the Administration needs these people for things that it wants, like we were discussing, the canal treaty legislation and aid levels, and you go back and you tell your people in the Administration that that's the way it is." So I did. I came back and reported to Christopher.

*Q: Did you do a memo on this?*

BUSHNELL: I don't think so. I think I just reported to him verbally. I may have done a night note for the Secretary and the President. I wouldn't have done a memo that would have gone into the big clearance system and been seen all over the Department and possibly leaked.

*Q: I think historically that was a very important meeting.*

BUSHNELL: It was one skirmish in a long battle.

*Q: How did Christopher react?*

BUSHNELL: In his usual way, he didn't really react. He listened, he understood, and he sort of said we've got a problem. He didn't change anything immediately as a result of that lunch, and whether or not he ever got back to them, which is what they asked for, I don't know. Not long after that Charlie Wilson in one way or another got to Henry Owen in the White House.

*Q: He was the economic czar at the White House.*

BUSHNELL: He was sort of an economic czar. He was responsible for the economic Summits and aid programs and I don't know what all.

*Q: He has always been very influential wherever he is.*

BUSHNELL: A couple months later the House was marking up the AID appropriations. I heard Congressman Wilson had told Owen the aid programs for India and some other places in which Owen was very interested were going to be devastated unless the Administration made a deal on Nicaragua. There was a series of White House meetings, and it was finally recommended, and the President approved, that we would do two or three new loans to Nicaragua. These would not be affected by human rights policy. The first loan may have come up in the Christopher Committee where there was much opposition from HA; ARA supported this loan because it directly helped the poor. Anyway, the decision was made that we would preserve economic assistance, but the military assistance and military supplies would continue to be denied. It seemed to me at the time that was not a bad compromise; in fact it made sense to distance a bit on the military side. The AID loans were the main thing because they involved substantial funds. Of course, approving the AID loans was a tremendous signal to Somoza and others. His American Congressional friends would tell him, "Look, we got this AID money. This is what counts. On the military side there was hardly any money. You can get military equipment somewhere else. They can't be too tough on a country where they're continuing their bilateral aid program." That arrangement was made in the course of 1978; it did not change Murphy's and Wilson's desire to change our Nicaragua policies more completely, but it at least got us through that appropriations cycle.

*Q: This is why foreign policy is always so logical and crystal and rational and clear.*

BUSHNELL: It shows domestic political considerations, even if they're only fairly personal considerations as they were in this case, play a large role.

*Q: With the Carter Administration, from the beginning, whatever differences in concepts of intervention and nonintervention, etc., they had a conspicuous distaste for Somoza from the beginning across the board, right?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, I have hypothesized that Somoza's main problem was that the military dominance in Nicaragua was personified, that it was seen as the Somoza dynasty. The military were more brutal and more corrupt and had much worse human rights records in Guatemala and El Salvador, but these militaries weren't personified. Generals moved up and moved on. Presidents came and went. There was no single person or family associated with the right wing rule in these countries. Personification of the authoritarianism in Nicaragua in the person of Somoza made him more of a target. Moreover, it was precisely the Somoza families' close ties with the United States which, in my view, made it impossible for us not to intervene because we had been so close to the Somozas for so long in so many ways. These historical ties particularly stirred up people like Pat Derian. The facts that Somoza himself was a graduate of West Point, that he regularly supported the United States, even that several US Congressmen traveled frequently to see Somoza made it

appear that the U.S. was involved in maintaining authoritarian rule in Nicaragua.

There was much talk in the Carter Administration about whether or not we should intervene in Nicaragua. This intervention discussion did not make sense to me. The United States and various parts of its government and society were involved in Nicaragua and had been involved for many years. Somoza had friends on the Hill; he worked the Hill; he worked the US society; he had lobbyists; he had the dean of the diplomatic corps. All of these Somoza interventions, if you will, in the U.S. were a challenge, you might say, to the Human Rights activists. Here was an authoritarian ruler who personified human rights abuses and was also tied to the United States.

There's one other wrinkle in this Nicaragua situation, however, that I think should be given much more attention than what I've seen written in hindsight, and that is the role of Carlos Andres Perez (CAP), the President of Venezuela.

*Q: Look, can you hold Perez for a minute, because I have some other questions getting at why Carter's people had this...*

BUSHNELL: That's what I want to come to, because that's where CAP played a big role.

*Q: Oh, okay. Because you've got a lot to say about Perez later.*

BUSHNELL: We'll also talk about Perez later. Perez had a particular link to Pedro Chamorro, the newspaper editor that was killed in 1978. Chamorro had lived in Venezuela, and they had been close, and when Chamorro was killed, Perez...

*Q: That was January 10th, 1978.*

BUSHNELL: That's right. It was very early in my time in ARA.

*Q: As Tony Lake says in his book, that was the point from which Somoza's slide was apparent. Everything was downhill from there.*

BUSHNELL: I think that's right, but let's take just the US side of the Nicaragua issue for the moment. CAP was the president, the leader, in Latin America with whom President Carter created the firmest connections.

*Q: CAP? This is Carlos...*

BUSHNELL: Carlos Andres Perez. We call him CAP; that's his nickname. CAP, of course, was a democratic ruler. Some of us remember earlier times when, as attorney general, he had overseen and even participated in torture in Venezuela, but those days were past, and Venezuela was a fine, upstanding democracy selling us lots of oil and playing an expanding role in the world. CAP, by his personality – I don't know just why – captivated President Carter, and especially Bob Pastor. The President saw him as the sort of political leader in Latin America he could really relate to, and the President respected his views. Remember at the beginning of the Carter Administration there were very few democratic heads of state on the mainland of Latin America. CAP helped convince

the President to conclude the Panama Canal treaties and then played a role in helping them get through the Senate. He was also influential in getting Panama strongman Torrijos to do some things that he needed to do to help us get the Treaties through. Thus CAP was perhaps our biggest ally at that moment in the hemisphere. There was a lot of Presidential correspondence that went back and forth. There were visits back and forth. Chamorro's assassination was a traumatic event for CAP. People that are close to him have told me that it was like losing his wife or his mistress. This was CAP's friend and buddy that had been killed, and CAP thought Somoza was responsible. It now appears that Somoza was not responsible, but most people thought at the time he was. CAP at that point wanted to make a major effort to get Somoza. CAP wasn't comparing anything in Nicaragua to El Salvador or Colombia or anyplace else. This was a personal thing, a personal vendetta. Do it at almost any price! And he played a gigantic role because in addition to influencing President Carter he made an alliance with Castro, something none of us thought he would ever do.

*Q: With Castro?*

BUSHNELL: With Castro in Cuba. None of us ever thought that CAP, who was totally opposed to communism, would ever do such a thing, but he did. And this CAP/Castro cooperation not only greatly speeded the fall of Somoza but also established the base for the Castro/communist domination of Nicaragua thereafter.

*Q: Let me back up just a little. Before Carter came into the White House. Saul Linowitz had headed a commission of Latin American experts that submitted a report a few months before Carter was inaugurated that presumably had some impact on the Carterites' thinking.*

BUSHNELL: Especially since Bob Pastor was the man who authored much of the report.

*Q: Exactly. Do you recall what its recommendations were, and were they relevant to the early attitudes -- this is a couple of years before what we're talking about here now?*

BUSHNELL: I haven't read that report for a long time, but I read it at the time. I don't remember that it was particularly focused on Nicaragua. Remember, I started in ARA at the end of 1977, so the Carter Administration had already been in office for nearly a year. I think the Linowitz report probably did play a role early on in a number of ways, including endorsing an emphasis on human rights and democracy although not in the rhetoric-heavy way the Administration proceeded.. It did endorse paying a lot more attention to Latin America – it was a report jointly written by Latins and Americans. It supported concluding the Panama Treaties and turning the canal over to Panama. I don't identify that it played a major role in policy formulation in 1978 and thereafter.

*Q: Well, the nonintervention angle, I think, was...*

BUSHNELL: ...was an angle of it, yes.

*Q: And the fact that Pastor was the principal author of the report.*

BUSHNELL: The report reflected Pastor's views, and he then tended to try to carry out the

recommendations.

*Q: Was it Pastor who always wanted to make sure the recommendations of the Linowitz commission were high on the agenda for the Carter Administration for Latin America? That was the way I understood it.*

BUSHNELL: I think that was true in the first year. I don't know that it had much carry beyond the first year. Most policies were already established by 1978 and had their own momentum one way or another.

*Q: Now pick up the Chamorro assassination, January 10th of 1978, a watershed presumably in the downfall of Somoza. Why was Chamorro so important, aside from his friendship with Perez?*

BUSHNELL: He was a Conservative, i.e. he was from the Nicaraguan opposition party, and he was seen as an alternative leader to Somoza. He had a family newspaper that had been there for a long time, a good newspaper with a large circulation. In many ways the paper was the opposition, vocal opposition, a very strident opposition to Somoza much of the time.

*Q: There apparently had been animosity between the two of them since they were kids and went to the same school together and fought on the playground.*

BUSHNELL: The Conservatives and Liberals had dominated political life in Nicaragua for generations. Thus the Somozas and most of the Chamorros had been political opponents at least since the first Somoza became a public figure in the 1920's. I don't know about personal relationships, but they had been political opponents as Liberals and Conservatives. Since there is little difference in the policies favored by the two Nicaraguan parties, politics become very personality dominated, confused by the fact that Nicaragua is a small place and the elite families intermarry and form business partnerships. It gets very confusing. At times the Somozas had closed the newspaper, and Pedro Chamorro had gone into exile in Venezuela. In fact, one of the things that Somoza did in 1977, as the U.S. became more outspoken on human rights, was to lift martial law and permit the newspaper to reopen without censorship. He also invited in the Inter-American Human Rights Commission and announced he would begin releasing the few political prisoners being held. He also suffered heart problems in mid-1977. Perhaps these steps to improve human rights were a tactic to improve relations with the U.S. without giving up real control, but they were more progress than was forthcoming from a number of other Latin countries at the time. Somoza argued he was prepared to move toward a fully democratic and free political situation. But he was still the most visible military authoritarian in the United States. Pedro Chamorro was an outspoken critic, making his newspaper the mouthpiece of the democratic opposition. He was seen as an alternative political leader to Somoza. His good newspaper was on campaign against Somoza.

*Q: Presumably the most prestigious newspaper in Central America.*

BUSHNELL: Many in Costa Rica would give an argument on that point, but certainly it was a solid and outspoken newspaper that tried for factual coverage of the domestic scene; it was certainly better than anything in countries like El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras where the

newspapers were not critical of the government. It certainly criticized the government, and it criticized other things too. In fact, one of its campaigns at the time that Chamorro was killed was against a group of Cuban Americans who had a very profitable operation buying blood in Nicaragua, giving poor people a dollar or two for having a pint of blood taken for export to the United States. The blood business was fairly widespread in Latin America, but according to Chamorro's paper these people had not gotten permission from the medical authorities in Nicaragua, were not paying very much, and were doing various things on a semi-black market basis. I think a preponderance of the evidence indicates that Chamorro was killed by the people who were running the blood business, not by Somoza. In retrospect, the thought struck me that the only big beneficiary of Chamorro's killing was Castro and the communists. With one stroke a major leader of the democratic opposition was removed and many Nicaraguans were radicalized against Somoza; guerrilla recruitment picked up sharply. Moreover, Castro and his intelligence service would have known this killing would likely make CAP desperate to get rid of Somoza. Castro, another personified authoritarian in the area, hated Somoza for helping the U.S. with the Bay of Pigs invasion. There is no evidence I know about of a Castro involvement. But we continue to learn that Castro had many more agents working in south Florida than we dreamed, and some of his people could even have been part of the blood operation.

*Q: Apparently there was no evidence of direct complicity by Somoza, but there apparently was some presumption that he may have been implicated. Do you think there was any...*

BUSHNELL: The immediate presumption by the Nicaraguans and by most everybody else when Chamorro was killed was that his big political enemy, Somoza, did it. The Nicaraguan opposition took to the streets and closed things down for quite a long time.

*Q: The famous example of Henry Forth: "I want somebody to rid me of that madman Thomas Averkiet", and so eventually someone went out and killed him, and so he was sort of held responsible. Do you think it may have been something like that?*

BUSHNELL: I think Somoza was smarter than that. Somoza knew perfectly well killing Chamorro would be a big problem for him, as it was. People closed the whole economy down for a couple of weeks; many thousand demonstrated, and the murder did cause a lot of people to move into more active resistance. It was a watershed event within Nicaragua because it polarized people against Somoza because they blamed Somoza. Somoza's people made a great effort to find out who did it. Nobody ever did find out who was responsible. Mrs. Chamorro, the victim's wife who later became president of Nicaragua, has said she does not believe Somoza was responsible. Moreover, use of hired killers was not the Somoza style, I might say. I think it is very unlikely that Somoza was responsible because Somoza was a smart politician and a fairly sophisticated operator. It would have been evident to him that, if he wanted to get rid of Chamorro, Chamorro should die after a long illness or something that wouldn't spark an emotional explosion. Just to gun him down on the street is very unlike Somoza. It would have been a stupid political move. But he was blamed for it. It moved a lot of people away from him. People struck and demonstrated for quite a long time. Somoza, probably wisely, didn't repress – he didn't send in the military and seal up the place. We may never know the full story about how that killing came about, but, yes, it was a watershed event because Somoza's position and the national guard's position ran downhill from there. The infuriating of CAP changed the outside environment. I think the killing and CAP's

reaction was a major factor that caused the White House – Pastor and Carter – to give much more attention to Somoza than to other dictators.

*Q: The sanctions you spoke of earlier, this came about during that period?*

BUSHNELL: No, a little later. The decision to stop military assistance was made fairly soon after the assassination. I don't think the assassination was key to that decision. In fact, I have some recollection of being impressed in the immediate aftermath, in the couple of months after the assassination, the national guard was very responsible. Guard soldiers didn't fire into the crowds and do a lot of things which they could have done in the wake of a big national strike and the polemics that were being thrown at them by the newspaper. That was short-term performance that could have been much, much worse on the human rights side. One didn't want to spit in the face of that good restraint by formally cutting military assistance, although the more general long-term pattern meant that moving this military lending to some other country made a lot of sense. I think it was our own internal bureaucratic processes that determined the timing.

*Q: Okay. Now, Perez then wrote a letter to Jimmy Carter. You explained much of the background there, but what was that letter all about?*

BUSHNELL: At the time I didn't give too much attention to it, because, as I said, there was a lot of correspondence going back and forth between CAP and the President. After the assassination CAP wrote a letter to Carter about Nicaragua.

*Q: Essentially it was suggesting that we should force Somoza out through some kind of OAS action.*

BUSHNELL: Yes, that we should work together to get Somoza out of Nicaragua; that was the bottom line. The specifics in the letter were things that we were in favor of. One of the things that we had been pressing Somoza to do was to invite the OAS Human Rights Commission to visit. My view was it was a good thing for Somoza, because the Commission would find some fault – everything was not perfect – but in the general scheme of things the Commission would show that things were not absolutely terrible, not nearly as bad as in several other countries.

*Q: To show there had been improvement.*

BUSHNELL: There had been improvement. It would be an independent group with a view that would be reasonably objective. We had that objective, and that was raised in CAP's letter. Then my recollection is that there was some general suggestion that we should work together in order to move Somoza out. I don't think those were the precise words that were used, but that's what was meant. We all knew what was meant, that we should work together to force Somoza to resign and leave the country. Reading the Lake book reminded me that it was probably the first time that I had lunch at the White House mess with Bob Pastor, because the issue of replying to CAP was in January or February 1978.

*Q: And that lunch was February 6th.*

BUSHNELL: The CAP letter was very much on Bob's mind, but I saw the lunch as a more general get acquainted meeting. I hoped to use my NSC experience to build a constructive and cooperative relationship with Bob Pastor.

*Q: According to Lake, it was something of a shouting session.*

BUSHNELL: I don't remember that; in fact I thought at the time that Bob was a serious and knowledgeable person with whom ARA could work much better than we had been.

*Q: So what is your...*

BUSHNELL: I don't think it was a shouting session.

*Q: Before you get to the lunch, there had been some maneuvering around trying to get a clear picture of what the response to Perez would be. What was the status before you went into the lunch?*

BUSHNELL: I assume the Nicaraguan and Venezuelan desks would have prepared a draft that I had seen. On most of the specific issues CAP raised our policy agreed with him. The only question then was whether or not we would give a positive signal in terms of working together to get Somoza out. I saw that as at least making sure he didn't change his mind and decide to have another term, at least ending the Somoza dynasty being directly in power. That was one way one could look at the situation and read the letter. I didn't at the time know about CAP's relationship with Pedro Chamorro and how his killing had affected CAP. I didn't see the letter as a big issue because it was clear to me that we were working with CAP and we were going to be working with CAP over the next couple of years. President Carter had just sent him a letter dealing with the Cubans in the Horn of Africa; the President was consulting with CAP on items important to us, and CAP was consulting with the President on items important to him. Certainly we weren't going to send him a letter and say, "Don't send me any more letters on Nicaragua." Nobody was proposing that.

*Q: Lake says also on international energy issues and north-south relations we worked with CAP.*

BUSHNELL: Yes, we worked with CAP on everything, so why shouldn't we work with him on Nicaragua. We and CAP both wanted to end the Somoza dynasty; the questions were when and how. I thought it was no big deal. I was puzzled at why Pastor, who thought that CAP was a better guy than I thought he was, wanted to spit in his face by refusing to work with CAP to end the Somoza dynasty. I didn't see any reason for articulating our reservations on how and when the Somoza dynasty ended. And besides, this issue wasn't going to go away. He'd be writing another letter no matter what we said. There were no specifics on ending the dynasty, just general directions we're going in the future. The specifics were all agreed. There was no problem there. ..

*Q: Where was the lunch?*

BUSHNELL: In the White House mess. I would have lunch with Pastor there from time to time, and I would have him over to the State Department for lunch. I was trying to develop a

constructive relationship because Todman had problems with Pastor whom he saw as a young whipper-snapper who was trying to go Todman's job instead of letting him do it.

*Q: Well, it was reciprocal, I gather. Pastor didn't...*

BUSHNELL: By the time I arrived in ARA, they were not on very good terms. Also, in my view, having served at the NSC, it was quite right and proper for ARA to do a lot of Pastor's staff work. Pastor didn't have much staff, and so it's necessary for State to do most of the work of drafting Presidential letters and even policy papers. On the other hand, there are limits to what ARA could do, and every time Pastor had some wild idea, he shouldn't expect a 50-page paper from ARA. We had to get some kind of mutual understanding and end the situation where he'd ask for things and Todman would just not deliver them. Thus my objectives in this lunch had nothing at all to do with the CAP letter, in which I had not yet been deeply involved. My objective was to get to know Pastor better and to try to work out a relationship where we could help him with his staffing and where his demands on ARA would be much more manageable. I also hoped Pastor would get a better understanding that there were things the White House should be involved in and things where it shouldn't, because his view was very expansionist, much more than what the NSC in my view should get into on policy implementation. I don't remember it at all as being a contentious lunch, but I have very little recollection of the lunch.

*Q: Incidentally, did Lake talk to you when he wrote that book? Apparently he did talk to many of the principal players.*

BUSHNELL: Yes, he called me on the phone, and we talked for an hour or so, maybe more. But certainly he got his story on that lunch from Pastor, because, before I read his book, I would have said we didn't even discuss the CAP letter. I thought we had discussed the general question of how Pastor's operation related to ARA and what he saw as major issues on the Latin American policy docket where we should both put emphasis. I was trying to get some direction on where I should be putting my time. Pastor apparently remembered this as a contentious lunch because I wasn't prepared to accept whatever language he had that would have told CAP that we weren't going to do work with him to remove Somoza quickly.

*Q: But you earlier did describe the difference in perspective.*

BUSHNELL: That's right, there was a difference in perspective. I don't actually recall what position I had on the details at the time of that lunch.

*Q: Do you recall more about the development of the letter itself?*

BUSHNELL: Yes. The Lake book tells about a meeting held a week or so later in the middle of February for Christopher to discuss the reply to CAP, which had been around in numerous drafts, many of which I wasn't involved in.

*Q: So who was for ARA?*

BUSHNELL: Sally Shelton was the deputy for Central America, so she was probably the

responsible deputy, and Todman was probably involved. Thus the action memo could well have been done without my involvement. Often something like this would be discussed at the morning senior staff meeting. My recollection is I did know there was disagreement on the reply to CAP on Nicaragua. In fact, it is not clear to me why I attended the meeting in Christopher's office for ARA rather than Todman attending or Sally Shelton attending. But I do remember this meeting. My recollection is that this whole argument, as I said earlier, seemed absurd, totally unreal. To tell CAP that we agreed to work for various specifics to improve human rights in Nicaragua and then to say in general terms that we would not intervene in internal affairs was practically an internal contradiction. Clearly we were going to work with CAP on Nicaragua and many other things in the future. Such was the nature of the relationship between his government and our government. Just as we were agreeing to work together for these things in the OAS, when CAP came up with some other specific idea, he'd approach us and we'd probably agree to do that too. Moreover, it was clear from our public statements and actions that we wanted an end to the Somoza dynasty. Thus I thought telling CAP we would not work with him for Somoza's departure because we would not interfere in Nicaraguan internal affairs would be read by CAP as either an insult to him or just public posturing in case the letter became public.

*Q: Why wasn't compromise possible?*

BUSHNELL: My recollection is that the letter finally sent was a compromise, that it certainly didn't say we're washing our hands of Nicaragua, we're not going to work with you on Nicaragua. I don't remember precisely what it said.

*Q: What was the thrust of it?*

BUSHNELL: It didn't accept his invitation to work together specifically to oust Somoza and it referred to our general policy of non-intervention while agreeing with the specific steps in his letter.

*Q: Carter didn't accept the invitation to push Somoza out at that point.*

BUSHNELL: Right. Internally the policy debate was to what extent we would work with the Nicaraguan opposition toward Somoza's departure. ARA urged that we actively engage to try to bring about a shift to the democratic opposition while maintaining the integrity of the National Guard either at the end of Somoza's current term or sooner. But SP and HA seemed to believe that such engagement would be used by Somoza to stay in power and to associate himself more with the United States. They argued for distancing and condemning, but not engaging with the democratic opposition. ARA favored quiet diplomacy while HA and SP favored public diplomacy while claiming non-intervention. ARA's argument was weakened by the fact that the opposition to Somoza was weak and divided and the Guard appeared very loyal to Somoza. We in ARA thought CAP had in mind working with the democratic opposition, and we wanted to encourage that approach. SP and HA gave great weight to disassociating the Carter Administration from Somoza, and they did not appear to think about what might happen in Nicaragua after Somoza, or perhaps they thought anything would be better than Somoza. My vague recollection is the ARA version of the CAP letter was mildly encouraging on working together to bring effective democracy to Nicaragua while the SP/HA version stressed our concern with nonintervention. The United States,

of course, follows a policy of nonintervention, which is like saying the U.S. has 50 states.

*Q: One would assume a certain delicacy...*

BUSHNELL: I wanted to say something to the effect that, in addition to these things that we were agreeing on, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss Nicaragua further with CAP.

*Q: A mutual interest in the evolution of Central America.*

BUSHNELL: In short the door is open, and let's discuss where we go. We could always say no to something that was too much intervention later. If nothing else, it would have been nice if we'd done that and he'd told us that he thought it was a good idea to make an alliance with Castro to get rid of Somoza, because I think we would have had a strong negative view on such a proposal. But Christopher chose the SP/HA draft. Moreover, Pastor correctly used the letter to establish the policy of US nonintervention on Somoza's exit. When President Carter met CAP a couple of months later, he told CAP we couldn't be involved in ousting Somoza. Frankly, I did not give this letter to CAP much importance because I thought our policy on Nicaragua would be driven by events in the country. Somoza would either fulfill his promises to open up the political situation and we would support such progress, or he would not liberalize and we would look for ways to increase the pressure on him.

I saw my role in the Christopher meeting as trying to get others to deal with the real world in which Nicaragua was linked to the U.S. in many ways. Although it was not an interagency meeting, Pastor attended. Christopher seemed to consider him an alternative or additional Latin expert. Kreisberg represented SP and Schneider HA. Steve Oxman, Christopher's personal staffer for Latin America and human rights, was there. This whole business of saying we weren't going to be involved in something that we were up to our neck in seemed to me to be kidding ourselves, which is what I tried to say. Tony Lake has a wonderful quote. I can't remember saying this, but I'm glad I did, because it really sums it up well.

*Q: Page 40 in his book.*

BUSHNELL: "The problem with nonintervention is that it is like denying the law of gravity. We are involved and willingly exert great influence. Noninterference is nonfeasible. The question is *how* to exert influence." We had all kinds of relationships with Nicaragua including those that our Congressmen had, and our military. The fact that we were trying to get the OAS Human Rights Commission in was a form of intervention. It didn't make any sense to say our policy is nonintervention but we'll do these things and these things to bring about change, but we're not going to intervene. So I was confused, let's say, by this debate, and it arose in one form or another over all of 1978 and into 1979 around the edges of Central American issues.

In retrospect on the Perez letter I think some others might have been reading intervention as a code word for covert action. I did not know until later, remember I had been in the DAS job less than two months at this time, that the U.S. and Venezuela were already cooperating on some low level covert operations. CAP's reference could have been read as inviting covert action, but such was not clear, and we could certainly have replied in a way that kept the door open which would have

encouraged him at least to have consulted with us as he moved to major covert action. Lake does not hint in his book that any of the participants meant covert when they referred to intervention.

*Q: I sort of have the sense, John, from having read the transcript of Bill Stedman's interview that maybe he had comparable frustrations before you came in, as your predecessor.*

BUSHNELL: Well, maybe. He never mentioned such concerns to me. As I said, it had never occurred to me that CAP would ever align himself with Castro when he felt rebuffed by us. Thus I didn't think the letter we were evolving to CAP made any real difference, since nobody was writing a letter to spit in his face. Neither version was a bad letter.

*Q: Well, among other things, letters between chiefs of state might very well become public, and people are sensitive.*

BUSHNELL: No one in their right mind would draft a letter that could be used against them. It didn't make any sense to agree and say, yes, we're going to work with you to get Somoza out. Of course, we weren't going to say that. The more important aspect was the policy arguments that people made, not what was finally in the letter. In retrospect, perhaps if we had done something different and gotten closer to CAP on this issue, we could have avoided the extent of the Cuban influence that ended up in Nicaragua. I don't know. We can't relive history, but certainly it is predictable that it would have been the US objective in working with CAP to avoid any common alliance with Castro. Whether we would have been successful, who knows?

*Q: There were a lot of delays and misunderstandings and confusions in getting the Carter reply back to Perez, to his letter. The letter finally got out. What was Perez' reaction?*

BUSHNELL: I don't recall. We did get an agreement for the Human Rights Commission to visit, and some of these things went forward.

*Q: Lake indicates that Perez was disappointed and that he thereafter became more sympathetic toward the Sandinistas. Was that your sense?*

BUSHNELL: I think in retrospect, it was inevitable that CAP would support the Sandinistas. He already had links to the more moderate Sandinistas. But I think that the fervor of CAP's reaction and his turning to guerrilla military action supported by Cuba, Venezuela, and Panama were influenced greatly by his assessment of what the U.S. would do. CAP, like many Latins, believed we had far more influence in most Latin countries than we had. With active cooperation from the Carter Administration CAP would have expected Somoza to exit without the sort of military action only the Cubans could support. People close to CAP told me he despaired that Carter had the will to push Somoza out so he then saw the only way to do it, or the only way to do it quickly, was to make common cause with Castro. I don't think he got the letter and then proceeded to turn to Castro. His thinking evolved over the next months as he talked with Carter in person and as he watched our actions, such as continuing the AID loan program. President Carter told CAP he would not intervene. It strikes me as unlikely the letter had an important role in driving CAP's thinking and actions, but it may have curtailed his willingness to communicate frankly with us about Nicaragua. The noninvolvement policy strengthened by the letter was probably more

important. However, that policy was reversed soon after Pete Vaky, our Ambassador in Venezuela, returned to head ARA in the summer of 1978. It's not clear to me when CAP's involvement with Castro on Nicaragua really took off. It may have been only, and certainly was greatest, after the failure of the mediation in December of 1978.

*Q: Just thinking of this period, mid-'78, during this period Todman was getting less and less popular with the Carterites. Was the Somoza factor significant here?*

BUSHNELL: I don't think it was a major factor in the 7<sup>th</sup> floor dissatisfaction because by and large the Human Rights activists were not unhappy with ARA's view of policy on Nicaragua once ARA accepted my view that distancing from the Nicaraguan military made sense. We had thrust upon us, not HA's doing nor ARA's doing, the continuation and increase of the AID program, so that was not an issue between HA and ARA. There were always, of course, a lot of minor issues which may have assumed big importance in some people's minds. One of the most ridiculous involved sling swivels. Somoza a few years before had bought new US rifles for much of his army. They came with a sling you put over your shoulder, and it was attached to the rifle by a metal swivel, a little thing that cost maybe 25 cents to make. It turned out that these swivels were defective; they rusted in the tropics. The US manufacturer quite properly agreed to replace them. It wasn't a big deal; the whole order was only \$2,000 or so for thousands of these things, but he had to apply for an export license because this was a military item. HA thought we should turn down the license because we were refusing to license lethal military equipment. ARA's view was that we also had to weight the reputation of US industry as a reliable supplier, that, if you sold something with a defect, you ought to make it good. It's not like we were sending bullets that could kill people. This issue became a *cause celebre*.

A memo was prepared to have the 7th floor break the deadlock between HA and ARA. According to Lake the memo reached the 7<sup>th</sup> floor on a Saturday and was referred to Under Secretary Habib, properly as being something that Christopher didn't need to decide. Habib agreed with the ARA position. HA then protested the decision to Christopher and to Vance. There was an unbelievable amount of discussion on these minor swivels. Finally, Christopher decided for HA, giving the critics of the Administration's human rights policies a prime example of an exaggerated human rights policy causing American industry to pay a high price for the posturing of bureaucrats.

These minor matters took far too much of our time. Another example was exporting hunting ammunition; some hardware store or sports store in Nicaragua for many years had bought shotgun ammunition in the United States. Nicaragua is a rural place; people use shotguns for hunting. Shotguns are not military weapons, but we turned down this license application as part of our distancing from the military. My view was the shotgun ammo was not for the military; it was going to goodness knows who and was more likely to end up in the hands of the opposition if you come right down to it. I told Mark Schneider he should give the guys that were against Somoza a chance at least to get shotgun shells; the military's got plenty much more powerful stuff. But HA would oppose anything related to guns; I think there was an HA policy to oppose all guns and ammo; it was somehow getting our hands dirty. Let them buy it somewhere else, which, of course, is what they did. Too bad for American exports and jobs. There were lots of these sorts of things debated in the course of 1978, and these were issues that came to me because of my responsibility for political military affairs.

But Nicaraguan issues did not take much of my time in 1978. The next big event in Nicaragua was the Sandinista takeover of the National Assembly, the Congress building, and the holding of everybody there hostage on August 22, 1978. I was on vacation at the Maryland shore when this happened and just read about it in the newspapers.

*Q: Eden Pastora?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, Pastora was the leader of the attack.

*Q: Causes, consequences?*

BUSHNELL: This attack marked the beginning of a dramatic increase in guerrilla attacks on the National Guard. The fact that Somoza quickly met most of the demands of the rebels, perhaps wanting to avoid attacks from the Human Rights activists, signaled weakness to the guerillas and CAP and probably Castro.

*Q: Explain just what happened at the congress.*

BUSHNELL: A group of about 25 Sandinistas, with considerable preparation and planning obviously, went to the Congress dressed as National Guard soldiers and managed to take over and demobilize the small National Guard and police presence. They seized the whole building and held over a thousand Congressmen, staff, and visitors hostage. Their principal demand was the release of what they called political prisoners, mainly guerrillas captured while planning or carrying out attacks. They also demanded publication of their long political communiqué in the press and on the radio; it was mainly a call for the Guard to rebel against Somoza. The National Guard was embarrassed and wanted to launch what would have been a bloody frontal attack. Somoza, perhaps advised by his lobbyists and friendly US Congressmen, met most of the demands including the release of 59 prisoners and a safe conduct to the airport for the guerrillas. Venezuela and Panama sent planes to pick them up.

I was surprised at both the daring and the success of this attack. My impression of the National Guard was that it was a strong fighting force with pretty good intelligence while the Sandinistas, the guerrillas, were militarily weak, able to do some insurgent sort of actions but without real military training or power. It was only some months later when I got more details that the incident began to make sense to me. I learned the attack benefited from a trick and exceptional good luck. The Guard had learned about the impending attack on the Congress at the last minute and had told the small contingent at the national palace that they were sending major reinforcements. When, minutes later, these insurgents dressed in National Guard uniforms appeared in a vehicle stolen from the Guard, the troops naturally thought these were the promised reinforcements. They didn't oppose them; they welcomed them, and they turned out to be the bad guys, the Sandinistas. In short this was no test of military capability, but the Sandinistas did again show themselves to be daring and brave. Certainly they must have thought that the Guard would attack and many of them would be killed. If many civilians had been killed, the country might have arisen against Somoza. The other thing this incident demonstrated was that Somoza was a much less brutal dictator than many in Latin America. Most would have sent their troops in shooting. Somoza negotiated a deal which

was very favorable to Pastora and his gang.

This dramatic attack and its success put the Sandinistas clearly at the head of the many opposition groups. We were aware that there was considerable Cuban and communist influence on the Sandinistas. We perhaps paid too little attention to this aspect, in part because Somoza raised it at every opportunity -- the alternative to Somoza was to have Nicaragua run by Castro. We didn't think that was the only alternative. There were many moderate democratic groups in Nicaragua, although the non-violent opposition was divided and disorganized. Another major consequence of the Palace attack and its aftermath was that it forced the Carter Administration to look again at the policy of distancing and not taking an active role in promoting constructive change. The arrival of Pete Vaky in July as the new Assistant Secretary for Latin America also provided new leadership to question the distancing policies.

*Q: Todman had been offered an ambassadorship, and he resigned, so Vaky replaced him. Vaky had been ambassador to Venezuela, so he had known Perez...*

BUSHNELL: Oh yes.

*Q: ...presumably quite well. Do you think they influenced each other's thinking?*

BUSHNELL: They probably did. It's certainly the job of an ambassador to influence a president's thinking, and Vaky was a good and experienced ambassador. CAP was a very sharp and articulate politician so he had some influence on most people he spent time with. CAP certainly influenced President Carter.

*Q: Did you sense that Vaky did represent a difference in perspective from Todman as far as Somoza was concerned, at the beginning?*

BUSHNELL: I don't recall specific timing because so early in Vaky's tour, within the first couple of months, there was this takeover of the palace, which changed the circumstances. However, very shortly, if not before he even came to the job, Vaky seemed to believe Somoza's continuation in power in Nicaragua was a big problem for broad US national interests. I don't think Todman ever reached that conclusion

*Q: It thrust him right in the middle of it.*

BUSHNELL: We weren't involved in the Palace incident. We were observers. But it demonstrated that things were on the move and that the obvious alternative to Somoza was these Sandinistas, who were not the alternative that we wanted to see in power. We didn't see them at that time as being in Castro's pocket, but many Sandinista leaders were either communists or otherwise closely associated with Castro. Others such as Pastora were more idealistic, anti-Somoza liberals. I don't remember what Vaky's feeling was before the Palace take-over, but that certainly gave him both the reason and the peg to challenge this policy of so-called nonintervention and to say we needed to get involved because we don't want to have Somoza and the Sandinistas just duel it out until one of them wins. Both of them were unsatisfactory, and we needed to get involved to work toward having a more moderate, middle-of-the-road group be the successor to Somoza. As I recall, Bob

Pastor moved substantially from his previous position, and, in fact, the whole government moved. It was exciting to see real world events and Vaky's leadership move policy nearly 180 degrees. When push came to shove, all this talk about nonintervention, which may be alright if you're just answering a letter, took a back seat when real world events put national interests more obviously at stake. The possibility that we might have another Cuba in this hemisphere caused many minds to clear in SP and on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor. But maintaining the principal of nonintervention continued to be a major plank for many in the Carter Administration, and these concerns forced Vaky to pull many punches, including what might well have been the key punch – a clear personal message direct from President Carter to Somoza that he should turn over power. Vaky worked fast to get agreement for the U.S. to provide leadership in getting a process, working through the OAS, to mediate a settlement between Somoza and the many democratic Nicaraguan groups and parties.

*Q: Vaky apparently spent a considerable portion of his time on Nicaragua from the very beginning.*

BUSHNELL: His first priority on arrival was the numerous personnel changes and other administrative things. Then the Palace take-over hit, and from then on he was Mr. Nicaragua.

*Q: One thing led to another.*

BUSHNELL: Nicaragua was the on-going crisis through all of Vaky's time. The other crises that came along, such as the Jonestown disaster, I largely did. I also had to make time to assure that the more routine work of ARA got done. Thus I was not involved with Nicaragua on a daily basis. I did not attend the meetings at the White House or on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, or even some of the fairly large Nicaragua working sessions Vaky held. Usually I did not see cables before they were sent, nor did I talk with the mediators or the Embassy on the phone. A large part of Vaky's morning deputies meetings was devoted to Nicaragua, and I read all the cable traffic and often cleared the daily press guidance. Thus I was reasonably well informed, but I was not a policy actor on Nicaragua until mid-1999 when political-military and economic issues became important. There were periods when I was disconnected from what was going on in Nicaragua.

*Q: Vaky apparently wrote a very large portion of the memos and cables himself, which is a little unusual for an assistant secretary, isn't it?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, assistant secretaries seldom have time to do first drafts. However, Pete was one of the Foreign Service's most experienced drafters, and I think he liked to do the first draft of policy papers or cables because he was exceptionally good at getting the nuances slanted in just the way he wanted policy to move. I would sometimes do press guidance myself on other subjects to get the nuances just right. I don't actually recall that he wrote a lot of things himself. I think he wrote some memos to the Secretary and later guidance cables for the mediation and other approaches to Somoza. My recollection is that he first worked on Vance, sort of bypassing Christopher, to get Vance on board for a more active US role in Somoza's exit to avoid a Batista-to-Castro situation [Batista was the Cuban dictator overthrown by Castro]. Vaky got Vance on board, and then they worked to bring the President on board. I wasn't really involved in that.

I do remember a discussion Pete and I had, just the two of us, at the point where we were going to have to appoint somebody as the US negotiator on the OAS team. Who should that be? I remember saying I didn't think anybody could do it better than he, but he felt he needed to stay home to backstop the negotiation and work on supporting signals from the highest levels here. That's when Bowdler was suggested.

*Q: Okay. Who suggested Bowdler and why? He was then...*

BUSHNELL: He was the Director of INR.

*Q: And he'd already had several ambassadorships, in South Africa and...*

BUSHNELL: Guatemala.

*Q: In fact, he had a pretty distinguished career up to that point.*

BUSHNELL: I don't know who first suggested him, but it was certainly a good idea. He fitted very well. He's a good negotiator, sort of an Ellsworth Bunker type negotiator. He's fluent in Spanish but had never served in Nicaragua and did not have a public image of being either for or against Somoza. He, of course, had an important full-time job as director of INR, and making him available showed Vance's dedication to the Nicaragua-negotiation enterprise. He worked on Nicaragua basically full time for the following six months.

*Q: Who else were the principal advisors for Vaky on Nicaragua and related phenomena?*

BUSHNELL: Brandon Grove came on as the Deputy Assistant Secretary covering Central America, replacing Sally Selton, and he was Vaky's principal backstopper. Wade Matthews was the country director through most of the mediation period. At some point, probably in late 1978, he was replaced by Brewster Hemenway

*Q: Apparently Vaky, according to Lake's book, got rid of Matthews. Todman had brought him in, because, according to Lake, Todman had been much impressed with a memo that Matthews had written on Nicaragua when he was in the mission to the OAS.*

BUSHNELL: I don't know anything about how Wade came into the job. My recollection was that Wade's tour was up. He had been there for about two years by the end of 1978. I don't remember that his tour was curtailed.

*Q: What could you say about Matthews? Was he influential?*

BUSHNELL: He was a strong country director, which is what we needed on Central America because, these being small countries, we got quite junior officers as country officers, often on their second or third tour, their first Washington tour. Thus the country director had to do the heavy lifting and at the same time train and develop the junior officers. Wade disagreed with the extent of our human rights emphasis, and he also was offended by the efforts of the political appointees in HA to micro-manage relations with his countries, for example by insisting on clearing every letter

to Congress and every piece of press guidance [matters usually handled in the regional bureaus within the context of established policy]. Moreover, HA tried to make policy by inserting things in these routine communications that went beyond established policy.

*Q: Matthews was fairly influential during this period. But he's handicapped by not having a strong Nicaragua desk officer or someone with experience in Nicaragua.*

BUSHNELL: I don't think he was very handicapped by lack of country experience. Wade studied Nicaraguan history and knew more about the history of the Somozas and about current developments than most who had served in Managua, certainly more than the officers in HA who mainly brought to the table the stories they were fed by the NGOs and activists. During 1977 and 1978 there was a perception that ARA was continually fighting with HA. Wade was the ARA officer most associated with this fighting, perhaps other than myself because of our debates in the Christopher Committee. Wade seemed to enjoy this role. He was determined not to let HA exaggerate or state anything they couldn't prove. He worked hours and hours on reports, memos, and cables which required HA clearance. It was guerrilla warfare. I didn't become involved until the bureaucratic/policy struggle had gone on for a long time and the Central American deputy, Shelton or Grove, had not been able to find a compromise. Finally, when something had to get done, I had to get involved.

However, Patt Derian and Mark Schneider usually became involved much earlier and did much of the HA negotiating with Wade. Despite his lower rank, Wade negotiated firmly with them although they would attack him personally and accuse him of not supporting human rights. He was not against human rights; he just thought that the HA's public approach was not the best way to improve human rights and that Central American policy was being hijacked by the human rights activists at the expense of our national security interests. Whether he was influential or not is hard to say, because he would seldom go to the Christopher Committee or other meetings where policies were decided. He was highly respected by Todman, but I think Vaky saw that Wade had become too confrontational and too enmeshed in the details to play a strong policy role.

*Q: Brandon Grove was much involved here.*

BUSHNELL: Brandon must have spent well over half his time on Nicaragua. He had a thankless job. Because Vaky micro-managed Nicaraguan policy and so many senior policymakers were involved, his role was reduced to moving the immense volume of routine paperwork and trying to keep it consistent with our rapidly changing policy. Like Wade he had to take up the slack from inexperienced desk officers.

*Q: How about Mauricio Solaun--how do you pronounce it?--the ambassador?*

BUSHNELL: I don't recall that we ever got a policy recommendation from him.

*Q: He was a professor.*

BUSHNELL: He was a professor, and I don't think he ever understood what was going on in Washington. As ambassador he was the point where the policy issue of intervention or

noninterference met the road. If I had difficulty with our arguing we would not intervene when in fact we were exerting influence in so many ways, imagine his dilemmas as virtually every move our ambassador in Managua made, or even didn't make, was seen by someone as trying to affect the future of Nicaragua.

*Q: So that was unfortunate, we didn't have a strong ambassador.*

BUSHNELL: Possibly. I'm not so sure. If we'd had a strong ambassador like Bowdler in the first year or more of the Carter Administration, there would have been more policy recommendations from the field and a greater effort by the Embassy to get rid of some of the ambiguities in our interfaces with the government. However, I don't think Washington would have faced the real dilemmas of Nicaragua before the Sandinistas got everyone's attention through the Congress take-over. Once the mediation efforts got underway, Bowdler was in effect the ambassador for all policy purposes, and Ambassador Solaun was just running the embassy, administering things. At that point it might not have been good to have had too strong an ambassador who might have gotten in Bowdler's and Vaky's way.

*Q: Aside from that, I gather, again from Lake's book, that the embassy was not very well equipped with strong, imaginative and incisive people.*

BUSHNELL: I think that's probably true. At least I don't remember any. However, the substantive State staff at the Embassy was less than a half dozen. The total Embassy was quite large because of the many AID, military, and other agency staff. The embassy was internally divided. The military attachés and the military mission, which was eventually withdrawn, were not in favor of distancing from the military and did not distance on a daily basis despite the policy pronouncements from Washington. I don't recall any efforts by Solaun to impose discipline on the Embassy.

*Q: Our military were close to the National Guard?*

BUSHNELL: Yes. They worked with the National Guard everyday and partied with them after work. The AID people were being thrown around by the ups and downs of our assistance policy, although it was quite a capable AID mission; it was quite good at managing. I had quite a bit to do with them, especially in 1979 and 1980.

*Q: What were the AID people doing mainly?*

BUSHNELL: They had a whole range of projects with small technical assistance efforts in most ministries and large loans for such things as feeder roads, water and sewerage, and lending to small farmers and businessmen.

*Q: Was it a big AID mission?*

BUSHNELL: Fairly big, yes. I was quite frustrated by its size and nature. Beginning with the Rockefeller period in the 1940's, we had set up technical assistance programs in small Latin American countries, and in some larger ones too, where we established joint offices with the government, so that the AID health office, for example, was physically in the Health Ministry and

was an integral part of the Health Ministry, providing technical and sometimes financial assistance. The AID health officers didn't have an office in the AID building; they sat in the ministry, and over the course of the decades they really became an integral part of the ministry. The situation reminded me of the former French colonies in Africa where French advisors had offices in many ministries. AID, as a matter of worldwide policy, was at this time beginning to draw back from this approach. But in Nicaragua it had not drawn back much. Thus despite our policies of distancing and nonintervention what the average Nicaraguan saw was American AID personnel going to work in most of Somoza's ministries and the US military going to work with the National Guard.

I became involved in Nicaragua, as well as in some other places, in trying to get such close associations reduced. In Washington there was great interest in the question of whether or not we would make new AID loans to Nicaragua. However, there was zero interest in whether or not American AID personnel were integral parts of Somoza's ministries, which, by the way, I found had a major role in handing out the jobs, grants, and bribes that assured votes for Somoza. I was trying at least to get the AID advisors out of the ministries and back in the AID mission so we wouldn't be seen to be so much in bed with the Somoza government. The erraticness of Washington's focus is almost unbelievable. We'd be debating for hours in Washington, involving even the Deputy Secretary of State, whether we should send some 25-cent item to replace a defective swivel on a gun. At the same time we'd have some US military training team in Nicaragua out on the ranges demonstrating anti-guerrilla techniques to the National Guard. There were so many disconnects like this that, as you got into the details, you saw that the US government is such a big ship with so many parts that without the strongest, focused leadership and policy we're giving conflicting signals all over the place. Nicaragua was not unique in this.

*Q: What was the CIA doing, in the field and in Washington?*

BUSHNELL: Not very much.

*Q: Neither place?*

BUSHNELL: Neither place.

*Q: Were they sending back good analyses?*

BUSHNELL: No, they weren't sending back much of anything. They had a very small station that had been downsizing for years. They had a few good sources in the National Guard, but as far as I could see they got almost no information from inside the Sandinista organization. Some years previous the station had practically been an integral part of the National Guard's intelligence operation. Fortunately by 1978 that relationship had been much reduced. However, there were no priority intelligence targets in Nicaragua, and staffing in both size and quality reflected that.

*Q: Of course, much of what they send back goes in one copy all the way into the inner vaults of Langley, but you're reasonably certain that there was not much that was useful coming out of there.*

BUSHNELL: Yes, I'm sure. Some reports on National Guard human rights violations or the personal peccadilloes of Somoza may have been given such exclusive distribution that I did not see them. But I pressed, beginning early in 1978, for more on the Sandinistas and other opposition groups and on dissension in the National Guard. Almost nothing was forthcoming. We learned that a coup to remove Somoza had been under development within the National Guard during the summer of 1978 only when the leaders were arrested. Pastor's book states that the main reason the Sandinistas attacked the Congress was to stop this coup which would have gotten rid of Somoza and thus made it much more difficult for the Sandinistas to gain political control. Both Somoza and the Sandinistas were able to get much better intelligence on each other than we got on either.

Once Bowdler became involved he tasked INR, which he continued to head, to get Nicaraguan intelligence improved. We did get a lot more information once the fighting intensified in the spring of 1979, but most of this was not from the station but from technical sources. On key points there were monumental intelligence failures. The most significant was that the Cubans began air lifting artillery pieces and ammunition into northern Costa Rica whence they were easily moved across the border by the Sandinistas. About early May of 1978 I asked CIA where the Sandinistas were getting the big shells they were using against the National Guard in significant number. The analysis I got back was that they must have been stolen or bought from the National Guard. Only when I encouraged Ambassador McNeill to get Costa Rican permission for us to station a small military detachment at a northern Costa Rican airfield in late June in case we had to evacuate the Managua Embassy on short notice, did we learn the Cubans had been using this field for their virtually daily supply flights. The entire intelligence community had missed this quite massive Cuban supply operation which had been going on for a couple of months. More than a million pounds of arms and ammunition had been flow into Costa Rica for the Sandinistas with the full knowledge and cooperation of the Costa Rican government. Even earlier Venezuela and Panama had supplied much military equipment to the Sandinistas through Costa Rica, but our intelligence missed this too. Some of the shipments, particularly arms from Venezuela, had even gone through Panama where the U.S. had a very large but obviously sleepy intelligence operation. Would there have been a different outcome if we had had reliable information on the extent of the Cuban involvement? Who knows? We almost certainly would have tried to stop such Cuban supplying of the Sandinistas just as we tried to stop ammunition sales to Somoza.

*Q: According to Lake's book again, the press there were pretty well informed about what the Sandinistas were doing.*

BUSHNELL: I think the press was fairly well informed about some things, but certainly not on military questions. The Sandinistas were close to parts of the press and fed the press information and probably misinformation too. But I would have liked to have known more about the internal dynamics of the Sandinistas, and the press was neither informative not reliable on this sort of issue. The Sandinistas consisted of three warring factions which had been brought together by Castro.

*Q: Castro really was a major factor?*

BUSHNELL: Oh, decisive. These three factions – at times in the early 1970s they were even fighting each other physically, shooting at each other – were brought together in a Havana meetings chaired at least part of the time personally by Castro. In my view the Sandinistas were

held together by the Cubans throughout. After July 1979 the role of the Cuban ambassador in Nicaragua was peacekeeper and arbitrator among these three factions while they were the government. The reason Nicaragua was governed by a nine-man Junta was so that the three top leaders of each faction could be equal. But we didn't learn much of this on a timely basis; our intelligence stunk. In all likelihood accurate timely intelligence on the major Cuban involvement would have changed our policies and we could have avoided the communist takeover of Nicaragua. Thus Reagan, if he had known, should have attacked our inadequate intelligence more than Carter's policies.

*Q: Now, what was this mediation process? Explain how that worked and what it was doing.*

BUSHNELL: I don't recall the details, but essentially the objective of the OAS mediators with Bowdler as the lead was to pull together the anti-Somoza businesspeople, community leaders, and politicians with the support of the church, in other words, the democratic-leaning people who wanted Somoza out. There were political parties, business groups, and the Group of 12, an intellectual group close to the Sandinistas. They formed something that was called the Broad Opposition Front, FAO, which represented much of the society excluding the Somozas. The OAS objective was to get a deal between the FAO and Somoza to have an early election with conditions which would make the election honest and agreement that, if Somoza lost, he'd leave the country, and if he won, the others would respect him or whoever he ran -- it wasn't clear whether he would run or nominate his candidate.

*Q: Did this have some kind of an OAS umbrella?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, with great effort we arranged for Nicaragua, both the government and the opposition, to request the good offices of OAS mediators in, I guess, September. There were three mediators, Bowdler and two others.

*Q: Dominican Republic?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, Dominican Admiral Jimenez and former Guatemalan Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Alfredo Obiols.

*Q: But the other two were mainly looking to Bowdler?*

BUSHNELL: Yes. Bowdler made a major effort to keep the effort tripartite and to give each of them a visible role, but it was clear Somoza wasn't going to give them the time of day, except maybe where he thought he could control the Guatemalan through his back channels to the Guatemalan government.

*Q: But Bowdler had Jim Cheek and...*

BUSHNELL: Yes, Bowdler asked ARA to provide him with staff assistance. We assigned Malcolm Barnaby, a very experienced Foreign Service Officer with mainly Latin American experience who headed the Andean Office. Bowdler also asked for Jim Cheek, who was the DCM in Uruguay at the time but had been a political officer in Managua during the early 1970's who

developed excellent contacts in the opposition. Cheek had disagreed with the ambassador at the time and had reported Somoza's stealing of disaster aid in State's dissent channel, receiving a Rivkin award for his actions. Bowdler had a small team, and the embassy and ARA supported him administratively. There was a tremendous amount of work to do to get this disparate opposition group to agree on anything except Somoza's immediate departure. Our objective was to develop a political group that might win an election while maintaining the National Guard to prevent a Sandinista take-over by force. There were practically daily crises as some part of the FAO threatened to resign or did, or as Bowdler called for more pressure on Somoza from us. Somoza would agree to an election with conditions, but the FAO would demand he depart first. The mediation had many ups and downs, but the violence in Nicaragua largely stopped during this period. Of course, all sides were continuing their preparations for further fighting. At one point Somoza announced he would double the size of the Guard, and he got military supplies from Guatemala and El Salvador.

*Q: Vaky was very much in...*

BUSHNELL: This was Vaky's baby, yes. An awful lot was done between Vaky and Bowdler back and forth on the secure phone. Occasionally, something like the IMF drawing

would come up that would involve me in an action role. On some points I tried to improve the staff work. For example, there was the question of how to make an election in Nicaragua reasonable honest. HA simply claimed it was impossible. I worked with the ARA staff, the embassy, and the intelligence community to pull together the best possible picture of how elections in Nicaragua had worked. The opposition said they had to have all new polling places. Somoza wanted to maintain the existing polling places. We found a lot of the traditional polling places were in schools and other public buildings as is common worldwide. But a lot of polling places, particularly in rural areas, were in the homes of leading Somoza supporters or in their the business premises, so people had to go to Somoza territory to vote. Similarly we found the Somoza infrastructure was such that there was a considerable number of little things Somoza could do to influence elections. Somoza officials were responsible for registering voters, and opposition supporters were given impossible documentation requirements, for example. Somoza and his close associates controlled most of the radio, TV, and other media, even billboards. Finally, these and many other issues couldn't be resolved. The opposition saw any election scenario as some kind of trick for Somoza to stay in power. But in Washington most senior officials found it hard not to go along with Somoza's insistence on elections. Not to accept the results of a free election would have been the most extreme form of intervention. There were more election schemes than I can remember. We went from a presidential election to a vote on whether Somoza should stay or go. We had international supervision of the election and then international monitoring. Increasingly Vaky thought Somoza was just buying time.

*Q: He wanted to stay till 1981 somewhere in there.*

BUSHNELL: At the time it appeared to me that Somoza was simply not willing to give up power even to handpicked associates. In a January 1979 PRC meeting (Policy Review Committee) I attended, chaired by Christopher, CIA director Turner reported that Somoza had been strengthening his forces during the mediation while the opposition was losing support. This CIA

assessment was dead wrong at the time it was given and very misleading to our senior policymakers. But none of us had sufficient information to question it, although the December Sandinista announcement of unity from Havana should have raised many red flags. Bowdler and Vaky were ingenious in finding schemes to satisfy both Somoza and the opposition, although several groups left the Broad Front unprepared to play out Somoza's election ploy.

*Q: Sounds to me like they're really trying to micromanage a complex situation, and politics everywhere are hard to control.*

BUSHNELL: The whole situation was full of ironies. Less than a year before I had sat in Christopher's back-office and lost the argument that our relations with Nicaragua were so complex that we could not avoid being seen to intervene regardless of what we did. The very people that at that time had been so strongly opposed to telling CAP we would cooperate with him to move Somoza out were now spending their days and nights on schemes for supervised elections and conditions to offer Somoza residency in the United States. Why couldn't we have told Perez we'd work with him before he got in bed with Castro?

As I recall, Somoza was always careful not to say no. He would just say a few things need to be changed. Finally, in January everyone had had enough of this game, and we moved to what we called sanctions, although we did not, as some had proposed, close the embassy and stop all US programs. The two big sanctions were recalling Ambassador Solaun for consultations [he never went back, but I doubt Somoza missed him] and closing the military mission. Of course, I didn't see why we hadn't withdraw it before, because we had cut off military assistance. What did we need a military mission for? Anyway, that's another worldwide argument that goes on with the military forever. By the end of March the Sandinistas began to show much more military capability. They began to take over some rural areas and hold them; by May they had heavy artillery; they were better trained and better equipped. It was a quantum jump in military capability from their earlier hide-and-seek guerrilla activities.

*Q: You're saying that by March 1979 the Sandinistas...*

BUSHNELL: By March I began to get the impression the Sandinista military was for the first time making significant progress. There really was an insurgency with substantial forces which was challenging the National Guard in some significant fighting and was occupying parts of the country.

*Q: And you thought this was because of Castro's support?*

BUSHNELL: I didn't at the time. I was puzzled by what was going on, and I was not able from our intelligence or military people to get a real fix on this. In fact, Sandinista military capability continued to grow through July of 1979.

*Q: That was the end.*

BUSHNELL: July 17 Somoza left, and July 19 the Sandinistas took over.

*Q: How did you subsequently learn of it?*

BUSHNELL: There were clues. Certainly in retrospect I see more clues now. We saw the Sandinistas were getting arms. We thought they were buying them. We thought they were getting some from Panama and Venezuela. It's a funny story how I learned about the Cuban air supply of arms. During the last part of June into July, when the situation was deteriorating...

*Q: It was July 1979.*

BUSHNELL: ...and in the outskirts of Managua there was fighting. By that time Ambassador Pezzullo was there. We were concerned about the safety of the embassy staff and other Americans and began thinking about an urgent evacuation. This project was my responsibility as Vaky and Grove were fully occupied with political efforts to avoid a Sandinista take-over. Of course, in the Caribbean we can get US Navy ships fairly quickly because the Navy usually has some ships in the area training or on other missions. But the Navy seldom has ships in the Pacific anywhere near Managua. So I came up with the idea that we should establish a small forward base for helicopters to support an evacuation in northwestern Costa Rica at the big airfield at Liberia. Frank McNeill, our Ambassador in Costa Rica, went to Costa Rican President Carazo and asked for permission for the proposed flights and support -- a communications center and small supply station with a couple dozen military to support helicopters. Helicopters from there could be in Managua to lift people out in an hour or so. Carazo initially approved, and I had the military send in the team and choppers. The Pentagon sent a general from Washington to oversee the setting up of this little operation, acting on my request to make sure it went smoothly and did not antagonize the Costa Ricans.

He was in Costa Rica for only a day and two, and he came back and said, "John, you don't know what we stepped into there." I said, "No, what did you step into?" He said, "That airfield is being used by the Cubans. Flights were coming in direct from Cuba, landing there, big transports unloading heavy military supplies heading right up to the border. And when we went in there, they had to stop." That was the first I learned there was that kind of Cuban supply. Subsequent reports indicated some flights also carried soldiers, Cubans, returning Nicaraguans, or others, who also went immediately into Nicaragua.

*Q: Didn't we have aerial reconnaissance, the satellites? Didn't they have pictures by then?*

BUSHNELL: The capability existed, but I guess no one ever thought to have a good look at the Nicaraguan border area and the Liberia airport. At least they never picked it up, they never identified it.

*Q: Of course, then they were keeping secret that we had the MRO.*

BUSHNELL: One has to target satellites. We weren't targeting them on Costa Rica. Of course, very quickly the Costa Rican left stirred up a terrible fuss in the Costa Rican Congress, arguing our military use of the airstrip was unconstitutional because it had not been approved by the Congress. In effect the Costa Rican Congress voted us out. The Cubans then used the facility again, although the Cuban military did not have authority from the Costa Rican Congress either. Perhaps all these

Cuban planes and personnel were civilian. Our intelligence community first learned about this critical Cuban supply-line in the same way I did. Of course they followed up and gathered information to estimate the number of flights, the equipment, and supplies.

*Q: You were talking about the mediation process. Who was overseeing this? Vaky obviously, but was Vaky the only puppeteer who was pulling the strings?*

BUSHNELL: Vaky and Pastor.

*Q: Were they getting along fairly well by this time?*

BUSHNELL: Vaky and Pastor always got along. The problems were between Todman and Pastor. Christopher was certainly involved, and Vance was involved to some extent. They were kept involved with night notes which then went to the President. That's one way I kept informed, by reading the night notes. Sometimes the notes would come back with guidance or questions from President Carter. There were numerous high-level meetings including the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Staff, the Director of CIA, and the National Security Advisor, or in some cases their deputies.

By about the end of May the Administration began to see Nicaragua as a crisis, and it competed for attention with the Salt Treaty, the Panama Canal legislation in the House, and the Soviet/Cuban expansion into Africa. More intelligence and military resources became available. About that time the increasing Sandinista military capability became apparent to everyone, except for CIA which continued to predict that Somoza could weather the storm. INR, which was quite prepared to throw lots of resources into Nicaragua analysis – Bowdler was still director of INR – gave us a detailed briefing every morning on the military situation. By that time we did have satellite and other technical intelligence. I remember well that I had to get up earlier to get to the office for this briefing. Soon it looked to me like the Sandinistas might simply win militarily, taking Managua. We hadn't really contemplated a Sandinista victory before; it raised the whole specter of Castro influence and the possibility of a second Cuba on the American mainland. Before May I think everybody's view was that the National Guard would always be around, the National Guard would be a dominant force, and the trick was to get a civilian government that would control the Guard but keep them in place to counter the radical guerrilla groups. But the military situation continued to deteriorate; the National Guard was drawn back into its bases near Managua, and the rest of the country was just left to the Sandinistas. Moreover, there were days on the southern front when the Sandinistas would fire 500 shells. This was beginning to be real war.

The deteriorating situation raised all kinds of policy issues. Essentially it began to look like we might have to choose on national security grounds between the Guard and the Sandinistas and their Cuban friends. There was even consideration of an OAS peacekeeping force with major American participation, although this got a negative reception in the OAS. There were many difficult issues, and the policymakers continued to be driven in part by a desire not to intervene or be seen to intervene. The National Guard began to run low on certain ammunition; of course they turned to us; we refused to resupply them. Then they went to places like Taiwan, and the question was should we stop them from getting supplies from our friends. That was a big policy fight; I recall they eventually did get some things from Taiwan, but I don't know who, if anyone, gave

permission. They got a lot of supplies from Guatemala against our wishes.

The final days of Somoza as we moved into July are a blur to me now. The situation on the ground moved faster than we could formulate effective policy in Washington. We finally tried to identify an effective new head of the Guard to take over once Somoza left Nicaragua. But the Guard deteriorated too fast. Toward the end of June the Guard killed an American ABC News correspondent in cold blood on camera, with the unintended consequence that efforts by the US Right and such Congressmen as Wilson to force support for the Guard were virtually stopped. Finally, Somoza resigned and flew to the United States. The Congress elected its House speaker, Urcuyo, president. An elaborate plan had been worked out for Urcuyo to turn power over to a five-person Junta Bowdler had assembled in San Jose from the more moderate Sandinista supporters. There was then supposed to be a new Guard commander. I don't remember all the details, but we had made a major effort to have a somewhat democratic-oriented government that would keep the Guard while reforming it. In the event Urcuyo refused to play his role, perhaps because he panicked and perhaps because he and Somoza never intended the complex plan to work. Urcuyo and most of the senior leadership of the Guard fled the country, and the Sandinistas took over.

In retrospect I should have pressed harder and earlier to assure most of the Guard leadership stayed in place. Otherwise the Guard was in great risk of disintegrating. But many in the Administration as well as Ambassador Pezzullo justifiably disliked the senior Guard officers whose human rights records were generally bad. It was hard to argue that for national security reasons the Guard should only be cleaned up slowly while it kept a Sandinista take-over at bay. Somoza and most of the leadership of the Guard came to Miami. Although the Guard was close to being defeated anyway, the departure of the leadership made it 'run for your life, boy, cause it's over'. The Sandinistas marched into Managua unopposed. Only then did we began to get reports of who was in the Sandinista forces; there were lots of Chilean communists and lots of Salvadoran guerrillas, whole units. There were reports of Cuban officers and even Cuban soldiers, although the numbers are unclear. The Sandinistas had leftish cadre from all over the hemisphere fighting with them.

*Q: Do you think the negotiations were doomed from the outset, or do you think we should have done something differently? Clearly the time to do something would have been at least two years earlier; at the end was it hopeless?*

BUSHNELL: It is my belief there could have been a different outcome if, in late 1978, we had intervened to force Somoza out when the broad front was ready to replace him and before the Cubans and the international cadre greatly increased the military power of the Sandinistas. It would have taken direct involvement by President Carter, talking to Somoza, because the US government was too divided for any messenger to have sufficient credibility. Carter might have said something like this: "The time has come for you to leave; unfortunately your name in a lightning rod for internal and external opponents. Place the National Guard in good hands to defend your family's interests, but find a way to hand over now to the broad front. This is the last best hope for Nicaragua, for your fortune. You can come to the United States." There's a good chance that Somoza would have taken that golden bridge.

Somoza thought throughout that the U.S. was not going to really push him, and he, of course,

turned out to be right. Neither he nor we realized that other forces might come into play to push him out and that the Venezuelans, the Panamanians, and the Cubans were willing or able to do as much as they did. I think Somoza just didn't believe the U.S. would let the Sandinistas take over. He didn't believe that the U.S. would let Cuba get the influence in Nicaragua that in fact Castro got. Of course, that was not our intention. If our intelligence had been better or we had maintained a relationship of confidence with CAP on Nicaragua, we would certainly have seen this coming communist take-over early enough that we could have done something about it, stopping the outside support, strengthening Somoza, or forcing the negotiated solution we seemed fairly close to in November and December. But we didn't see it coming, so the situation ran its course.

*Q: Do you think Vaky, Bowdler, and Pezzullo did whatever could have been done? We can't really hold them responsible.*

BUSHNELL: In this type of situation nobody is responsible. Everyone tried to do his job as well as he could. Many were responsible for the low priority placed on intelligence. All of us should have woken up earlier to the implications of a military defeat of the Guard by the Sandinistas. All of us in State, CIA, and the NSC should have been alert that Castro's aggressiveness in Africa would likely have a counterpart in this hemisphere. I tend to fault those in the Carter Administration who gave this great intellectual importance to nonintervention while in fact intervening in a great many ways but then pulling back from that decisive last step of intervention. One can fault the supporters of Somoza in the United States, including many in earlier Administrations, whose words and actions led Somoza to believe he could muddle through the opposition of Vaky, Pastor, and Christopher.

*Q: Who was issuing the instructions?*

BUSHNELL: Most of the time Vaky was issuing the instructions or at least drafting the key cables for clearance on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor and in the White House. There were times in the last couple of weeks when I talked with Pezzullo; probably the 7<sup>th</sup> floor also talked with him. One of my concerns at that point was that we didn't want a total Sandinista military victory. We wanted to preserve the Guard, not necessarily every general and colonel in the Guard but the Guard as an institution, as something that could be a counterbalance to the substantial Sandinista military forces. I had the impression that Pezzullo did not really share that objective, but perhaps he just had a more realistic impression on the possibility of holding the Guard together at that late stage.

*Q: What happened to all the cast of characters? Bowdler replaced Vaky.*

BUSHNELL: Yes, in October soon after Vaky retired, Bowdler replaced him.

*Q: Did Vaky want to retire at that point? He must have been battle weary.*

BUSHNELL: My recollection is that by the summer of 1979 we were all pretty battle weary, but I frankly don't know why Pete retired. It came as a complete surprise to me when Vaky told me he was going to retire. I have no recollection of him saying why. I'm quite sure he was not forced out. It's always been a mystery to me.

*Q: This was the fall of 1979.*

BUSHNELL: He'd only been in ARA slightly over a year.

*Q: But what a year.*

BUSHNELL: His wife had been sick. My recollection is she was sick in the heat of the Nicaragua negotiations, in December and January. She had an operation or something, and Vaky wasn't able to spend the time with her that obviously he would have liked because of what was going on. I speculated in my mind at the time that his wife wasn't fully recovered and that's why he was retiring. But his wife's still alive today, so I think that was not right.

*Q: What happened to Pezzullo?*

BUSHNELL: Pezzullo stayed in Managua as our ambassador and worked very hard to establish a friendly relationship with the Sandinista government. Actually he went back. We evacuated him as the Sandinistas entered the city. But I arranged for him to go back on the first military flight of relief supplies a few days later. The rest of us took a deep breath and moved to the next stage, which was trying to work constructively with the Sandinistas. Pezzullo stayed quite a few months into the Reagan Administration, until about the middle of 1981.

*Q: I guess we can talk about Bowdler later too. Somoza went to Florida with his retinue. What happened to him?*

BUSHNELL: Somoza was in Florida a short time, but we refused to give him permanent residency and made it clear we would not block an extradition request from the Sandinistas. Christopher dealt with his lawyers and, I think, made clear we preferred for him to leave. He went to Panama and then to Paraguay. Stroessner, the dictator in Paraguay, gave him refuge there but did not provide much protection. It was only a little over a year before he and his American financial advisor were assassinated, September 17, 1980, by some of the Argentine Montoneros, led by Enrique Gorriaran Merlo, who had fled to Cuba and then moved into Managua with the Sandinistas. Among the many non-Nicaraguan Sandinistas were Argentine guerrillas who set up their headquarters near the Managua airport. They knew the southern cone area and agreed to do the Sandinistas the great favor of ending Somoza's life to avoid him ever becoming a rallying point for resistance to the Sandinistas. Even nearly 20 years later Sandinista ex-president Ortega is still working actively to get Gorriaran out of an Argentine jail; he was sentenced after involvement nearly a decade later in an attempted coup in Argentina in which many were killed.

People are puzzled why the Argentine military was the first to train and support anti-Sandinista guerrillas in Nicaragua. Some even seem to think this was an Argentine favor for the Reagan Administration. The first anti-Sandinistas were trained and supported by the Argentines well before Reagan was elected. The sworn enemies of the Argentine military were the Argentine Montoneros. When they moved their headquarters from Cuba, where the Argentines could do nothing but try to watch them, to Managua, the Argentine military said, "There's our enemy, part of the Sandinistas." So the Argentine military began to help those in Nicaragua who were actively against the Sandinistas and might kill a few, especially the Montoneros. There were even more

Chileans than Argentines, many of whom have been given Nicaraguan citizenship. We found later that there were whole brigades of Salvadorans. There was a real multinational effort with the Sandinistas, but the majority of the fighters were Nicaraguans.

The days just before and after the Sandinista take-over were traumatic in the operations center where I had set up a command center. Then the immediate question was how do we relate to the new Sandinista Government. My proposal was that we do the best we can, no matter what happens in the long run, to work with the new government and move it in democratic directions. We shouldn't be accused of forcing or pushing the Sandinistas into the communists' hands. We should make it clear that, as long as they play by something resembling the rules of the western world, we'll work with them. That approach was, of course, strongly supported by Pezzullo and approved by everybody. My workload on Nicaragua increased greatly because it was not easy to gear up economic and even potential military assistance for the Sandinistas.

*Q: This was during the last six months of 1979?*

BUSHNELL: From the middle of July through the rest of the year and well into 1980 I was trying to manage a policy of openness to the Sandinistas. Initially we had planes flying food and medical supplies to Managua to help restore life to near normal after the fighting and other disruptions. The relief efforts were relatively easy to organize because we have emergency relief programs at alert and the US military can do the logistics well if someone has the funding to pay for it. But then things became much more dicey. The human rights situation became dicey, as the Sandinistas had kangaroo courts with no defense lawyers or even regular procedures trying and executing Somoza's followers. Many properties were expropriated including many businesses and farms owned by Americans. The Sandinistas introduced a national anthem which condemned the United States. The number of Cubans and before long even Russian advisors grew continually while the Sandinistas made it clear they did not want American technical advisors and even threw out the Panamanians and most of the Venezuelans. In big and little ways the strongly anti-U.S. views of the Sandinistas were becoming clearer, as was the immense Cuba influence.

*Q: And meanwhile they were nationalizing the economy and redistributing income to urban and rural poor and otherwise instituting...*

BUSHNELL: Not necessarily to urban and rural poor; that's putting too nice a face on it. They were redistributing as much as they could to the Sandinistas, some of whom came from poor families but many of whom, especially those that got big houses and big farms, came from the elite or upper middleclass. Keeping the US door fully open to the new government was a lot of work for me. We wanted to make it clear we would provide more aid than most Latin countries got from us as well as trade and other assistance, but we did not want to waste our scarce resources on a leadership which not only was not saying thank you but was actively spitting in our face. On a personal level I tried to work with many of the Sandinista leaders. I met them in New York when there was a special meeting at the UN for them to seek donor aid as well as in Washington and at various international meetings such as the IDB annual meeting.

The only way we could finance a major economic assistance program without stopping aid to the rest of the hemisphere was to seek a large supplemental appropriation. I remember we started work

on a supplemental request, maybe on a Thursday, and we decided we needed to send it to the Hill the next week to have any chance of getting it passed before Congress recessed for the year. I had the staff of PPC, ARA's policy planning office which was writing the political justification, and ECP, the economic office, in on Saturday to work on this. I went down to ECP on the third floor to review the status of its work. They were preparing a request for 25 million dollars, which would have made Nicaragua the largest aid recipient in the hemisphere. I said, "It's too small. We want to show we really want to work with these people. Let's ask Congress for 100 million." They said, "We have to write a justification. We don't have projects to use that much. Nicaragua is a small country."

*Q: Was Gerry Lamberty there?*

BUSHNELL: Gerry was there and he had his whole staff, even the trade people, going full steam. We spent all Saturday coming up with ideas, sample ideas, of what we might use 100 million for and why it was essential to make a major up-front AID effort to jump start the Nicaraguan economy. We had a first draft finished by Monday morning. It cleared AID and State quickly, but there were delays at the White House, and it did not get to the Hill in time to be enacted in 1979. Also the amount was adjusted to 80 million. There were hearings, and I spent a lot of time preparing testimony and appearing before various Congressional subcommittees in late 1979. As time went on and the Sandinistas did more anti-American things, it got harder to defend the Nicaragua supplemental.

Congressional consideration resumed in 1980. There was a decisive moment. The full House Foreign Affairs Committee was marking up the final bill. Most Democrats led by Dante Fascell were for the bill; most Republicans opposed it. Fascell was very supportive and consulted with me closely. Larry Pezzullo was with me as well as some of my staff and several people from the State Congressional Affairs Bureau as we stood by to deal with whatever issue arose as well as to try to get whatever last vote we might. Somebody from the Republican side offered an amendment saying that the aid would be stopped if there's reasonable evidence that the Nicaraguan government was supporting terrorism. I signaled Fascell, and he came down to where I was sitting in the front row. I said, "You know, this could kill the aid effort, because these people are going to give some support to the guerrillas in El Salvador and Guatemala. Hopefully we can limit what they do, but, if this is just black and white – the amendment doesn't say how much support or what kind – something's going to happen that's going to trigger this." Dante said, "Jesus Christ, John, how can I be in favor of somebody that supports terrorism? How can I oppose this?" I said, "Let's see if we can't at least get it into a place in the legislation where a presidential waiver is possible." Dante managed to do that, but I knew at the time that provision was going to be a big problem, as it was.

This Nicaragua legislation was a big issue on the Hill. It unfortunately polarized views on Nicaragua and thus helped set-up Nicaragua as an election issue later in 1980. There was no way I could see to avoid this fight, which incidentally had the benefit to us of making it crystal clear to the Sandinistas and everyone else that the Carter Administration was bending over backwards to try to have satisfactory relations with the Sandinistas. In February 1980 shortly before voting on the Nicaraguan supplemental the House held only the third secret session in its history to examine Soviet involvement in Nicaragua. It then approved the bill; the Senate had approved it in January,

but opponents managed to delay approval of a final conference report until May and to remove the small request for military assistance.

*Q: The covert war against Sandinistas began in 1980 sometime. We tend to think of it as Reagan, but it began earlier?*

BUSHNELL: No it did not, not action supported by the United States. Of course there were some remnants of the Guard and others who really never stopped fighting the Sandinistas. As I said, the Argentines began supporting some small bands of anti-Sandinistas in 1979, or perhaps it was 1980 before any significant Argentine assistance arrived. The Sandinistas took some time to consolidate effective control of the more remote areas such as on the Honduras boarder. Although the number was small in comparison with the significant number the Sandinistas killed, resistance fighters or common criminals did kill some Sandinistas in 1980, and there were periodic skirmishes, especially between the Sandinistas and the indigenous people on the Atlantic coast. It was a pretty messy situation, but I don't think there was any substantial organized opposition until months into the Reagan Administration.

*Q: What lessons do you think we should draw from the whole Carter experience with Somoza?*

BUSHNELL: I don't think we'll ever confront anything analogous to this situation again, but the key lessons are: (1) its dangerous to focus on only one aspect of our relations with a country – in this case human rights – when we have numerous interests and objectives, and (2) it is counterproductive to allow a general principal however good it may be – in this case nonintervention – to limit our options such that we cannot attain key objectives. The U.S. is a diverse country with very diverse interests and interest groups; there are many interfaces between the United States and most other countries that have noting or little to do with the government. When a lot of these other interests pull in the opposite way from the government, not only is there going to be a domestic political battle, but the other country is going to have its eye on and its hand in this battle to move US policy as it wants. If the Administration had been perceived as unified and speaking for all American interests, Somoza would have seen the writing on the wall, but he had good reason to believe his many friends in the United States, including in the Congress and the military, would change the direction of US policy. Similarly, the very complexity of US interests and voices convinced such Latin leaders as CAP and Torrijos that the Carter Administration was not a reliable ally against Somoza and extreme measures were needed. Somoza said frequently Nicaragua would be controlled by him or by Castro. We tended just to disregard that point, which was a mistake by those of us who were being paid to be more cautious. We probably would have been laughed out of court if, in the early stages, we had raised that possibility. Ironically Somoza was Castro's best asset; much of Nicaragua could agree on getting rid of Somoza even though his opposition could agree on little else; the hatred of Somoza pulled the opposition together to support the Sandinistas. Getting rid of Somoza was also the focus for many in the Carter Administration. The difference was that Castro prepared his actors for their post-Somoza take-over. Vaky and Bowdler tried to do the same through the mediation, but when Somoza stayed longer, these efforts became mute.

*Q: Wasn't much of the problem earlier: so much US support for people like Somoza and Batista in Cuba and the Shah in Iran and Marcos in the Philippines. All these people were anticommunist,*

*but we gave them so much support.*

BUSHNELL: This is the same point of not focusing on a single interest. When national security was the issue and we gave no attention to improving human rights, we set ourselves up for trouble. You put all your eggs in one basket, and, if that basket springs a hole, you're in bad trouble.

The blind spot of my colleagues who desperately wanted to get rid of Somoza is that they were focused just on getting rid of Somoza. The real objective should have been a democratic government in Nicaragua. Getting rid of Somoza may be necessary to get there, but let's focus on where we want to get, not just on the first step.

*Q: One point that did impress me from Lake's book is that Carter's overall philosophy may have been very healthy, but, like all Presidents on so many other things, he would get bits and pieces of information from NSC briefings, from memos from the State Department, from all kinds of other things, and whenever he dipped into something, he had limited time and limited possibilities, he'd be besieged by Brzezinski with all kinds of things, so he'd quickly have to make a judgment on something without really knowing what it's all about. Isn't this a real problem, and don't we really need a President to have more confidence and support for the Secretary of State and give the Secretary broader support for the whole foreign policy process?*

BUSHNELL: I don't think President Carter suffered from an internal information or background gap on Nicaragua. Of course in the final six months we had a massive intelligence failure; good intelligence might have made a difference even that late in the game. Carter did rely on Vance and Christopher. Nicaragua was a case where both the CIA and the pentagon were basically out of the picture, perhaps unfortunately. The two experts who most supported the President were Vaky and Pastor. I don't think Carter spending more time on the Nicaraguan problem would have made any difference. He just did not believe it was his place to tell a president who had come to power through at least some kind of electoral process, although maybe not fully democratic, that he should step down. It was alright to have people do it on his behalf, but not to do it himself. Somoza thought he could play Murphy and Wilson against Christopher and Vaky and win, or at least win time until 1981. I think Somoza believed – he said in his book that he believed until the last minute – that the U.S. would not let the National Guard collapse, that we would send in troops and we would stop the Sandinistas from taking over. What a mis-assessment!

*Q: We might hold El Salvador and the Reagan period, the transition and all that to the next session. Is it fair to say as a final comment that the Carter Administration seemed to be interested in the other countries of Central America, such as Guatemala, Honduras, and Costa Rica, principally because of their relevance to developments in Nicaragua?*

BUSHNELL: No, I don't think that would be a fair assessment of anyone in the Carter Administration. These other countries may have gotten much less attention from the highest levels, the President and Secretary, even Vaky and myself. But no one looked at them as linked to anything in Nicaragua. Guatemala had a terrible human rights situation, far worse than Nicaragua. There seemed at the time of the Carter Administration to be a little forward movement. In retrospect it turned out not to be sustaining, and perhaps not even real, but it moderated our policy and took Guatemala off the human rights front burner. Certainly Nicaragua was a big factor in our

relationship with Costa Rica, but we would have had good relations with Costa Rica if there had been no Nicaragua. The Costa Ricans wanted to have a democratic friendly government to their north, of course, more than anybody else, and they didn't like Somoza. Thus our objectives were the same although neither one of us developed a sound plan to get where we wanted to go. Costa Rica finally threw in with CAP, Torrijos, and the Cubans after the Nicaraguan Guard began bombing their border areas, where there were Sandinistas. We had more contact with the Costa Ricans because of the Nicaraguan problem, but Nicaragua could be said to have dominated the relationship only in that it was the major foreign policy issue shared with Costa Rica.

*Q: What were the main problems in trying to establish good relations with the Sandinistas?*

Nicaragua owed lots of money to American banks and banks elsewhere, as well as to commercial creditors. The Sandinistas refused to pay anything. With great difficulty I did finally engage them and get them at least to negotiate, to talk about making some arrangement with the banks. A number of other countries were not doing much more than talking at that point, so talk-talk bought some time. Incidentally, what other countries were doing was my key argument, i.e. others are talking while not paying why can't you do that, or don't you know how to talk.

On the military side, our military was reluctant to have much to do with the Sandinista military which was considered basically a guerrilla force. I insisted that the military wing of the OAS, the Inter-American Defense Board, receive a Sandinista officer, replacing the Somoza Nicaraguans who were there. This was a small point but quite a struggle because the military throughout Latin America wanted to have nothing to do with Sandinistas. Having made great efforts to get the Sandinistas a seat on the Inter-American Defense Board, they then spit in my eye. They sent a young indigenous Nicaraguan, who could barely speak Spanish, who had no real military training or experience, who had great disdain for anything other than some tribal warfare, and who had no hope of understanding Washington and effectively representing Nicaragua. He was totally ostracized because he just came from another planet as far as anybody on the Inter-American Defense Board was concerned.

The Sandinistas said they needed military assistance, and their first priority was helicopters. Our military assistance levels in Latin America were not sufficient to help any country with new helicopters. Moreover, the Sandinistas had no trained helicopter pilots or maintenance personnel. I was prepared to just say no on helicopters, but Bowdler urged me to find a somewhat constructive response. My people located two or three old helicopters that we could sell or give to the Nicaraguans for little or nothing. They were not happy with this proposal as they wanted something first-class to fly their leaders around for better security. I had a paper prepared to show them that we were not providing helicopters to other Latin countries even those that could pay for them. I think they did finally take the old choppers which quickly became inoperable. Of course the Russians soon provided them with lots of first-class helicopters including pilots and maintenance personnel.

*Q: This is Monday, August 20, 1998. John, I think we pretty well traced the Somoza saga last time, but while the tape recorder wasn't playing you made some comment about Tony Lake's book Somoza Falling. Would you care to put on the record how you assess that book?*

BUSHNELL: It's a good book in terms of revealing the complexity of decision making within the State Department and outlining the various pressures including time pressures on senior State officials. It reflects, despite his considerable reliance, I think, on Bob Pastor's work, the fact that Tony was not involved except on an occasional basis in Nicaraguan policymaking, and he says that.

*Q: He said one reason he chose Nicaragua for a topic was so he could be objective about it.*

BUSHNELL: It's certainly meritorious to be objective. At the same time it means that he, by whatever process, focused on only a few points of the evolving situation, by definition omitting many things that went on in between. His is considerably less than a complete picture. While the book does an excellent job of reflecting some of the struggles within the State Department from the point of view of a senior worldwide official, it is much less than a complete picture of the Nicaragua situation. For example, Lake does not try to deal with problems in the Embassy in Managua which resulted in many false signals to Somoza and perhaps even to Washington. The Pastor book presents a more complete and detailed picture, but, of course, the State Department is only one of its many players, and it doesn't do as much with State internal procedures.

*Q: Somoza himself wrote a book. Have you read his book? Do you have any sense of it?*

BUSHNELL: I have read some of it, only some pages. I don't think there's anything surprising. Somoza told US representatives beginning well before the Carter Administration that the alternatives in Nicaragua were a Somoza or the far left, meaning the Cubans and the Russians. He devotes his book to explaining why, a case with which I wouldn't agree. Was this just a tactical ploy? He and his family had long used their firm anticommunist and pro-U.S. stands to cover all their sins at home. Whether or not he believed the Somoza or Castro line, he acted in a way which made it true, much to his own, and our, disadvantage.

*Q: Was his book influential? Was it a factor in the Reagan's view of Nicaragua?*

BUSHNELL: I don't think so.

*Q: You were particularly concerned with El Salvador during the latter part of the Carter Administration. First, could you outline the historical context of what was happening in El Salvador at that time?*

BUSHNELL: Perhaps I can best start the El Salvador story by what is my first recollection of dealing with that country in January or February of 1978. As I was trying to get a better understanding of the various complex situations we were dealing with, I would have meetings with all the people involved, the country officer or officers, the country director, other people that were knowledgeable within the Department and sometimes from CIA and Defense as well. I would explore not only what had happened but what might influence events in a direction we wanted, such as improved individual human rights or a movement to free elections. I remember the frustration of my first meeting on El Salvador. There seemed to be no sign of early improvement of human rights nor any options for us to get such movement going. El Salvador's history is unique in this hemisphere. El Salvador is a small country, and there is no open frontier, unlike Nicaragua

where, as I have said, people with ambition could move out to the frontier, establish their own farms, and earn a modest living. In El Salvador most of the good agricultural land was controlled by a small number of families who were largely intermarried, called the 14 Families but actually several hundred adults. These families also owned most large businesses. This oligarchy tended to be extremely far right, and it controlled the army, partly because its own sons and sons-in-law were senior officers, but also in a number of other ways. Perhaps the current history of El Salvador started with a Communist revolt in 1932, which was really a peasant revolt. It seems to be accepted that there was substantial Communist influence, but intellectual influence not a role of Russia.

*Q: There was a depression...*

BUSHNELL: Yes, although I don't think El Salvador was any more depressed in 1932 than it was in other years. Peasants, who essentially couldn't feed their families -- at least that was the view -- rose up and tried to take over agricultural land particularly in western El Salvador. They were put down very brutally with many killed. Estimates were around 10,000. I don't think anybody knows. The result was to polarize the society so that a great many people were either on the far right, believing an authoritarian structure was necessary to keep the situation under control and to try to make economic progress, or on the extreme left, believing the whole society had to change in some revolutionary way, not necessarily communist. From 1932 to 1979 the extremes dominated rural El Salvador and national politics. The right maintained control. In rural areas a local power structure developed. In many places what most resembled a gang of thugs developed, perhaps paid by the large landowners. These local enforcers were loosely organized on a national basis in something called ORDEN. These thugs brutalized any peasant who challenged them or the landowners. Sometimes the thugs were members of the local police, but in many cases they were more a volunteer auxiliary police or military, usually with some link to the military but not on any military organization chart. The main role of ORDEN at the national level appears to have been to keep the various local ORDEN groups from fighting each other - a territorial division. Certainly the national ORDEN organization made no attempt to discipline or direct the autonomous local units. El Salvador had fairly long periods of apparent stability. The general who put down the 1932 revolt ruled until 1944, protecting the selfish interests of the leading families. Then there was a succession of either generals or politicians from the far right in cahoots with the military and the oligarchy. There was something that passed for elections, certainly not honest, free elections.

*Q: I'll bet all these people claimed they were anti-communist.*

BUSHNELL: Yes, the national leaders were anti-communist, but that really meant they were against those that might try to take any power or wealth from the oligarchy. At the local level anyone that challenged the system and the local gangs was labeled a communist. Beginning in the 1960s but then accelerating with Vatican II, the Catholic Church, which was also strong in some places, began to move definitively away from the oligarchy, although at the beginning you could generally include the Church people as part of the oligarchy structure. In some cases rural priests moved to the opposite extreme and supported revolution. The most constructive sign on the horizon was that in the urban areas the Christian Democrats, with a lot of help from the Christian Democratic Party in Germany and elsewhere in Europe, began to organize the growing middle-class. Their leader was Napoleon Duarte. In the 1960s Duarte won an election to be mayor of the capital city of San Salvador with a Christian Democratic local government. The city had

never been controlled in as authoritarian and brutal a way as the countryside. Under Duarte local taxes were increased, but the oligarchy seemed prepared to pay the modestly higher taxes to fund public works and education. With economic progress an urban middle class was developing fairly rapidly. They elected Duarte, and he was allowed to run the city whatever his term was. This sort of established him as a politician with a party favoring change that was not perceived by anybody serious as being communist, although he was often called communist by some of the far right.

The Christian Democrats found it almost impossible to make any political inroads in the countryside where most of the people were, because as soon as anyone from the Christian Democrats went out to the countryside, the local gangs or ORDEN would threaten them and, if they began to organize, kill them. Thus the large rural vote continued to be delivered largely to the parties supported by the oligarchy. Nevertheless, Duarte appeared to win a plurality against a divided right in the 1972 national election. However, five days later the candidate of the ruling party was proclaimed president. After an attempted coup within the Army, Duarte was arrested, tortured, and exiled. In the 1977 elections a former general was elected president. There were lots of arguments whether the 1977 election was fair, not necessarily that the votes weren't counted fairly, but election tactics used were not fair, especially in rural areas where those that did not vote for the establishment candidates could expect reprisals from the local gangs. The Christian Democrats won seats, as much as 25 or 30 percent, in the national parliament, but not enough to change anything. Violence was accelerating. The number of bodies found weekly in San Salvador would go up or down, but every week there were some. In rural areas there was probably much more violence, but it was generally not reported in the press, and we had no way to get comprehensive information. The Church was fairly outspoken in opposition to the government and to the violence.

The economy was doing quite well. In addition to the usual agricultural exports, beginning in the late 1960s, El Salvador had begun taking advantage of the provisions of our tariff code, sections 806.3 and 807, that allow firms to send parts or raw materials from the U.S. for processing in another country and then to bring back the finished product with the content from the U.S. entering duty-free. A lot of these assembly operations, especially for textiles, were being set up in El Salvador employing thousands at what we would consider very poor wages but what were livable wages in El Salvador, or at least more than what the oligarchy paid rural laborers. The urban economy was developing fairly well with infrastructure being financed by the IDB and World Bank. The rural situation was prosperous for the few landowners. The rest of the people barely squeaked by.

*Q: Didn't the coffee workers start agitating for higher wages?*

BUSHNELL: There was little organization among coffee workers or any other rural workers. The presence of the ORDEN gangs was usually enough to avoid any concerted action, and even in good times there was a surplus of rural labor. The hopelessness of the rural situation is what drove many peasants to the city and then to the long trek across Mexico to the United States. Over the years we had financed the AFL-CIO to help develop unions. They trained a lot of people and had some success in the urban areas, but they could hardly penetrate the rural areas. Quite a few of the people they trained were killed, and even one American AFL-CIO organizer was killed during my time in ARA. It was clear the central government didn't exert much influence in most rural areas

and did not try to make its presence felt. The rural areas were ruled by these local ORDEN gangs, or whatever you want to call them. Maybe gang is not a good word, but local groups dominated in one way or the other by the large landowners or the large businessperson. The national government, police or military, did not interfere. They didn't endorse the gangs and their killing either.

*Q: Were the armed forces supporting the plantation owners?*

BUSHNELL: The armed forces didn't have to support the large landowners actively; they just did not do anything to interfere with what the ORDEN gangs did unless the gangs got out of control and the landowners asked for help. The armed forces could have controlled at least some of the gangs, but the argument was that it was a domestic matter and the armed forces are for defense against foreign threats. Generally in rural areas the gangs were local people; some gang members may have spent some time in the army or the police. These gang or militia members were virtually the only people who had guns, not necessarily fancy guns. Only as some guerrilla groups began to develop with training and supply from Cuba was there effective opposition to what I have called gangs. Then, of course, the military moved into the rural areas to oppose the guerrillas in alliance with the local gangs. In short El Salvador was a very violent country, a festering situation but one in which there were no good options for the United State. In this first meeting, we went on for hours on what could we do to encourage some change, but we did not identify much of anything.

*Q: There was an AID mission presumably.*

BUSHNELL: There was a small AID mission. But the human right situation was so bad that we were limiting aid even before the Carter Administration, distancing ourselves and finding it hard to find significant groups that we wanted to work with. We supported the AFL-CIO work with the unions; we supported a few other groups like that, generally urban organizations. I think we had some loan programs to help small and medium size firms, but it wasn't an extensive program. It certainly was not going to bring about major change for decades. In the area which was the backbone, the bulk of the country, the rural areas, there was virtually no one and no institutions to work with. Anybody we worked with ended up dead. So El Salvador was very frustrating, and it didn't seem to me we were going to change anything by distancing, since distancing didn't mean much. We had very little military assistance, few military people there, not much of an AID program.

*Q: What did the CIA do?*

BUSHNELL: CIA was closing its station, which wasn't much to close. Agency personnel had been involved in a series of scandals in El Salvador. With no US national interests and no communists in sight even in other embassies the best people were not sent to El Salvador. Those that were there tended to associate with the elite and the military -- the far right. They got caught up in homosexual and other scandals. The Salvador station must have had one of the worst records in the CIA; my CIA colleagues in Washington asked me not to talk about the station or its output while it was closing.

*Q: Just who or what were the so-called death squads?*

BUSHNELL: Although there was a lot of talk about death squads, I 'm not sure there were actually organized squads devoted to killing selected people. Bodies appeared regularly in certain areas of San Salvador and in rural areas. I think various groups were responsible for these killings. The police were brutal and might well kill a common criminal in the course of interrogation; they would then just dump the body. Many of the elite had private guards who might kill some employee or competitor causing a problem. Teenage groups killed each other. It was almost a sport. In the rural areas most of the killing was done by the ORDEN gangs, the rural militia, which defended the interests of the large landowners and of themselves. Some killings followed a refusal to pay protection money.

*Q: And all this was totally unhampered by trials, due process...*

BUSHNELL: Murders were generally not even investigated, let alone solved. It was commonly believed the local police were part of the so-called death squads, so of course there was no enforcement from them. Moreover, they had very limited investigation resources or experience. The killing seemed to increase in 1978 and 1979 and spread more into the city, but part of what we saw as an increase may merely have been that the Embassy particularly, and to some extent the press, began reporting such killings in a more organized way. Extortion appears to have increased at this time; some believe Salvadoran gang members from Los Angeles who were deported to San Salvador introduced the practice of demanding payments from the middle-class and rich, killing those who refused to pay. Businessmen apparently also resorted to killing more frequently, especially as efforts to organize unions in the city began to be successful. Reportedly it was easy to hire killers. The couple of Americans that were there for the AFL-CIO, for example, were killed in a paid-for execution. These American labor officers were giving a seminar in a luxury hotel, and, when they walked out of the hotel, they were shot down by assassins obviously waiting for them. This was a very violent society.

One of the best insights I had into this miserable situation came by accident. I invited the Army attaché who had just returned from a couple of years in El Salvador for lunch to debrief him more informally than the normal group sessions and to see if I could learn a bit more and get a better feel of this strange place. He related some of his experiences which did not get fully reflected in his reports. The following is the story that made the biggest impression on me and suggested just how hopeless the situation was. The colonel said that his job took great discipline because he was expected to get fairly close to the officers in the Salvadoran military; as an attaché that was his job, but not so close that he was involved in things where he shouldn't be involved. He described one Saturday night when he was out with a group of Salvadoran colonels; they were drinking. They got very drunk, and all of a sudden one of them said, "By golly, I feel like we ought to go kill somebody." Our attaché was amazed, but the others said, "Yeah, let's kill somebody," and they said, "Come on, get in the car. We're going to kill somebody." He said, "Who are you going to kill?" "We don't know. We'll find somebody."

*Q: Were they all pumped up with drugs or something?*

BUSHNELL: They'd been drinking heavily. He made an excuse and went home; he said a couple of bodies were found the next day consistent with these colonels having carried out their talk. This

may not be the pattern one thinks of as a death squad, but it indicates the depth of the problem.

*Q: Amnesty International once claimed that some 13,000 individuals were killed at the hands of the death squads, their term, between '79 and '81 and at least 6,000 more fled the country while hundreds of women were routinely raped. These are staggering statistics for such a small country. Do you think they're valid?*

BUSHNELL: I don't know what they define as death squads. Probably that number of people killed is about right. By 1980 there began to be some effective organization on the left and some guerrillas groups which also killed both in combat and to facilitate recruitment and supply. So it was hard to tell who killed whom among the local people and militias of the right, the local people of the left, the army, the police, the common criminals, and the businessmen. El Salvador is still today an extremely violent country. The murder rate in San Salvador makes Washington look safe, and it has a democratic government now. I think the problem is in the culture. It's not just population pressure, but that's certainly a factor. The country is small; there's not an open frontier; there's not much economic potential, much chance for advancement. Historically most people who have had big money in El Salvador inherited or stole it; they did not earn it.

A lot of people reportedly fled to the U.S. because of the violence. Of course hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans came to the States; most of them came for better economic opportunities, not because they were driven out by the violence. In many Salvadoran communities in the States the murder rate is also high, reflecting in my view the culture. The immigrants quickly learned to say they fled the violence because that was the story that justified refugee status and a legal right to work. The rural violence was undoubtedly a major factor driving people into the cities. If they could not find jobs, the next step was the trip to Yankee land.

The more I learned about El Salvador the more hopeless the situation seemed, but there was nothing we could do to change the culture of violence and repression. There was no maximum leader like Somoza whose departure might make a difference. In the early part of 1978 Sally Shelton and Mark Schneider went to El Salvador with the idea that they would try to talk the Romero government into making some reforms. They had no effect. There was some sort of confrontation that made President Romero, if anything, even less willing to listen to us and less willing for us to have these programs of building some democratic institutions there. He saw then that the Carter Administration was really on what he called the subversives' side, so he tended to break the dialogue, which never amounted to much anyway. This situation continued through 1978 and the first part of 1979. No one in the United States cared much about El Salvador, except perhaps parts of the Catholic church which had many missionaries there. Remember our primary attention during this period was focused on Nicaragua. Nobody cared if we cut back on aid except a few people in AID who had some vested interest in a project there.

*Q: Were there any interactions between El Salvador and Nicaragua, or totally separate situations?*

BUSHNELL: We didn't see any particular interaction before the departure of Somoza except that the Salvadoran military provided some supplies to Somoza when he desperately needed them. Only later did we learn that full units of Salvadoran guerrillas had gained considerable battle

experience fighting and training with the Sandinistas.

Finally the first crack in the Salvadoran iceberg, and a big one, came in October of 1979, three months after Somoza fell. A group of officers led by lieutenant colonels staged a coup. They claimed they saw what had happened in Nicaragua with the complete destruction of the Guard and the execution or jailing on most officers that were caught. They said El Salvador was on a route which was inevitably leading the same way. Thus they said they had to open up the political and economic situation. Although I don't recall them ever saying it to me – they may have – what they also saw was an enemy emerging nearby in communist Nicaragua that was going to be a base, a supply and training base, for insurgents in El Salvador. In short the recent example of Nicaragua and the nearby support base in Nicaragua made the next revolt in El Salvador look life-threatening to many Salvadorian military. Any earlier beliefs that the U.S. would assure a communist takeover did not happen were erased by the Sandinista takeover. The coup was followed by a major shakeup in the military with the exile, retirement, or reassignment of some 10% of the officer corp.

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*Q: Was this the first time you interacted with him?*

BUSHNELL: No. I testified before Helms when I was at Treasury and for ARA in 1978 and/or 1979, but the issues had never been terribly contentious. In some respects I set myself up by taking the position that the land reform and the banking reform were needed to change the explosive trajectory of Salvadoran history and avoid a social explosion that would give the communists just the opening they were seeking. Of course, I also defended the AID programs that we were setting up to make the precipitous reforms work better; the prominent role of the AFL/CIO in these programs was a red flag for Helms. He launched several attacks on me and the program. He argued that it was grossly unfair to take away the land that families had worked hard for generations to develop and that the new cooperatives were destroying the coffee trees and undermining the economy. He said idiots like me in the State Department had no idea of what it took to produce things, and we also could not even identify communists before our nose as proven in Nicaragua. He went on at great length. Finally he said the people of North Carolina could never understand taking land away from the people that owned it; that was just against what America stood for. I was not being as cautious as I might have been, although I don't regret it, but I responded that, if almost all the good land in North Carolina were owned by 14 families, things might look very different to the people of North Carolina. This really set him off. How could I say all the land in North Carolina was owned by 14 families? How dare I suggest that land be taken away from any hard working and under-paid farmer in North Carolina? Of course, that isn't what I said at all. Over the next couple years he would mention that I was the first to favor land reform in El Salvador. I took it as a merit given the way El Salvador has progressed, but that is not the way he meant it.

In December 1979 after the icebreaker coup but before Duarte and land reform, there was a negative development which we knew about, although we did not know how to assess it. The far left in El Salvador consisted of both urban and rural guerrillas and a more traditional urban Communist Party, which often had to operate secretly, and several small Maoist parties. All these groups were against the government, the oligarchy, and the United States, but on many issues they

had been quite divided. At times there were even gun fights among the groups. Some people thought the oligarchy employed good tactics to keep the left divided. I don't think the Right had anything to do with it. There was a natural division between the guerrilla street and field fighters and the more intellectual and doctrinaire political Marxists. There were leaders such as Communist Party Secretary General Shafik Handal who were basically communist intellectual professorial types. They were quite different from the rural guerrillas who were like some of the military and just wanted to go out and kill somebody. There seemed to be little cooperation or coordination among these groups. Then in December of 1979 the Cubans, Castro and his Department of the Americas, got the leaders of these far left groups together for a long session in Cuba. Following his pattern with the Nicaraguan Sandinistas, Castro urged and pressed these groups to agree to cooperate and form a common front. It wasn't clear at the time what leverage Castro had. Certainly he could offer training and some supplies. Little did we know at the time how much he was offering. Up to this time I saw the Salvadoran left as being indigenous to El Salvador and not really dependent on Castro or the Soviets. But I had to be concerned that Castro's success in Nicaragua would encourage him to follow the same pattern in El Salvador and that the Russians, with their build-up of military materiel in Nicaragua, would bank-roll Castro and help supply the Salvadoran guerrillas.

With the advantage of hindsight we see that Castro followed basically the same tactics in Nicaragua and El Salvador, uniting and supplying the far left. The U.S. coincidentally followed completely different tactics. In Nicaragua we played a major mediating role to bring the democratic groups together, and we used distancing to urge Somoza out. In El Salvador we did little to organize a democratic alternative, but one arose. Then until January 1981 we did relatively little to support it. Yet the indigenous reformers in El Salvador beat the Castro-supported far left, while the democratic groups in Nicaragua tried unsuccessfully to change the nature of the Sandinistas. At the end of 1979 and through most of 1980 the intelligence was not very plentiful on the Salvadoran left and on their relations with Cuba and Nicaragua. I recall actually having the embassy inquire with the Salvadoran military to try to find out more about these various leftist groups. The military in El Salvador didn't seem to know much about them either, although they were their everyday enemy.

The security situation deteriorated and violence increased through 1980. The guerrillas began attacking individual military officers. In one case the guerrillas burned an officer's house with him and his family inside. The attacks on uniformed personnel provoked harsh counter-measures by the uniformed services with numerous serious human rights violations. The Treasury Police and the National Guard were the most frequent abusers. Because they operated throughout the country in small units, they were also most subject to guerrilla attack. It was becoming a desperate situation. In discussions various people from Washington and the embassy had with Christian Democrats we learned many Christian Democrats were afraid to go into the government because they would likely be killed. In fact, a substantial number were killed. The seizure of factories continued; the extortion of funds by right and left increased. The economy, affected by the land and banking reforms as well as the increasing violence, went into a free fall despite the fact that we cranked up AID spending. We were building streets, sewers, and such things all over in order to provide employment as well as building needed infrastructure. HA began arguing for human rights sanctions. We did press the military to take a number of constructive human rights steps such as adopting a good military code of conduct and strengthening military justice. The civilian

government did not seem to be responsible for human rights violations; members of the government were among the main victims. The military, or more correctly people in the military acting on their own, committed a small part of the violations. The press in the U.S. was giving much more coverage to the human rights abuses under the moderate reformist government than it ever had to the abuses of previous right-wing governments. Some abuses committed by the guerrillas were made to look like government abuses, for example the guerrillas frequently wore military uniforms particularly for urban operations.

*Q: You say the assassination of Romero captured press attention?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, Romero's cold-blooded killing was a big issue for the American Catholic Church, and it gave a peg for the press to start running Salvador stories. I don't think there were ever any American reporters stationed in El Salvador, but reporters would go there, and they'd even visit rural areas and write stories about local killings. A school teacher was trying to teach, and somebody thought she was teaching the wrong thing, so they killed her. That type of human interest stories and anecdotal stories on land reform began to appear. About the middle of 1980 there was a great acceleration in press interest, which I didn't understand at the time. I came to understand it later, but that's another story.

By the middle of 1980 we began to get reports both from Salvadoran intelligence and from our own intelligence that the Nicaraguans were helping the guerrillas in El Salvador. Arms were being smuggled across Honduras from Nicaragua to El Salvador (the countries do not have a land border). Guerrillas were going to Nicaragua for rest and recovery from wounds and, more important, for training. The intelligence reports did not indicate what volume of activity was going on, but by the fall of 1980 we had enough that we sent Jim Cheek, who had replaced Brandon Grove as Central American deputy, to Nicaragua to warn the Sandinistas. Remember, the Nicaragua aid legislation had recently passed and we had this \$80,000,000 to help Nicaragua, but we also had the provision that had been inserted by the Congress that aid had to be stopped if the Sandinistas supported terrorists. Clearly these insurgents in El Salvador who captured American factory managers and the guerrillas who killed land reform workers were terrorists.

Jim Cheek met with both the five-person junta that was formally running the country and most of the members of the Sandinista leadership. He made our point very forcefully but in a friendly manner. The Sandinistas knew Jim and knew he had been strongly anti-Somoza for a decade. They claimed that they, as a government, weren't doing anything to support violence in El Salvador but they didn't have absolute control of their territory. Something could happen without their knowing about it. Salvadorans could come to Nicaragua. They did all the time. The Salvadoran came, and, if he was injured and wanted medical treatment, what were they going to do? Things could move through Nicaragua, and they often couldn't stop them. Jim made the point that they should intensify their efforts to stop military supplies; otherwise our aid might have to be stopped. Subsequent evidence indicated that for a while they did stop moving military supplies, which were in fact being moved in much greater volume than we had thought through Nicaragua.

*Q: Did the various elements of the US government agree on what was happening here? There was the Pentagon, CIA, State, various elements within State.*

BUSHNELL: I don't recall that there was any real disagreement on a major effort to support the Duarte reform government. AID was super, getting a fast disbursing supporting assistance program going and increasing AID staff in El Salvador. The military was slow to increase programs with the newly purged Salvadoran military in part because the assistance and training budgets for Latin America had been cut so much. Many of the moderate Salvadoran military had been through US training over the years. These officers were closer to the US military than the officers they threw out, so our military was happy with these more moderate military. In fact, some people were saying the change in El Salvador showed the success of training at the US Army's School of the Americas. Everyone agreed the country had at least begun to move in the right direction. HA continued to oppose assistance to the military because military officers were still involved in some human rights abuses, although not as many as HA claimed. The CIA continued to be out to lunch. I forget when they decided to reopen a station, but CIA was not providing useful human intelligence from El Salvador. I would be hard pressed to think of any other situation where US interests were so substantially at stake where intelligence support was as weak as in El Salvador. At inter-agency meetings CIA representatives generally did not provide an assessment, and, when they did, nobody gave it any weight. Everyone remembered that practically until July 1979 CIA had said that Somoza and the National Guard could hold off the Sandinistas and that CIA missed that massive Cuban supply effort.

*Q: You say we did have a small military assistance program?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, I think we quickly began training and approving some export licenses. However, I don't believe we approved any lethal shipments in 1980, but I don't recall we actually turned any down. Because of our earlier refusal to provide lethal supplies either under the military sales program or even to approve export licenses, all the Central American countries had found alternative suppliers for the sorts of light arms and ammunition they used.

*Q: You felt what we were doing was effective?*

BUSHNELL: Oh, I don't think the small programs we were gearing up had much effect on the economic situation or on military readiness. The big effect was symbolic. These programs showed that we were no longer distancing, quite the contrary that we approved of the revolutionary changes in social and economic structure that were underway. Under President Romero we were phasing everything down and out. After the October coup and particularly when the Christian Democrats came into the government, we in effect changed direction and began expanding our programs. They were still small, but AID technicians were arriving in country instead of leaving, and in a small place that was noticed. Even statements like my exchange with Senator Helms got a lot of attention in El Salvador. Many did not believe the U.S. would break with the oligarchy, including many members of the oligarchy, who began giving more attention to their public relations efforts in the United States. I don't recall that there was any strong opposition to our policy aside from Helms and a few of his associates. The banking reform impacted one or two US banks, but I encouraged them to cooperate, and their situations worked out with smaller losses than they had expected. HA strongly supported our help with land reform and increasing the AFL-CIO presence. Within the government there was very little disagreement on what we were doing except on tactical issues such as which institutions in the U.S. should be given AID contracts.

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*Q: Were senior people in the Department, Habib and Newsom, or anybody on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor involved?*

BUSHNELL: I don't recall any contentious issue that went up to them after Duarte joined the government and before the nuns were killed, although I did seek 7<sup>th</sup> floor help to get supporting assistance and military training money from other parts of the world. After the reform coup we did frequent night notes on El Salvador which went to the Secretary and Christopher and to the President. The same was true on Nicaragua once the decision was made that we were going to try to cooperate with the Sandinista government. If they backed off from us, that would be their decision, not ours. Once we were working on that basis, it was not necessary for senior people to be very much involved. I think that Helms did write at least once, probably to the Secretary, complaining about the Salvador land reform and our assistance. We would have drafted a reply on the desk, and I probably cleared it to go through H [Congressional Affairs Bureau].

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*Q: He retired just after that. Was that coincidence?*

BUSHNELL: We haven't come to that time yet; there are more parts of the White story. We cut off military aid in December, which didn't mean much because we were not giving much military aid. What we didn't know, of course, although it was entirely unrelated to the killing of the nuns, was that the Salvadorean left had been gathered together by Castro and really whipped into a military organization. Their arms had been procured all over the world and shipped through Nicaragua. The communist-Castro guerrillas had been furiously training, including training hundreds, probably thousands, in Nicaragua, many of whom were, in fact, trained by the Nicaraguan and Cuban military. But we didn't know all this at the time. The defining event in this story, as in many other things including my next assignment, was that there was a US election in November 1980.

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*Q: Was Bob Pastor involved?*

BUSHNELL: Oh, yes, Bob Pastor was continually involved. El Salvador was in many ways the flip side of Nicaragua. In Nicaragua we tried to negotiate in great detail for months and months with Somoza to get him to make changes and to open up the society, without fundamental success. In El Salvador it wasn't through negotiation that the society was changing because that route hadn't worked, but because, after the coup, we worked with the moderate military and the Christian Democrats on the land and other reforms. With our help changes were obvious in the course of 1980. The new moderate government even formed an electoral commission to look for a way to make elections honest, although it hadn't announced a date for an election. Thus in El Salvador, despite the increased violence and the unfortunate nuns' murder, we saw the situation moving in a favorable direction toward democracy and a more open society. Carter was very much aware of this; we kept him aware of it. I don't think he was asked to do anything. We did reallocate quite a bit of aid to El Salvador, but I do not think these decisions required Presidential

involvement. There was a good deal of willingness to assist reform in El Salvador. Even Henry Owen, who generally opposed aid for Latin America because it was not the poorest of the poor, supported us. There was not a big bureaucratic battle. I don't recall hearing about any meeting with President Carter on El Salvador before December 1980. Bowdler and his mission reported to the President when they came back about the nuns. Then in January, reacting to the guerrilla all-out offensive, the President approved the resumption of lethal military support very quickly.

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*Q: Because I think maybe we ought to go through the whole period of transition before we take up what actually happened under Reagan. Reagan, of course, as a Presidential candidate in 1980 was quite critical of the Carter Administration approach to Central America. Why do you think he put such emphasis on Central American during the campaign? It seemed to some of us at the time that it was a little bit out of perspective.*

BUSHNELL: I'll tell you my theory. On most US foreign policy issues there was, and still is, actually a pretty good national consensus. There was a national consensus that we support Israel, that we were against the Soviet Union, that we were prepared to open but be cautious with China, support Japan, and for that matter that we support human rights in general terms. For 90 percent, let's say, of foreign policy Republicans and Democrats were basically in agreement. There was some disagreement at the margin, but it was at the margin. Should Israel get 2.5 billion dollars, or 2.9 billion? That's not really the basis for a debate among Presidential candidates. But Latin America, including Central America but perhaps excluding Mexico, suffers from the great disadvantage that most Americans do not consider issues there very important. Because there did not appear to be national security interests at stake in Central America, the Carter Administration was free to emphasize its human rights policies there, in contrast to say the Middle East where other issues trumped human rights. But events in 1979 and 1980 presented a major national security interest in Central America -- stopping communism. This had been the core issue for Reagan most of his political life. Thus it was natural for him to attack the Carter Administration for communist gains in our backyard.

Differences between the candidates or parties tend to be exaggerated. The geographic proximity of Latin America makes it easy to present the image that the other guy is fouling up our backyard. Remember that Nicaragua was a very unconsensus place for US policy; there were key Democratic Congressmen who were very opposed to our anti-Somoza policy. In fact no one liked the outcome with a far left or Communist take-over under the guidance of the Cubans. Everybody would agree that was a bad outcome. So it was a natural area for Reagan to criticize. Here was a bad thing that had happened on Carter's watch; it hadn't just happened on Carter's watch, he had been deeply involved in Nicaraguan policy. A lot of people in the Congress, including Democrats, had been concerned about our Nicaraguan policy. They had said don't let the Communists take over. Moreover, Reagan all his life made opposing communism his first, and perhaps also second, principal. Thus allowing communism to spread to Central America was to him a major sin. In short there was no American consensus on Central American policy; the communists had made gains; and the Republicans could make a good issue out of Carter's "allowing" the communists into Central America; being anti-communist was classic Reagan. No doubt he was sure he would act to prevent communist gains in Central America, or for that matter anywhere.

Nicaragua was not the only place in Central America there were disagreements. There was an element of the Republican Party led by Helms that was against land reform and our supporting the land reform in El Salvador. The Right in Guatemala, which greatly opposed the Carter Administration human rights policy in Guatemala, provided a lot of assistance to the Republican Party. On Panama, of course, many Republicans accused the Carter Administration of giving away the Canal. Central America was an area where Republicans, and many others, perceived that things had gone badly under Carter, and the advance of communism tied Central America to a bigger picture - the anti-communism that was the core of what Reagan stood for. In some respects Cuba was included in this negative presentation. Carter's attempts to befriend Castro had backfired in terms of greater Castro involvement in Africa and Nicaragua and then the Mariel invasion, certainly not things that Carter wanted to see happen. Thus recent history made Carter's policies in Latin America ripe for criticism. Reagan was critical.

I believe it was not until the guerrilla offensive in El Salvador that the idea occurred, I think first to Al Haig, that the new Administration could make Central America the cutting edge of the Reagan Administration anti-communist campaign. The difference between the Carter and Reagan Administrations would be profound. On Carter's watch Communism moved forward, and on Reagan's watch Communism would be stopped and moved backwards. Central America became the cutting edge for this policy.

*Q: The Reaganauts apparently believed active support from the Russians and/or the Cubans was critically helpful to the insurgents in Central America, but do you think that was really true?*

BUSHNELL: It was certainly true in both Nicaragua and El Salvador.

*Q: Critically important?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, critically important. Castro and the Cubans were critical in both cases. The Cubans united the squabbling leftist guerrilla groups in both cases and then provided massive equipment, munitions, and training. Until the Sandinistas took over in Nicaragua the Russians appeared to act mainly through the Cubans. In El Salvador the key role of the Russians in arranging a large supply of guns and ammunition from around the world for the guerrillas became known only when we got key guerrilla documents after January 20. The most important and critical thing the Cubans did was to bring a diverse and divided, and often fighting among themselves, far left together. As long as that group was divided, it would not have taken over either country. So bringing them together and then training their cadre and supplying them with key weapons was critical. If you take away those factors, they wouldn't have succeeded. The amount of supply we now know, although we didn't know currently at the time, was massive -- plane after plane from Cuba flying into Liberia in Costa Rica and loading artillery shells on trucks to go across the Nicaraguan border. In El Salvador the large number of weapons -- how we learned after the fact is a story we'll tell in a minute -- were provided from all over the world from Communist countries, from Vietnam, from Somalia, from various places, not from Russia itself, but always coordinated from Russia. These weapons permitted the all-out offensive by the Salvadoran guerrillas in January of 1981. At the time they were occurring we didn't know about these massive communist supply efforts. We had a massive intelligence failure. If Reagan had criticized our intelligence

about communist military supply in our hemisphere, he would have been dead right. But, of course, he did not know about the El Salvador supplies during the campaign, and I do not recall that he made a specific issue of the Cuban supply to the Sandinistas. We didn't know at the time what was happening, but in retrospect one can certainly say that the role of the Cubans, supported by the Russians, was critical in both cases.

*Q: Apparently another factor strongly influencing the Reagan people was the article Jean Kirkpatrick wrote about the presumed double standards applied to dictators. Do you think her thesis was valid, and was it influential with the Reagan people?*

BUSHNELL: Yes on both counts. As with most short popular analyses, Kirkpatrick's famous article was an oversimplification, but it was certainly true that the Carter Administration pressed authoritarian governments much harder on human rights when there was not another major issue such as oil supply or defending against communism. Reagan emphasized this inconsistency as a flaw in Carter's policy. One shouldn't treat this debate as completely black and white. Reagan was not saying we should have no human rights element in our foreign policy, although he did believe we should mind our mouth and stay off the bully pulpit. He was saying it was overdone by the Carter Administration. Certainly an argument which I made often in the Christopher Committee and with Christopher himself was that we didn't have a comparable worldwide policy, that we were a lot tougher with some governments in Latin America than we were elsewhere. El Salvador was a very brutal place. A lot of people were killed. It was a dictatorship. So was Romania, but we activated our aid program in Romania. We turned human rights to the side because this was a communist country that was disagreeing a bit with the Russians. There were many places around the world where human rights abuses were much worse than in Somoza's Nicaragua. He wasn't killing many people, and the press and opposition were even outspoken. The military in Nicaragua didn't decide on Saturday night to go out and kill somebody just for the hell of it. Ironically one of the best examples of the inconsistent and unintended double standard was the Carter Administration treatment of the Somoza and then the Sandinista governments in Nicaragua. We stopped military aid and tried to cut back economic aid to Somoza, but we started a new military aid program and offered massive economic aid to the Sandinistas even though in almost every respect human rights in Nicaragua were worse under the Sandinistas than under Somoza. I favored the aid to the Sandinistas, only because I did not want them to claim we pushed them into the arms of the Cubans and the Russians. However, while HA pressed for some human rights sanction against Somoza on a weekly basis, HA hardly even wanted to mention in the annual report the many summary executions or the repressive measures against the press and even the church under the Sandinistas.

*Q: This is Monday, August 10th, 1998. I'm John Harter with John Bushnell. We were discussing the elements in the Reagan campaign of 1980 that predisposed its policy toward Central America. Do you have any sense as to the degree to which Bill Casey was exercising an influence on Reagan's thoughts on Central America? We subsequently learned he was obsessed with Central America. To the best of my knowledge, prior to that he was not that much concerned with that area.*

BUSHNELL: I don't think he was concerned or knowledgeable on Central America until he took the CIA job. During the Carter Administration the Agency was very uninterested in Central

America. There were monumental intelligence failures. We did not even have decent intelligence on the internal Cuba situation. We weren't watching places like Venezuela or Nicaragua to see what the Cubans were doing, but that intelligence is not easy to acquire. In places like Nicaragua under Somoza or El Salvador under Romero the Agency would work with and be used by the intelligence organizations of these authoritarian, corrupt, and violent regimes. Such assignments are not very pleasant for Americans, and it is easy for the intelligence officers, who are usually not the cream of the cream, to be taken in by some pretty professional and strong intelligence operators in these governments. Then our intelligence becomes what they give us, not impartial independent facts or views. Thus during the first weeks of the Reagan Administration Casey was urged by Haig, by Allen, by Defense, and I suspect by the President himself to improve intelligence on Central America immediately; it was the first foreign policy priority for the Administration. If this caused him to be obsessed with Central America, that was what Haig and I were trying to do.

*Q: What were the ARA preparations in anticipation of the new administration before the transition?*

BUSHNELL: Soon after the election ARA was tasked by the Executive Secretariat to prepare transition briefing papers on major issues.

*Q: Now, let's see. Vaky was gone and Bowdler was in by that time.*

BUSHNELL: Bowdler had been running ARA for over a year. Independent of the transition I encouraged our country directors to maintain briefing papers on the main issues in their countries all the time so that they could just make quick revisions if some traveler was going there or some official was coming to see one of our principals. I remember soon after the election -- I don't know how soon -- before any transition team had been set up or any tasks had come down from the seventh floor, I'd asked the country desks to begin going over these papers with the idea that a new administration would want fairly detailed briefing papers on all the main problems. We also began work on some over-arching papers on aid levels, military assistance, and some other areas. Then the secretariat in its usual way put out a tasker sometime in November to have briefing papers prepared in a standard format. Eventually a transition task force was set up, and some transition officers were assigned to State by the Republicans running the transition. There was great speculation, of course, about who was going to get various jobs and what policy changes would be made. During this period I was very busy with other things -- the nuns' killing in December, the ongoing crisis of Nicaraguans pulling back from a military association with us and inviting in the Russians, worrying about the Nicaraguans supporting the Salvador guerrillas, trying to get an aid program going in Nicaragua which was proving quite difficult, the problems with the aid program in Salvador. I don't think I spent much time on the transition papers until they began to be due, and even then I don't think I reviewed many of them.

*Q: I was just wondering if these papers were basically pro forma or a really serious activity.*

BUSHNELL: They were a very serious activity on the part of the country officers and the ARA deputies. I pointed out that the transition papers were the first exposure many people in the new administration, including the 7<sup>th</sup> floor principals, would have to professional Foreign Service staff work. The biggest foreign policy mistakes of an administration are usually made in its first weeks

before its people have had time to understand fully the various issues.

*Q: One could understand why they would be a little bit cautious in what they would say, especially knowing that the Reagan people had been very critical of what the Carter people had done. It's easy to do a factual paper, encyclopedia sort of thing.*

BUSHNELL: The effort was to identify issues that either needed to be decided one way or the other soon or that were subject to decision and to lay out the considerations in favor of the reasonable alternatives. We tried to write these papers keeping in mind readers with little knowledge of Latin America, which means providing quite a bit of background even in short papers. Then I had a board meeting in Panama the second week in January, so I was away for some of that week.

*Q: Were you actively involved in preparing these papers, or you just told the country directors?*

BUSHNELL: I was actively involved in some. I remember changing and reviewing a couple of papers. I may have seen a lot, but I don't remember them now.

*Q: Do you have any particular sense of what the papers on Nicaragua and El Salvador dealt with? They presumably would have been quite difficult to write.*

BUSHNELL: On El Salvador the first draft written before the nuns were killed was upbeat – constructive changes are happening but there are problems. Then the paper would have had to be revised to a downbeat noting the nuns' killing and our reactions. Finally supplemental papers would have been submitted dealing with the January offensive because the papers were already with the transition team at that point. Thus some of these papers were sort of a movable feast. I don't think I saw most of the individual country papers because the other deputies did those and probably Bowdler reviewed them. I remember working more on papers about the level of military assistance, aid especially for the Caribbean and Central America, and a general paper about the coordination of human rights policy. I also reviewed the Nicaragua and El Salvador papers because there were so many military, aid, and human rights matters concerning those countries.

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*Q: Who replaced Bob White?*

BUSHNELL: Nobody for awhile. We sent Fred Chapin, who had returned from being ambassador in Ethiopia and had been consul general in San Paulo and had served in several ARA posts, to hold the fort for a couple of months because we had no ambassador or DCM when White departed. Dean Hinton was nominated by the end of February, but he didn't get there for a couple of months or so. Yes, that's right, another friend of mine that I threw into a surprising place. Who knows, it may have changed his life? He married a Salvadoran. But being sent to El Salvador after being Ambassador in Pakistan was a come-down in some respects, although that embassy soon became one of the largest in the world.

To return to the intelligence coup, I had decided in January, before January 20th, that we needed to

strengthen the reporting out of the embassy in El Salvador. We had a bright young political officer in Mexico, Jon Glassman. It's a big political section in Mexico with four to six State political officers. I called Mexico and said, "We need a good political officer, experienced and able to speak the language well in El Salvador. Can Jon Glassman go to El Salvador for four or five weeks, maybe then come home, and maybe go back again later?" Mexico could certainly spare him and only insisted that ARA pay the travel costs. So Jon went to El Salvador; I talked to him on the phone to tell him what sort of reporting to give priority in addition to digging around on the nuns' killing. The Agency has lots of money to spend for intelligence, but it's amazing what good Foreign Service Officers can get for nothing.

Jon was rummaging around, talking to a lot of people, and trying to learn more about the guerrillas as I had suggested. Somebody mentioned to him that the government had all these documents they captured when they raided guerrilla safehouses in November 1980 and January 1981. He arranged to look at them. He was provided with this big group of documents which included, the guerrillas being well organized, the minutes of many of their meetings and a diary kept by Communist Party Secretary General Jorge Shafik Handal about his travels to Havana, to Moscow, then elsewhere. From Moscow the Russians sent him to Vietnam, back to Moscow, from Moscow to Somalia, back to Moscow. At each of these places they got him large quantities of weapons. They wanted to get him weapons that were not Russian, that would not be associated with them, but rather weapons that were captured by the Vietnamese or provided by the West to the Somalis. The Russians arranged to get these weapons, probably in some sort of exchange for new weapons they were providing these communist states. The Russians also arranged and paid for shipping the arms and ammunition to Havana. Then with the help of the Cubans the arms were shipped to Sandinista Nicaragua.

This massive arms supply effort was all laid out in the diary with exact details on the number and types of weapons, a mine of information, as were the minutes of the guerrilla meetings. This incredible intelligence find had been sitting in some Salvadoran police station; apparently no Salvadoran intelligence officer had taken the time to read the documents, nor mentioned it to any US intelligence type. Nobody was exploiting it. Jon immediately saw the importance of his find, and we soon had the documents or copies, I forget which, in Washington as well as his summary reports. Thus it was this professional work by an FSO that gave us the key information to document the roles of Russia, Cuba, and Nicaragua in supporting and training the Salvadoran guerrillas. These documents answered many of the questions Haig and I had been asking the Agency. They were a tremendous advantage for us because we had been saying that military supplies had come from Cuba to Nicaragua and then to El Salvador and that the Sandinistas were training the Salvadoran guerrillas. But we could point to only a limited number of isolated incidents such as arms intercepted by the Honduras government, and the Sandinistas were denying their involvement. As I recall, we had no previous hard evidence of the Russian role.

In making our case, particularly with NATO and with the public, this document find laid it all out, in the guerrillas' own handwriting. We put out a white paper covering this information, which was a major help in getting support for our policy, particularly in Congress. If it hadn't been that I decided we needed to reinforce the embassy urgently with another good FSO reporting officer, we'd probably not have gotten this intelligence goldmine on a timely basis. There then might have been much less support for assistance to El Salvador in NATO and the US Congress. Who knows

how history might have been changed?

The Agency and the entire intelligence community were extremely weak in terms of just about everything related to El Salvador and Nicaragua. Once Haig and I, and the NSC, began really pushing hard to upgrade intelligence collection in Central America all the agencies made big investments, particularly in technical collection. They had an air watch to see any planes that were coming from Nicaragua to El Salvador, any ships by sea, and all the more sophisticated collection. We began to get all sorts of satellite pictures. All this collection was useful, but it didn't tell us anything about what had happened before February 1981. It was Jon Glassman's work that gave us that critical picture.

Haig wanted to make very clear that one of the things the Reagan Administration was going to do was to stop the Communist advance in Central America. The communists were trying to advance in El Salvador, and we were going to stop them there. There was an implication that maybe we'll roll communism back in Nicaragua if the Sandinistas didn't live up to their promises and even go to the source in Cuba if necessary. Central America was the first thing on the foreign affairs docket. Determination to save El Salvador raised some difficult policy questions about how we were going to strengthen the Salvadoran military, which needed a lot of training and a lot of supplies and re-equipping. Haig said to Defense, "You know, we can send our guys to El Salvador and our guys can do a lot of training, but the Salvadoran troops are still going to be in their territory and they're going to continue doing half the things their way. Let's take whole units, whole battalions, and bring them up to Fort Benning (Georgia) and train them as a unit; look at them as an American unit; run them right through boot camp and train them as light Rangers, our way in our territory the whole way.

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*Q: How about Nicaragua? The real problems were in Nicaragua a few years later. Was some of that beginning during this time?*

BUSHNELL: The big policy issue in the first Reagan months after we put in train the programs to support El Salvador was what we should do on Nicaragua. Should we stop the AID program on the basis that the Sandinistas supported terrorism in El Salvador? Once we saw the extent of the all-out offensive – and, of course, once we got this intelligence gold mine I mentioned – it was clear the Nicaraguan government had given major support to the Salvador guerrillas. The question was had they stopped and stayed stopped after Jim Cheek's fall visit. As of the end of January, before our intelligence gold mine, the evidence was contradictory. Our intelligence was woefully weak. Most of us felt, certainly I felt, that the Sandinistas had helped with the all-out offensive. The guerrilla radio station which was key to their hopes for major popular support was in Nicaragua. It even appeared to me that a lot of the guerrilla main forces had gone back into Nicaragua when the offensive failed. On the other hand the Sandinistas were still telling Ambassador Pezzullo in Managua that they were not helping. The new Administration seemed to feel Nicaragua was definitively communist, but I still had some hope that, seeing a strong anti-communist Administration, the Sandinistas would decide to cooperate with us and seek some light between themselves and the Cubans and Soviets.

I tried to buy some time and some flexibility. The AID mission director from Managua was in Washington in January or early February, and I worked out a scheme with him such that we would not disburse any significant AID money. When requests for money would come in, the AID mission would ask for more documents and more justification. These delays would appear to be just the normal bureaucratic AID process. But such stalling would buy a few weeks without making a decision to stop aid while not actually disbursing the aid. Then, if we decided to go ahead, we'd disburse a lot at once. If we decided not to go ahead, that money wouldn't be lost. I didn't want the new Administration to make a decision precipitously which would be seen in Latin America and elsewhere as just Reagan's anti-communist bias. If we cut off aid later, we would have built the case that we had no choice because of the law's terrorism provision and the actions of the Sandinistas.

I also tried, with much help from Haig and INR, to improve our intelligence on what the Nicaraguans were doing. The Agency and other intelligence collectors were very heavily tasked. You say Casey said he was very impacted by Central America. Certainly, in that first six weeks between Haig and me, and I think Dick Allen too, an awful lot of requirements were put on the Agency, and it was not well positioned to handle Central American taskings. I'm sure this weakness was frustrating for the new Director. Central American intelligence was what his President and his gang wanted, and Casey's agency couldn't produce it. So I suspect, although I did not hear many complaints, that he rattled around a good deal. I know Bob Inman was very frustrated with the lack of raw intelligence, and he quickly broke a lot of bureaucratic crockery. Central America got a top priority on many collection platforms. The embarrassment of the intelligence agencies was only compounded by the Glassman intelligence gold mine which we declassified and used as the basis of a State Department White Paper giving major support to the President's policy.

*Q: Aside from the question of intelligence, to the best of your knowledge, were steps taken during that period toward organizing the contras as an anti-Sandinista force during those early months of '81?*

BUSHNELL: None during the first months.

*Q: Actually there was some covert war during the Carter period.*

BUSHNELL: I don't think there was any covert war during the Carter Administration or even early in the Reagan Administration, at least not with US involvement. There was some violent opposition to the Sandinistas. Even before the Sandinistas began executing former National Guard members, many got to the hills and jungles and defended themselves. Some property owners whose holding were confiscated also went to the hills or supported those who did. Some soldiers and others who had escaped into Honduras appear to have made aggressive visits back to Nicaragua. Such opposition really started right after the takeover in July of 1979. Many of the rural indigenous people along the Atlantic coast traditionally resisted central government interference, and they resisted the Sandinistas as they had Somoza. Then there was the Argentine connection. When the Montoneros were defeated in Argentina by the military in 1976 and 1977, the Montonero leadership went to Havana with their money. They had, it's estimated, something between 80 and 100 million dollars that they had gotten mainly from kidnappings. While they

were in Havana, the Argentine military continued to consider them as their enemy. These were the people that had killed their colleagues and tried to kill them. But there wasn't much the Argentine military could do about them in Cuba. The Argentine military learned, I think in June of 1979, that the Montoneros had joined the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. The lights went on in Argentine military heads. Now the Montoneros had put themselves in a place where the Argentines might get at them. The Argentine military began virtually with the fall of Somoza – they may even have tried to work with Somoza before – to find a way to attack their blood enemies, the Montoneros.

After the fall of Somoza, the Montoneros, stupidly in my view, actually set up a base and controlled the Managua airport. They had their building there and were quite visible. This was certainly a challenge to the Argentine military and intelligence services. The Argentines moved quickly to establish operations, mainly in Honduras. They began to recruit Nicaraguans who were against the Sandinistas in an effort to get the Montoneros. Of course, many of the Nicaraguans had other agenda, but it made a marriage of convenience as the Argentines began organizing their covert operation. I don't think the Argentines had the intention or capability to support a full-scale war. They hoped to organize attacks on the Montoneros. They didn't really care about the Sandinistas. There were a few shooting confrontations in the course of 1980 and the first part of 1981. I've never seen any US intelligence that defines the Argentine operations; the Argentines told me they ran quite a big operation, but they probably exaggerated.

After January 20th of 1981, my primary interest was getting better intelligence on the Nicaraguan role with the Salvador guerrillas. ARA was responsible for complying with the Central American Assistance Act that provided assistance could not go to a government which was supporting terrorism. Of course, we were also interested in what was happening in Nicaragua itself, especially the growing role of the Soviets and Cubans. Some of the intelligence, once we got it, was fairly explosive. We got aerial photography of military camps in Nicaragua which were identical to the standard military camp in Cuba. The measurements were the same, the buildings were the same, everything was the same. The camps in Cuba were used to train the Cuban military. Identical camps were built for the Cubans and Nicaraguans in Nicaragua, and we were able to identify a couple of these camps, including camps for training in parachute jumping, mind you, being used by the Salvadoran guerrillas. But it took us some weeks to get this sort of stuff and get it analyzed by the experts. On the ground we didn't have much at all. Our intelligence resources in Nicaragua were extremely limited. The Agency began to go all out to get intelligence resources. Of course, there's a fine line between intelligence gathering and covert operations. You might recruit a person to get intelligence, but then he'd like a gun. Do you give him a gun? If he's giving you good intelligence, you probably do. But I don't think that, in the early part of 1981, in any significant part of the Agency there was a glint in their eyes of going where they subsequently went. They were far behind the eight-ball and had far to go to get some intelligence resources. They weren't thinking far down the road.

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*Q: Allen Fires?*

BUSHNELL: Yes, I knew him. I knew most of the senior people there at that time. I had a once-a-week intelligence meeting with of the senior Latin American hands in my office. I had

attended the Assistant Secretary's similar meetings most of the time for three years. Probably in May Tom Enders began to sit in, and in June he took that over as an internal meeting even before he was confirmed. I went to meetings; I knew what was going on, but I was phasing out. It was only about May or June that the Agency was beginning to get some good assets, but these assets were certainly intelligence focused, not covert action focused. Although it was obvious and anybody could have raised it, early in 1981 I suggested that Miami was increasingly full of Nicaraguan exiles and, of course, the Agency still had a major Cuba-focused station there. The Nicaraguans in Miami wanted to go back to a non-Sandinista Nicaragua, and their interest was, therefore, different from just gathering intelligence. When you get in bed with them, things can progress in more than one direction. I don't know much about intelligence operations after July 1981.

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*Q: Do you think the United States could have done anything more than it did during that period, 1977 to 1979, to exercise a constructive influence on developments in El Salvador that might have forestalled the terrible things that happened later?*

BUSHNELL: I spent quite a bit of time in 1978 trying to find a better approach. I didn't think that our approach, essentially just to be more stand-offish and critical of the existing government, was likely to produce change. But we didn't find anything significant that we could do. No one identified any way of convincing the senior military and land-owning oligarchy that they should share power and open up the political system while doing something about ORDEN in the countryside. These issues were certainly raised on every government-to-government occasion, but there was no way that we could force change. The oligarchy and senior military saw their situation as in their own best interest. I think, with the advantage of hindsight, that, if we had been aware in 1977 and 1978 that Cuba would play as big a role in Central America as it did play in 1979 and later, including with the Salvadorian guerrillas, we might have acted differently. If we had been convincing on the Cuban threat, we might have gone in a sympathetic way to the Salvador oligarchy and military and said, "If you keep on the track you're on, you're setting yourselves up for Castro to pluck Salvador easily. We should work together on a twofold strategy. One, we need to strengthen your counter-insurgent capability, and we'll work with you on that. But only if you also adopt a second track of opening up more to democratic procedures and improved human rights."

Of course we had no idea what the Cubans were going to do; they certainly did not even know themselves in 1977 that the focus of their activities would be forced to shift from Africa and opportunities would present themselves in Central America. Moreover, it would not have been possible to convince the Carter Administration not to distance in exchange for some movement, but not movement that would have fully satisfied the human rights activists. I frankly doubt if we could have engaged President Romero initially, but we might have been able to engage people around him in the military and in the society. But El Salvador doesn't even border the Caribbean. The Salvadorans thought they would be the last target for the Cubans in Central America, and frankly so did I. The thinking of many Salvadorans changed 180 degrees with the fall of Somoza, the increased role of Cubans in Nicaragua, and the use of Nicaragua by Salvadoran guerrillas. I know of no one in Washington who put the changed situation for El Salvador in perspective in the

few months after the Sandinista take-over in July 1979. But many middle-grade Salvadoran officers saw the changed situation, and their assessment of the need for real change sparked the October 1979 coup.

*Q: Frank doesn't reflect that theme so much, but he argues in his book that prior to 1977 we might have had more leverage for influencing constructive reform in El Salvador which he felt could be useful, but he seemed to feel that as of the time he arrived there were very limited possibilities.*

BUSHNELL: I think that's right. If you go back to the early 1960s, to the beginning of the Alliance for Progress, the need for change in El Salvador was clear. When I was working with Walt Rostow at that time, we looked for the places where land redistribution was very important because of the concentration of ownership of the good land and because there wasn't any frontier land available to an expanding population. El Salvador was at the top of the list because it was a small country that had been virtually completely settled, unlike most of Latin America where there was still a frontier where people could go, chop down the bush, and plant. El Salvador's population was expanding very rapidly, and the concentration of land ownership was unusually great. Land reform was a theme of the Alliance, but the various governments in El Salvador just deflected that thrust while getting us to help with urban problems. We never pushed land reform hard. Land reform was a touchy issue and not well understood in the United States. Perhaps if we had pushed land reform back in that period, history would have been different. However, it would not have been easy to convince the ruling elite of El Salvador to see their future more in owning factories and other things than in coffee plantations and land. In the past two decades they have learned this the hard way. What El Salvador really had was not great agricultural land but cheap labor. As foreigners began to exploit this labor in factories, more Salvadorans became involved, and in the past two decades people who used to have large and rich country properties transferred their capital to businesses and factories in the cities.

*Q: Frank complained that, time and again, his embassy had the feeling that its cables to Washington were unheeded and even unread. Of course, that's an endemic of Foreign Service Officers. George Kennan was quite eloquent in making the same complaint many years ago. Frank says maybe it was just that the traffic to and from Managua was so preoccupying all of Washington that the circuits didn't have room for two crises at a time.*

BUSHNELL: I was certainly not the only person reading his cables. In 1978 and 1979 I read any policy recommendations he made. But I frankly don't recall him making any. Moreover, I'm sure the officers on the Central American desk were reading everything he sent. Since I was pressing them hard for ideas, especially in 1978 before Nicaragua became a total crisis, they would have sent any policy ideas from the Embassy to me. I recall at one point having them send a letter to the embassy specifically asking for some out-of-the-box thinking. Yes, we sent a letter to avoid clearing a cable with HA. But I don't recall that we got anything. On administrative issues such as personnel El Salvador was a hard embassy to support, and cables on these subjects might well have been given too little attention; generally I did not become involved unless there was a major problem or conflict. I think Frank pointed out that the shrill rhetoric from Patt Derian and from others about El Salvador was complicating his ability to even dialog with the people in positions of power in the government and the military. I agreed with him, but there was little I could do short of a major policy initiative that would have presented an alternative that we could defend as more

likely to make progress. Thus his point may be, “Look, I’m here trying to convince the government to move policy in the direction you want them to go. You’re making my job much harder by the public rhetoric and by reducing my staff and by taking away the few carrots that I might have to offer. Nobody has any reason to listen to me, particularly since I don’t have a very nice message. So how can I get my job done?” There were more than one or two ambassadors that felt that way. But I have no recollection of any message put that clearly by Divine.

*Q: He also complained in the book that, as El Salvador’s political problems worsened, the embassy was besieged with high-level visits from Washington which, he said, more often than not were misconstrued by influential Salvadorans, and he thought that, rather than imposing such visits on an embassy, the Department would be well advised to consult with the embassy when they were planning such a visit and try to be a little more restrained and send the senior people out only when it really seemed warranted, when it seemed something constructive could be done. Do you think that was a legitimate complaint? He said whenever Pete Vaky or Bill Bowdler would come, there would be all kinds of speculation as to what they were saying and doing, and this was quite counterproductive.*

BUSHNELL: I don’t recall Assistant Secretary Bowdler visiting during Frank’s time there. In fact, I seem to recall that when Bowdler went on the nuns’ mission, it was his first visit to El Salvador as assistant secretary. Frank left before Bowdler had been in office more than a few months. Bowdler might have had a stop or two in El Salvador earlier while he was on the OAS mission trying to resolve the Nicaragua conflict, but such visits would have been focused on Nicaragua. Vaky may have visited there once, stopped there briefly.

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*Q: What were your discussions with Haig about?*

BUSHNELL: They were about Central America, primarily about El Salvador at first and then about Nicaragua. Carter had made the decision on January 16 to resume arms sales for the first time in three years with munitions sent right away to replace what the Salvadoran military had used up during the guerrillas’ all-out offensive. But this initial supply was an emergency measure. The new Administration would have to address what, if anything, it would do in the longer term to help the military of El Salvador counter what was now for the first time seen clearly as a much expanded insurgent threat with substantial support from outside El Salvador, including Nicaragua and Cuba at least. There was a more moderate military in charge in El Salvador than at the beginning of the Carter Administration, but the level of violence and killing on all sides was considerably greater, reflecting the revolutionary changes taking place in El Salvador. The Salvadoran military had just confronted a guerrilla offensive far stronger than they had thought possible, and they had come close to losing it all. They were probably willing to play just about any game we put in front of them.

The question was what that game should be. It had to have a major military component to strengthen the military against future such offensives, made much easier because the guerrillas were supplied and trained out of Nicaragua nearly next door. Directly related to the military readiness questions were the issues of how we would deal with the deteriorated human rights

situation and the lack of action on the American nuns' killers; also there were many issues on how we would deal with continued support from Nicaragua and Cuba or beyond. Related to all these issues was what might be called the public diplomacy crisis. Few people in the United States or around the world had been paying any attention to El Salvador. If the typical citizen knew anything about recent events in El Salvador, it was that the military or someone had killed American nuns. Without a greater public understanding of the situation there was no way any Administration could provide the type of lasting support that was needed. When I reviewed the situation with Haig, he agreed and said people must see El Salvador as the place we are stopping communism and beginning its rollback. He said President Reagan was the perfect person to educate the public on this. He got the White House fully engaged; ARA prepared an endless stream of briefing papers and talking points.

Haig said it is our job in the State Department to educate the rest of the world and get support from all our friends. It was important to get support from the NATO countries, from Japan, from other Latin American countries for our policy of stopping the communists in Central America. Probably for the first time in modern history other bureaus, especially EUR, were told their first priority was to support ARA on El Salvador. Also in these early conversations, as I said earlier, Haig came up with the idea of training whole units of Salvadoran military at Fort Benning and including human rights training. Also within the first two weeks we had the visit of Seaga, in which Haig played a major part.

Also, as I mentioned, on the day Seaga arrived, the President gave the traditional reception for the Diplomatic Corps. After I got the Seagas and their delegation settled at Blair House, my wife and I walked across the street to the White House. We were somewhat late, but our rank would have put us at the end of the reception line anyway. Not far ahead of us was the chargé from Nicaragua, also toward the end of the line because she was not an ambassador. Haig was greeting the guests and introducing them to the Reagans. I remember him really sending a message to the chargé from Nicaragua. She was a Sandinista revolutionary leader, and during the early 1970's her role had been to befriend, let's call it, one of Somoza's senior officers so that the Sandinistas could execute him in the bedroom. Haig greeted her as the military world's most dangerous girlfriend and went on to warn her that, if her government continued to support the Salvadoran guerrillas, it would become the biggest enemy of the U.S. in Latin America. When I spoke with her later, she said she had been hit with and an atomic bomb. I commented that the message seemed to have gotten through.

I remember that William Clark, who was the deputy Secretary early on, was given the job of having lunch with the Latin American ambassadors to make our pitch on El Salvador. I arranged for one of the ambassadors to host the lunch, and I introduced him. Then he had me make the presentation because he was brand new to all these issues and hadn't really mastered the brief.

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*Q: Rob Warren emphasized the other day the dramatic contrast in the attitudes of the Carter and Reagan Administrations toward Central America and Cuba in particular, as illustrated by Haig's pressure on you to do something about Cuba. Was it really that intense and unrealistic?*

BUSHNELL: We had several discussions about Cuba, including one after I went to that strange meeting on Cuba at the White House. However, there was no pressure on me to do something about Cuba. We did want to get a clear message to Cuba that the new Administration was not going to permit Cuba to continue running around the world helping leftish groups use violence to take over countries. Where I was sort of caught at first was that Haig wanted to blame the Salvadoran all-out offensive, the Salvadoran insurgency, and the Nicaraguan takeover 100 percent on Cuba and 70 percent on Russia. At first we really didn't have, because of the intelligence gap, the hard evidence. We didn't know just what role Cuba and the Soviets had played in training and equipping the guerrillas. Until we got the breakthrough in early February when Jon Glassman found these documents in El Salvador which detailed the insurgent leader's trip to Moscow and then to other places arranging arms, we only had hard evidence of occasional shipments from Nicaragua to El Salvador, and much of that was classified. But those captured documents conclusively showed the key and gigantic role of Castro in uniting the insurgent groups and facilitating the movement of arms. They also showed the central role of Moscow in arranging the arms. Before these documents were found Haig was sure in his mind that this was the case, but frankly I had doubted there had been a major Russian role. I was caught between Haig's instinct, which turned out to be 100 percent correct, and the available facts. It was my job, the job of the career State staff, to flush out everything we had and then to tell the Secretary we just didn't have the intelligence on the Russians and Cubans. Thus for me at least, the breakthrough with Jon Glassman finding this hoard of documents was a godsend, because they provided the evidence to prove Haig's instinct right. This was the evidence in their own hand, and we were then able to use this to support what in more general terms Haig had been saying.

While I don't recall being under pressure to do something about Cuba, we did have a problem with our chargé there, Wayne Smith, who early in the Administration sent in a cable arguing that we had to move forward improving relations with Cuba. It was 180 degrees opposite of what the Administration was intending to do. Moreover, it was more rhetoric than reason. I don't think Haig actually saw this first cable, although someone apparently told him about it or gave him a brief summary. I sent a message to Wayne or I called him – I'm not sure which – and told him that the new Administration was moving in a different direction and this sort of message wasn't going to do any good. I suggested he wait for Cuban policy to become clearer and then, if he wanted to, send a message in the dissent channel. Within maybe two weeks he sent a second message along the same lines. This one Haig did see. He called me and said, "John, have you seen this message from Havana?" I said yes. He said, "I thought you said this was a good guy." Haig didn't know Wayne had gone directly against my request by sending the second one. But Haig was angry and said, "Get him out of there." Wayne was removed after a replacement was identified.

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*Q: The Reagan Administration seemed to be so preoccupied with Cuba and Central American during its early months that it largely ignored the rest of Latin America. Is that the way you see it?*

BUSHNELL: No. I would say that El Salvador and Nicaragua, and Cuban to the extent it was involved in these two countries, were taken as a major worldwide problem – the first Reagan priority worldwide. The rest of Latin America got the normal attention. The normal attention for Latin America or anywhere else is a lot less than the attention that's given to a major worldwide

problem, but it is not no attention. The Seaga visit in the first two weeks – the first official visit – certainly represented attention from the President and numerous other senior officials.

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*Q: What lessons did you learn from your experience in ARA, your experience as a Principal DAS under four assistant secretaries, as overseer of regional economic policy in the hemisphere, as a key participant in the transition process, and as Acting Assistant Secretary during the early Reagan period? What do you know now that you never would have known if you hadn't done it? Not just the facts but about overall how the State Department works, how foreign policy is made, how we do things right and we do things wrong, not specific issues.*

BUSHNELL: It's certainly a general perception that the differences between administrations were greatest on this set of Latin American issues, human rights and other things to do with Latin America. If you were to pick areas where the Carter Administration and the Reagan Administration were different, these Latin American issues would certainly be one area that one would pick. However, sitting with an exceptional view on both sides of that fence, I would say the actual differences in policy were much less than the public thinks or that the literature makes out. There was a lag at the end of the Carter Administration in catching up with the progress that Latin America was making on human rights. A number of Latin American countries such as Chile and Argentina had stopped major human rights abuses. Some might see this improvement as a credit to the Carter human rights policies, but I think it was largely the result of the internal dynamics in these countries. The end of an administration is not the time people focus on policy changes. It's easy to leave an issue to the next administration whether it's the same people or different people. Thus I think a second Carter Administration would have done most of the things the Reagan Administration did, at least during the first six months. Of course, the turnaround on El Salvador in terms of supplying the Salvadoran military with lethal material came in the last week of the Carter Administration. The Reagan Administration would have done the same thing, and a second Carter Administration would have come up with a follow-up package to strengthen the Salvador military and improve its human rights performance probably not much different from the Haig package, although whole units would not have been trained in the States. If the Carter Administration had gotten the captured documents on Nicaraguan, Cuban, and Russian involvement in El Salvador, it would have stopped aid to Nicaragua as the Reagan Administration did. It might also have cast Central America in the worldwide anti-communist light although probably not as quickly and decisively as the Reagan Administration did.

I came away from that transition, which is seen generally as about as big a policy swing as the pendulum takes, understanding that the pendulum doesn't swing very far in US foreign policy. In fact our policy on most things is pretty much the same regardless of who wins elections. The biggest differences are in rhetoric – what you say about it rather than what you do. The rhetoric emphasis in Latin America was in terms of stopping Communism and Castro in the Reagan Administration while it was on the improvement of human rights in the Carter Administration. In both cases rhetoric was exaggerated. I participated in that exaggeration, probably more on the anti-communist side because I was then Acting Assistant Secretary while I had been trying to moderate the human rights extremists during the Carter years.

*Q: Would you have any comment regarding the performance of the intelligence community, the CIA, as you gathered it from your experience in ARA?*

BUSHNELL: I think everybody would agree that we had major intelligence gaps on Central America. I'm reluctant to use the word 'failure' because failure implies that you tried and didn't succeed. That's the wrong description for what happened.

*Q: Well, if you put that many billions of dollars into it and get little fruit from it, that sounds to me like you tried and didn't succeed.*

BUSHNELL: But that's taking intelligence in general. Through the Carter Administration the Agency spent less and less in Latin America. We closed stations; we cut back stations; we refused to gather intelligence from human rights violators; we did less and less. Latin America wasn't where the big bucks went for intelligence. It is surprisingly to me in retrospect, although I have no recollection that this really occurred to me at the time, that our intelligence on Cuba was so weak when Cuba is just 90 miles from the United States. Maybe on Cuba there was an intelligence failure. We should have known about their activities in this hemisphere, especially when they were shipping plane loads of arms to Nicaraguan guerrillas and later ship loads for the Salvadoran guerrillas. In Central America itself we really didn't try. Perhaps this was a failure on everybody's part including mine. I should have been saying, beginning in 1978, look, we need more intelligence on guerrillas in places like Nicaragua and El Salvador, but none of us anticipated in 1978 that we were going to have Nicaragua taken over by a Communist regime and El Salvador nearly taken over by one.

*Q: I've always felt it should be up to the State Department, political economic reporters from the embassies, to give the analysis as to what the realities are in the country.*

BUSHNELL: The realities, yes, and State Department reporting may have been spotty, but that's not where there was an omission or a failure. The Foreign Service is seldom in a position to report on clandestine activities; that is the job of the CIA. The fact that Cuba drew together the Nicaraguan guerrilla leaders and then secretly supplied them with the help of Venezuela is the sort of thing the Agency is supposed to find out before it happens or at least as it happens. Generally embassies don't talk with guerrilla leaders.

**MARCIA BERNBAUM  
USAID  
Managua (1980)**

*Marcia Bernbaum was the daughter of a Foreign Service officer and born in Quito, Ecuador. She joined USAID in 1977 as an International Development Intern. Her placements abroad included Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras and Kenya. Ms. Bernbaum was interviewed by W. Haven North in 1999.*

BERNBAUM: We were not convinced and persuaded Buster to change our assignment. We were

then assigned to Nicaragua. We actually really wanted to go to Ecuador to work with John Sanbraillo. I would have done anything to go back to my country of birth. But Buster said, "Ecuador has a small program. Nicaragua is going to be our show piece. The Sandinistas have just come to power and we are putting in 75 million dollars in economic support funds (ESF)." This was the first big ESF allotment outside of Israel and Egypt. So we left in June of '80 with a four year old and a six month old and arrived in Nicaragua in August.

I'll never forget. We were in Berkeley visiting my brother and sister-in-law. The night before leaving for Managua we were watching the evening news. There was a guy on the news who was campaigning for the presidency. His name was Ronald Reagan. He said on this interview, "When I become President of the United States, I will cease all assistance to Nicaragua."

I turned to Eric and said, "Do you think we are going to the right country?"

When we arrived a day later everybody was on a high - the ambassador, the Mission Director, my husband. I was neutral. They were very excited about supporting the revolution. But by November when Reagan was elected as President, the Carter Administration had concluded that the Sandinistas were not Nicaragua's hope for the future.

At the time, I was working on the redesign of a loan that had been approved under the Somoza regime and put on hold. When Reagan was inaugurated as President in January, '81 he made good on his campaign promise. Three days after his inauguration, we were advised that the AID mission was to be cut in half. We simply rolled over the border to Honduras.

I would like to raise a point before we go on, and it has to do with values. The prior November, I went to Washington with the Mission Director, Larry Harrison. We had redesigned the education project and, in the course of the design, were faced with issues of commingling funds with the Soviets.

*Q: Commingling means what?*

BERNBAUM: AID was prohibited by law to invest funds in a program that also had Soviet or Cuban funds going into it. In this case, we were dealing with thousands of Cubans flooding into the Nicaraguan education system, as advisors and teachers. One of the things the Sandinistas wanted us to do under the redesigned project was to build schools. However, there was the risk that some of these schools would have Cuban teachers. To address this potential problem, we met with the Minister of Education. Larry said, "We need your solemn promise that you will not put any Cuban teachers in schools built with AID funds." He said he could do that.

Another Sandinista request didn't work. The Ministry of Education, under the redesign, had asked AID to help design and finance an audiovisual center which would have the capability to print texts and other materials. Yet the Sandinistas were, at the time, publishing literacy manuals that opened on the first page with a diatribe against the Yankee imperialists and the bourgeois. Larry went to the Minister of Education and said, "Mr. Minister, this just will not do. Our U.S. Congress will not agree to financing a printing press that publishes material that is critical of the United States. I need your promise that you will not publish anything on AID-funded printing presses that

is critical of the U.S."

The Minister of Education said he could not promise this would not happen, so we agreed not to support the Sandinista government's request for an audiovisual center.

When we took the redesigned project to Washington, we knew that some elements were well designed and others were very iffy. The political situation made it such that there were a number of aspects we had no control over. I remember on the way up saying to the Mission Director, "Larry, what are we going to say when they raise some issues that are very legitimate?"

He said, "We'll be honest. Tell them the truth." He knew that AID/Washington was going to approve the project because of the political nature of the program.

I remember going into the review. The Mission Director turned to me and let me take the lead as the technical person, even though I was an intern. Buster Brown was chairing the review. And the issues were fired at us. Some of them I could handle fine. However, in a number of instances my response was that the issues were on target but that we couldn't answer them. These were things we were going to have to look at in project implementation.

Buster Brown, who had a reputation for being very tough when he chaired reviews, turned to the two of us and said, "You know, Larry and Marcia, I have to congratulate you. This is the first time in a long time I've seen such an honest review." Another confirmation that the values I held near and dear and continue to hold near and dear - honesty and integrity - were being rewarded by the system.

*Q: Did he approve the redesign?*

BERNBAUM: He did. It was approved in November. However, due to the overall political situation, it was put on hold in December.

*Q: What was it supposed to do?*

BERNBAUM. It had several components. Limited school construction at the primary level, construction and equipping an agricultural university, support for vocational training. As I recall, due to our own limitations with commingling, there was more bricks and mortar than we would have wanted.

*Q: Do you remember any of the issues for example?*

BERNBAUM: Goodness, I don't remember the issues. That was a long time ago. Sorry.

*Q: What was your impression of the Sandinistas?*

BERNBAUM: It was a fascinating experience. I felt like I was in a cartoon, horror thriller eating popcorn and peanuts as a participant observer. The Minister of Education, Dr. Carlos Tunnerman, was a highly respected educator within and outside of Nicaragua. His Vice Minister was a Marxist

who would have nothing do with AID or with me. I never met him. The person who was assigned to be our counterpart was the head of Planning, Juan Batista Arrien. He had been the Rector of the Catholic University before joining the Sandinista government, and he is now is back there ù a fiery Spaniard and a former priest. When I wasn't in meetings with him, he had the Cuban advisors meeting with him. I have several memories of going down to meet with him and seeing the Cuban advisors scurry out of his office. A couple of times I tried to get them to talk to me. They refused.

The Sandinistas had a long range vision. For them a revolution is a generational event. It begins with children, preferably of preschool age. Those are the hearts and minds you are going to be able to change. The first thing they did was literally to go to the parks throughout the country and fix up the swings and slides. They introduced cartoon programs in the afternoon on television. They immediately started rewriting the texts. They were excellent in the whole area of mass social marketing - very effective. I had to hand it to them. While I admired their effectiveness, I disagreed entirely with their messages. When the first set of revised texts came out, sure enough, one found in social studies and other subjects the predictable diatribe against the Yankee imperialists and the bourgeois.

I remember watching cartoon programs with my kids in the afternoon. Suddenly the cartoon would stop, and you would see what would be like an advertisement. In it you would see a flash of U.S. Marines coming on shore shooting people and raping women. This is what the three and four-year-olds were exposed to.

**STEPHEN BOSWORTH**  
**Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Western Hemisphere Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1981-1983)**

*Ambassador Bosworth was born and raised in Michigan and educated at Dartmouth College and George Washington University. Entering the Foreign Service in 1961 he served abroad in Panama, Madrid and Paris before becoming Ambassador to Tunisia, where he served from 1979 to 1981, to the Philippines (1984-1987) and to the Republic of Korea (1997-2000). The Ambassador also was a member of the Department's Policy Planning Staff, and he played a major role in the US-Japan Foundation and the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization. In 2009 Ambassador Bosworth was named the President's Special Representative for North Korean Policy. He was interviewed by Michael Mahoney in 2003.*

*Q: What years?*

BOSWORTH: This was June of '81 through the end of '82 when I left. So, I was there 18 months. Now in that period we had the civil war in Central America, Nicaragua, the Contras, El Salvador, Guatemala massacres, tremendous violence. Then Allen Ryder who was then a correspondent for the New York Times in Central America described it to me at one point. He said that he had put in for a transfer and wanted to leave. I said, "Allen, why are you leaving?" He said, "Because I'm not going to sit here any longer and watch my friends kill each other." That's what was going on in

Central America. It was just awful. The Sandinistas who had taken control of Nicaragua were viewed by the West and the United States and elsewhere in the world as sort of the reaction to Somoza. They were viewed as the good guys. It became I think very clear very early on that they were not good guys. They had their own agenda and it was just as nasty in some ways as Somoza's agenda. Then subsequently we had the Falklands war when Argentina tried to take back the Falkland Islands. We had the debt crisis in Mexico and it was just one thing after another. I found myself in that office from 8:00 in the morning until 9:00 or 10:00 at night, six days a week. So, it was a very difficult time and a time of some spiritual torment. I have some sympathy for the people who are now working in the Iraq issue for example, the FSOs. You know you are involved in a policy, which is very controversial within your own country. We were invited to occasionally go out and appear on college campuses and make speeches. You did so at some peril. I remember one Saturday afternoon leaving my office and walking into central D.C. just to watch the demonstrations. I was very struck by the similarities between what was going on then and what had gone on just a few years before that on Vietnam. There were many things about the policy I didn't like, I wasn't comfortable with.

*Q: Like what?*

BOSWORTH: I didn't think it was all being directed from Moscow and Havana. I thought Moscow and Havana stood to benefit from some of the things that were going on, but I thought basically it was all indigenously based. I didn't make the Sandinistas or the insurgents in El Salvador any better and it didn't make the right in El Salvador and Guatemala any worse. They were bad enough as it was. I guess I accepted that the U.S. because of proximity and interest in the region had to be somehow involved. In the end I think our presence made a difference. I think that the basic decision that we made in '81 to support a process of democratic elections in El Salvador provided the kind of third way for Central America. We worked very hard at that. We brought in election observers and supported a process that had a lot of credibility. Over the next several years long after I had left the scene, elections were the way that the place was eventually transformed or at least pacified. Salvador, Honduras eventually even Nicaragua.

*Q: But there was sort of a feeling, one was the feeling that bureaucratically a lot of people in ARA were rather mistreated in this deal, on the internal stuff by the attitude of the administration. Secondly, that the U.S. itself was out there really messing around in areas that maybe it shouldn't have been messing around in and doing it in some very devious and dubious ways. That's not my view, but that's a view.*

BOSWORTH: Yes, I know that's a view. Given the context of the time I can understand why some people would have that view. Enders came into ARA. I arrived there three months later and I didn't know many of the people. I hadn't worked in the bureau. They knew me to some extent but only by reputation for my time in EB, but I was greeted as the guy, the savior, the person they would come to when they didn't dare to go to Enders because they were so afraid of him. He was, you know, this guy is six eight and very austere.

*Q: I remember when he walked down, he was beautifully dressed, tall, and when he walked down the corridor, you just got out of the way. He didn't even look to see.*

BOSWORTH: He expected them to get out of his way.

*Q: He was formidable and you had to be the nice guy.*

BOSWORTH: I was the nice guy. I worked for Tom before and I respected him and I had a relationship with him which I could speak my mind and I wasn't afraid to do that.

*Q: Did you feel in fact that ARA was short on talent?*

BOSWORTH: No, they had some very talented people. Now, we did recruit some people into ARA for key jobs it turned out for the most part to be very good.

*Q: I remember for example the case, wasn't there a guy named Jim who was considered a very capable guy and he got sent to Afghanistan or something?*

BOSWORTH: Jim was very capable. Well, he was sent someplace, I don't know where he went. Jim's problem was that the republicans, particularly republicans on the Hill, had targeted him during the Carter administration as someone they didn't like. So, that had nothing to do with Enders. That was done right from the White House. There was no way that Enders or I could have protected Jim. I dealt with Jim a lot trying to help him find a place to go and he did finally.

*Q: I think he went literally to Nepal or Afghanistan.*

BOSWORTH: He then came back of course later and he kept his head down for a few years and came back and I think finished as ambassador in Argentina. We brought in people like Craig Johnstone who was not an ARA hand, but came in and became director of the Office of Central American Affairs.

*Q: Wasn't Negroponte an ambassador somewhere in that period?*

BOSWORTH: John was in Honduras.

*Q: He was also known in ARA.*

BOSWORTH: No, he was primarily in East Asia. Ted Briggs was an ARA figure and he served for a year as the other deputy who was, well, at the time there was just two of us and then there was just one deputy, me.

*Q: Really?*

BOSWORTH: Yes. Tom brought in somebody, we brought in somebody as an executive assistant, sort of ran the bureau internally. A very smart thing to do and I think it really was much more efficient than the traditional structure. This was a guy who was a fairly senior person. He was basically an administrative officer.

*Q: Who was that?*

BOSWORTH: Tony Gillespie.

*Q: Oh, yes.*

BOSWORTH: Tony used this as a springboard. He then went on and had a very illustrious career and served as ambassador I think twice.

*Q: Within the White House where would you say the intense pressure came from on Central America?*

BOSWORTH: It came to some extent from the president himself although I found Reagan pretty disengaged on most issues. It came from political appointees there who were very conscious of their and others' ideological postures. It came from Bill Casey.

*Q: I was going to get to that yes.*

BOSWORTH: Bill Casey. This was the beginning of my relationship with Bill, although I had known him when he was under secretary years before for economic affairs, but Bill was very involved in Central America to the point which I think he basically did some very unfortunate things. He was not honest and straightforward to put it mildly. I read Bob Woodward's book called Veil. It was one of the best treatments I've seen of Casey. He can be a very engaging guy and was very smart and very determined, but very devious and duplicitous. I had to go up with him a few times to testify in closed session before the intelligence committees on the subject of Nicaragua and the Contras. I was very much the second seat at this hearing, but Bill was, he never really misled them, but he was certainly less than forthcoming about what was going on.

*Q: The initial national security advisor was Richard Allen I guess at the beginning?*

BOSWORTH: Yes, I didn't really know him.

*Q: Was he engaged do you think in this? In other words, if you stack up, it always seemed to me that if you stack up the amount of attention that was given to this area of Central America versus in a sense what you might call a quantifiable American interest in the area, that there was some kind of huge disproportion between those two things and yet the summaries and it really is an ideological issue as a theological question for some segment, I guess primarily of the Republican party but there probably were some democratic hawks around.*

BOSWORTH: As in 2001 this time, that time also, a lot of this was a reaction to what had gone before. You remember Reagan came into office and announced himself as loyal to America's friends pointing to what had happened to the Shah in Iran, pointing to what had happened to Somoza in Nicaragua as people who had been long time friends of the United States. We had abandoned them and he said we will not do that anymore. That was part of it. The other part of it was a conviction on the part of many people that this was all being directed from Cuba and there were ties between the Sandinistas and the Cubans, no question. But Al Haig for example used to talk rabidly about the need to go to the source. If you were going to solve the problem with Central

America, you had to solve the problem with Cuba. I'll never forget one of the most bizarre exercises I ever participated in in all my years in government. I was the newly arrived principal deputy in ARA. Tom I think was traveling someplace. Haig charged us with producing a set of proposals on what to do with the boat people, Marielitos, the refugees that had come out of Cuba in '78 and '79 who for the most part were really bad people. Most of them were in a federal penitentiary in Atlanta and there was a lot of agitation on the right in the United States to get rid of these people, send them back. So, Haig charged me and the fellow who was the chief of the joint staff in the defense department to come up with proposals for how we could do this. Of course it was a totally bizarre exercise, we were never really going to do it. At one point we came forward with a proposal, which we presented to Haig first, and then he called Weinberger over and we presented it to both of them. It was to take a derelict freighter, shackle these guys inside the hold, put the freighter on autopilot and send it up onto the beach outside Havana. Haig actually said he thought it was a great idea and commended us for our imagination. Weinberger was appalled and then I think Bill Casey may have been there and Casey or somebody from the agency made the point that beach was where the Russians in Havana went to sun bathe Sunday afternoons and maybe it wouldn't be a good idea to have a freighter come roaring in. That was the sort of stuff that was going on there. All the stuff that was surrounding the activities in the Contras and the effort to try to interdict the supply of equipment and arms from Nicaragua that was going into Honduras and going into El Salvador, which was really happening, but the notion of how you would stop this. The agency, a fellow named Dewey Claridge has written a book. Dewey is a delightful rogue and I really enjoyed him, but he would come up with some of the most harebrained schemes. I mean these people all needed adult supervision.

*Q: Later to be a big central figure in the Iran Contra.*

BOSWORTH: Oh, without question. Ollie North was involved in all this.

*Q: So, there you are and so the Central American thing is being seen through this prism again of East West relations with Cuba as one thing and behind them the USSR, so this is part of the great struggle and it's also I guess a kind of in another way kind of manageable thing. I mean its something that we think we can really put our footprint in. You have all these issues in front of you. When Enders got into it how did he feel about it? Does he really bring himself up to speed on the issues and what did he think?*

BOSWORTH: Right. He thought as I did that we had to try to find a third way to as I put it earlier that it was feckless to try to win militarily.

*Q: The third way being in a sense if you had Somoza and his notion on one hand and the Sandinistas on the another, there had to be something in-between.*

BOSWORTH: There had to be something better than both of them.

*Q: Yes, and it might be actually something approaching some semblance of democracy.*

BOSWORTH: We had to find something that would appeal to Ronald Reagan and basically we found elections, democracy. We were laughed at early on, but you know, Enders deserves great

credit for having sold this concept within an administration that despite its rhetoric was somewhat hostile to this whole notion.

*Q: Well, what did they think they could do?*

BOSWORTH: They wanted to go to the source and get rid of, you know, cut off the head which was Cuba.

*Q: How were you going to do that?*

BOSWORTH: Damned if I could figure out a way.

*Q: No, but I mean if they said that, did someone then follow up and say, well, we have to have an invasion of Cuba?*

BOSWORTH: Yes, that's the sort of thing that they were talking about.

*Q: Really?*

BOSWORTH: Yes.

*Q: Interesting. You dealt with this in a sense on a country by country issue I suppose. You had a central plan?*

BOSWORTH: It was all part of the same problem. Yes. The Guatemalan military, which was just awful, killing guerrillas, killing Indians who were not guerrillas, the massacres in El Salvador. Deane Hinton was the ambassador in El Salvador at that point. I used to get on the phone with him on the secure line once a day and he would tell me the latest horror stories. These people were out of control and yet because we were seen as their not protectors, but at least aligned with them in opposition to the rebels, we were being tagged with their atrocities. It wasn't until we began to see some progress on elections. There was a big election in, let's see it would have been early '82 in which Duarte won.

*Q: Napoleon Duarte.*

BOSWORTH: Napoleon Duarte. He won in El Salvador with our strong support for the process. I don't think we got too engaged in the election itself. The process was what was crucial because both the right wing and the insurgents were trying to disrupt the process. Anyway, it was a very difficult, complicated time. Finally Enders got fired.

*Q: Why was that?*

BOSWORTH: Basically for a memorandum that I wrote with his full support and in fact he asked me to do it. We had been talking for some time about what we were going to do about Nicaragua. The notion that we were going to continue to support these Contras who were coming in and basically outside U.S. direct control, public relations disaster, but on the other hand the Sandinistas

were visibly exporting their revolution into the rest of South America.

*Q: They were definitely, they were getting help from Cuba.*

BOSWORTH: They were getting help from Cuba. Cuban military equipment was arriving and they were sending money and weapons into El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Enders went down to meet with the commandants in what would have been the summer of '81 and he in his very blunt fashion said, "Look, we would probably be prepared to let you continue to live and exist here in Nicaragua, but you are trying to export this revolution to other countries and that is something that we cannot allow or cannot live with." I think it was Ortega, Daniel Ortega said to him, "You don't understand, do you? The revolution is our shield. In other words we have to keep exporting it in order to continue to survive." It was, we again decided that there had to be a third way and that basically the third way in this instance was to negotiate.

*Q: So, you draft up a memo on the Contra question?*

BOSWORTH: Yes, on the question of the Sandinistas really, what were we going to do about the Sandinistas? There was no political support in the United States for putting American troops in there to take them on, no political support for doing anything about Castro and the Contras were visibly backing up in terms of U.S. interests, so we proposed that we begin a process of negotiation with the Sandinistas and try to persuade them that we would give them certain security guarantees in return for their explicit agreement to stop aiding rebel movements elsewhere in the region.

*Q: Who was the memo going to?*

BOSWORTH: The memo was going from the Secretary of State to the White House.

*Q: Did Haig agree with that memo?*

BOSWORTH: Haig was no longer Secretary. That was when George Shultz was Secretary.

*Q: Did he agree with that?*

BOSWORTH: He basically agreed with it, yes. This was still fairly early; he hadn't been in office even a year at that point.

*Q: But it would have gone in effect as a memo from Shultz to the president?*

BOSWORTH: Yes.

*Q: So, why did Enders get fired?*

BOSWORTH: Because he was seen as responsible for the memo.

*Q: Shultz was not prepared to go to the mat to defend him at that point I gather?*

BOSWORTH: Not at that point. I mean Tom again.

*Q: Did he and Shultz clash?*

BOSWORTH: No, not really. I mean I think George had a lot of regard for Tom. Tom had put up so many backs in the White House. Bill Clark, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Bill Casey, Weinberger, all these people just wanted him gone and George Shultz had other fish to fry including issues with the Soviet Union.

*Q: Was the memo leaked and then became?*

BOSWORTH: No, it just went and when Jeane Kirkpatrick got her hands on it and Bill Clark got his hands on it it just blew up. So, I had already been asked by Shultz to go to another job and sort of that memo was almost my last act in ARA and then I moved to policy planning.

**GILBERT R. CALLAWAY**  
**Counselor for Public Affairs**  
**Managua (1982-1984)**

*Gilbert R. Callaway was born in Tennessee in 1938. He received a B.A. from Rice University, an M.A. from American University, and served in the U.S. Army from 1963 to 1965. His postings abroad included Caracas, Zagreb, Moscow, Bologna, Rome, Managua, and Madrid. He was interviewed in 1999 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

CALLAWAY: In '82 I went to Managua, Nicaragua.

*Q: That was a nice, quiet spot, particularly during the Reagan administration.*

CALLAWAY: And the Sandinista years, yes.

*Q: You might have a little to talk about there.*

CALLAWAY: Right.

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*Q: Today is the 14th of May, 1999. Gil, you were in Nicaragua from '82 to when?*

CALLAWAY: '84.

*Q: How did you feel about being assigned there and what were you hearing about the situation before you arrived?*

CALLAWAY: I had served in Latin America before and had some Spanish which by this time had become somewhat confused with the Italian. I still retained an interest in Latin American affairs. The Sandinista revolution had kicked out Somoza in 1979. The Reagan administration was making quite a show of being concerned about the Sandinistas - that this was going to become the first foothold on the mainland of Latin America, after Castro in Cuba, of the communists.

When I received this assignment, I objected strenuously. It was the first time I had ever done that in my Foreign Service career. I said I would be very happy to work on Nicaraguan affairs, I was concerned about the issues myself, but I felt that I wanted to come back to Washington because that was where the decisions were being made. I did not want to go to Nicaragua for a variety of reasons, some substantive, but also because I had three young children and the situation, both from a schooling and medical point of view, from everything that we were hearing was deteriorating rapidly.

It ended up that I was ordered to go to Nicaragua and was told that the combination that I had, background in both the Soviet Union and in Latin America, was unique. I'm not sure that I believed that but anyway that was the line they were feeding me, and there was nobody else who could go as the counselor for public affairs at that particular point to Nicaragua. For the first and last time in my Foreign Service career, I went without my family. I chose to do the separation and have them back here in Washington because of the schooling and medical reasons that I mentioned.

I went off quite reluctantly and unhappily to Nicaragua although once I had decided I would accept the assignment, I did a lot of consulting in Washington, both academically and within various agencies that were operating there. I knew people at State, Defense, and the CIA from my Latin American days and from my European days, and I felt that I was pretty well prepared. As a consequence, it turned out to be one of the most fascinating assignments I had. It is sort of like the Soviet Union, you can't say you really enjoyed it, but it was extremely educational and challenging throughout, and I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the Nicaraguans and maintain contact with some to this day.

*Q: What were you getting as you were doing this briefing, going through both the academic and government agencies? There seemed to be a fairly solid split. Were you getting that?*

CALLAWAY: No. To be quite honest what I got was a spectrum of opinion. At one end of the spectrum there were people who were solidly convinced that this was indeed a vital threat to the security of the hemisphere, and the security of the United States. President Reagan at one point, I can't remember the exact quote, but said, "Next week they may be in Harlingen, Texas." At the other end were people who felt that we were beating up on a small, poor, underdeveloped Latin American country which had suffered tremendously over the decades from U.S. intervention. Indeed U.S. marines had been dispatched to Nicaragua on a number of occasions before the second world war and we had maintained a presence there up until the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt when the last of the Marines came out. There was a spectrum in between those extremes of, "we are the devil, or we are the angels."

I found the more time I spent in Nicaragua, the more that was the message I tried to give not only to the Nicaraguan contacts I had, but to the constant flow of American officials and do-gooders,

priests, humanitarian workers, students, and you name it, who were a constant responsibility for those of us in the embassy and particularly for those of us who were responsible for meeting and dealing with the public. Both ambassadors that I served with there, and I, were constantly meeting with Americans who were coming down who also matched that spectrum from right to left, or from absolutely opposed, to absolutely in favor. Part of the message I think that we tried to give is that this is a gray situation; there are no right or wrong answers; it is a very difficult and complex situation.

We tried to convey to them that if they really strongly opposed the policy, that unlike the regime that was being installed in Nicaragua at the time, we did have a democracy and they should come back here and inform their elected political leaders. They should get them out of office if they didn't agree with them, or convince them to change their minds if they did. If they strongly felt that this regime was a threat, then we tried to show them a little bit of just what a poor, underdeveloped country Nicaragua was, and in my strong opinion I think it certainly was no direct threat to the power of the United States.

*Q: Was Managua itself pretty well devastated by the earthquake? Had it recovered much?*

CALLAWAY: It reminded me of nothing so much as a modern day Pompeii. Anyone who has ever visited Pompeii, as you certainly have, is struck by the sense of feeling that you are walking through a city which had been suddenly deserted, devastated to a degree. You see streets, you see parts of buildings, you can certainly get a sense of what shops and homes were like. Downtown Managua, which had been devastated by an earthquake in 1972, so it was just about 10 years later, in which over 5,000 people had been killed, had hardly been reconstructed.

In my opinion, it was one of the nails in the coffin of the Somoza regime that a lot of money went down there, both privately donated money and American aid money, and other sources of income, to help Nicaragua restore itself and recover from this terrible disaster, and it had simply been stolen. It had been used by Somoza and his family and crony connections to build shopping centers and other things. It had not been used in large part to restore the country. This was very obvious to the common people. Nicaragua is a very small country. There are only three million people. People know each other, and they know what is happening in the country. I think that to go down there and see it for yourself, was an affirmation of why Somoza did have to go, not only from a repressive point of view, but from simply a robber baron point of view. He ran it as though it were his private holdings.

One was struck constantly throughout by the U.S. attitude. I presume this is a historic fact, but we deal with a lot of unsavory characters throughout the world. Back in the days when Roosevelt was dealing with Somoza, and the Somoza family goes back that far with the original Anastacio, FDR said, "He's a son of a bitch, but he is our son of a bitch." Some people tended to look at the Sandinistas as well, they are sons of bitches and they are the other guy's sons of bitches; in this case the Soviets or Castro.

*Q: Who was our ambassador when you first arrived? Who were the two ambassadors?*

CALLAWAY: The two ambassadors were both very good career ambassadors. The first was Tony

Quainton, who is one of the names, if you haven't...

*Q: I've had a long interview with him.*

CALLAWAY: Great. He's recently retired as you know after being director general of the Foreign Service. He was replaced by, unfortunately deceased, Harry Bergold. Quainton came with a tremendous amount of experience in underdeveloped areas of the world, and Bergold came in with a lot of experience in communist countries; he had been ambassador to Hungary. They came with different perspectives on the country, but both had quite a bit of background in dealing with Nicaragua.

*Q: How did Quainton use you when you arrived? Sort of what did he tell you he wanted to be done?*

CALLAWAY: Quainton wanted to go as far as he possibly could in normalizing relations, in trying to get some kind of a dialogue going. I thoroughly agreed with him. I like to think of myself as a people person. I like to reach out and so on. One of the disagreements that we had - I thought that Tony wanted to go further than was possible and it turned out that we both thought we were right - he wanted to open a cultural center; a place where we could teach English, have performances, and so on. All of my contacts among the Sandinistas, among the officials and opposition as well, said it wasn't going to work. Indeed it didn't work. It didn't work until a good number of years after I had gone.

He pushed in that direction and I was in favor of pushing as far as we could. Make as many contacts as you can. Convince the Sandinistas that we are not bent on seeing them all hanging from the nearest lamppost, and convince the United States administration that there were advantages to having some kind of relations, some kind of a dialogue, with the Sandinista regime.

One of the things that I tried to do, very forcefully during the two years that I was there, was to get a Fulbright exchange program reinstalled. It had existed, and then it had been cut off. I wasn't able to do it from the Sandinista side. They wouldn't agree to it, but neither would the American side. They simply said there is no reason; we are wasting our time; those people are hopeless; we are not going to have this kind of exchange. I felt frustration in both directions about trying to establish that kind of academic and educational exchange program.

*Q: When you got there and started sampling, what was your impression of the Sandinista regime? I mean you had your Soviet time and all and your Yugoslav time, what did you think of the Sandinista regime?*

CALLAWAY: I tended to agree with Harry Bergold who came later and said, "They are a bunch of rank amateurs. They don't really know what Marxism is all about." The nine commandantees who formed the directorate of the Sandinista regime came from three different factions. Tomas Borge was the oldest and was probably in his 50s at the time. He was by at least a decade, if not more, the oldest member of the nine. He and Carlos Fonseca had been among the original people who had established the Sandinista Party.

Just a little bit of background. Antonio Sandino had been a popular rebel who had fought against the marines in the '20s and '30s. They took his name to epitomize their anti-Yankee, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalistic kind of mantra that they chanted rather frequently. The best that I can read, Sandino was no Marxist. They simply appropriated the name and utilized it as a popular figure.

The commandantees ranged I think from Borge who had struggled a long time and had been out in the hills for a long time, to the Ortega brothers. I think Borge was a rather dedicated, although extremely clever, individual. He was the minister of the interior which means he headed the interior police, and so on, and, as I say, he was a commandante and they all had military responsibilities. Borge maintained several offices. He had his official office as the minister of interior where he would receive official callers. He had a private office which was very small and modest. There was another office where he kept crucifixes all over the wall and showed what a humanitarian and Christian background this country had. Depending on who his visitor was, he would welcome them in one of the three offices.

The Ortega brothers were kind of the leaders. Daniel Ortega was the head of the junta and the president of the country. His brother Humberto was the minister of defense and thereby the head of the army. I think they thought they were Marxists but the things that bothered me more than anything were the foreign advisors that they brought in. They brought in Cubans and East Germans, and this I thought posed more of a danger than the Sandinistas themselves. If we could convince them that they could perform some kind of a revolutionary activity in the country, which it certainly needed given the Somoza background, then we would move along the lines of trying to have a dialogue that Ambassador Quainton, and Bergold in a different way, tried to foster.

*Q: In your work, was there a press to deal with?*

CALLAWAY: There indeed was a press. The New York Times had a resident there. Others lived in Salvador, and there was a lot going on in El Salvador at the time. One of the aspects of the whole Sandinista situation in Nicaragua was that these self-proclaimed Marxists had taken over, and they were supporting a revolution which was still going on against the government that we were supporting in El Salvador. We tried to reach out to the journalists, a number of whom - New York Times, Time Magazine, Los Angeles Times, Miami Herald - sent pretty experienced people in the Latin American area. For example, Steven Kinser was there, who is now in Turkey and before that was in Berlin. Before coming to Nicaragua he had covered Guatemala in Latin America and had written a book about Guatemala and U.S. intervention in '54 in the Guzman regime there. I thought he was a very balanced and critical reporter.

You also had a number of what people derisively call "Sandalistas," people who came down in their sandals and who were very favorably disposed to the Sandinista revolution. They either refused to see, or overlooked mistakes or erroneous directions that more objective observers, in my opinion, felt that the Sandinistas were making. There was too much expropriation of land discouraging any remnants of the old capitalistic system to remain, and this is necessary because you need a transition period. It was difficult to deal with them. We dealt with them as with all reporters, the doors were open. But some of them were pretty openly biased in their opinions. As I say the standard press was pretty balanced in trying to do its reporting.

Dealing with the Nicaraguan journalists was quite a different matter. The Sandinistas established a newspaper, Barricada, the barricades. La Prensa had been the old newspaper of Chamorro and Pedro Joaquin Chamorro had been another nail in the coffin of Somoza. He had been assassinated on the streets of Managua because he had been a very strong critic of the Somoza regime. After Chamorro was assassinated, his widow, Violetta, who subsequently after the Sandinistas became president of Nicaragua, and his son, Pedro Joaquin, Junior, moved into the newspaper and harshly attacked the Sandinista regime. They were really trying to bring democracy, neither from the right nor from the left, but a democratic regime. However, the younger brother of Pedro Joaquin, Carlos, became the chief editor of Barricada.

So the Chamorro family history is interesting and this was repeated a lot in this small country. It was divided right down the middle on the Sandinistas, and how much they could be helped, and how much they could be resisted. We saw it in the newspapers very strongly, in Barricada, the organ of the Sandinista party. La Prensa was still being critical and being censored. Like in an old communist state, you would see whole pages blanked out or blacked out, and they would publish it that way. Sometimes they would get away with it, and sometimes Tomas Borge, the minister of interior, guardian of the internal security, simply ordered the paper taken off the streets because they didn't want to show how much had been censored.

I found that some of the Sandinista media, like Barricada or like the main Sandinista radio station, were pretty open to interviews. We would bring down Otto Reich who was in the State Department at the time playing a very active role in combating what we saw as the disinformation policy of the Sandinistas and the Castroites in Latin America. He visited Nicaragua and we got him interviews with Barricada and on the Sandinista radio station which was, I think, a nod that they had not become as controlled as some people would like to paint them. It was a fascinating mixture of dealing both with the foreign press, who were there covering the revolution, and the Nicaraguan press.

*Q: How did you find sort of the American academic community because this was a red hot issue with them? Did you find yourself sort of an outcast?*

CALLAWAY: It was divided. There were academics who came down who were very strongly opposed to the Sandinista regime and very critical of it. They had equal academic credentials as the more, what we traditionally tend to think of academics as being, liberal and supportive of the Sandinistas.

People used to ask me, "Don't you find that dealing with the journalists is a real headache, a real pain in the butt?" I used to say that the journalists are sort of third on my list. Some of them are very dedicated, and some of them are very dedicated to espousing their own opinions. I put them ahead of many congressional figures who used to come down and spend a day or two days at the most in Nicaragua, and there were a lot of them who came down. I used to classify them, I used to joke, into two categories, the IWTs and the ITTs. The IWTs were the, "I was there and I know what is going on." The ITTs were the, "I told them; how they ordered them to shape up and fly right.

The most difficult group of all to deal with were the religious people who would come down. Either God had told them that the Sandinista regime was the devil incarnate or that the American presence there was the devil incarnate. They were very, very difficult to be swayed. They would come into the embassy. I have sat there as the ambassador and I briefed them, and they would stand up and scream at the ambassador and say, "You're going to hell for what you are doing here!" He took it very well.

*Q: Yes, Tony told one story about how some nuns came in and asked if they could pray at the end and he said of course. They all gathered hands, including Tony there, and he found himself in a prayer group praying against Ronald Reagan.*

CALLAWAY: Right, and praying for the salvation of his soul because he was carrying out that policy, exactly.

*Q: How did you find yourself and other officers in the embassy? Were they pretty much, this is just a problem to deal with, or did you find them sort of reflecting the spectrum or not? Did you have trouble with your officers?*

CALLAWAY: No. I think they did tend to reflect the spectrum, but I found it a situation similar to working in Moscow. When you are under difficult circumstances, and that can be either physically difficult circumstances or politically, I find the embassy team pulling together. I found that to be the case very much in Nicaragua whether they tended to disagree or to agree with the policy, they pulled together. They were there as professionals working under difficult circumstances. It was a very tightly knit team just as I found the case to be back in Moscow when I had served 10 years before that.

The problem came with some of the Foreign Service nationals. As you well know, USIS overseas generally employs more Foreign Service nationals, both in the cultural and informational side, than most other sections. In the course of my time there, two people were accused by anonymous sources at the time of being spies for the Sandinistas. We looked into this along with the regional security officer. I didn't really feel that there was sufficient evidence on either case, although one was much stronger - circumstantial evidence in my opinion - than the other. The regional security officer and I divided, one went and one didn't go.

It was a very difficult situation because as you well know in many cases our Foreign Service national employees are some of the most dedicated people. They have stuck their necks out, worked for the United States government, and been identified as such for years, through thick and thin. It is always a difficult matter to accuse one of having become a turncoat. It certainly could have been true. The Sandinista secret police certainly knew how to put the screws on people, there is no question about that. We had no question whatsoever that everybody in the embassy, just as we knew in Moscow, was being closely questioned. Whether they crossed the line but, of course, they had no access to classified information either. The Foreign Service nationals had a very difficult time during that period in Nicaragua.

*Q: You would have pronouncements coming from the president and then you had Jesse Helms and all, and these people would be talking in apocalyptic terms, and here you are down there living in*

*this country that is kind of not much of a country. I would have thought that it would have been very difficult to deal with this. I mean interpret it, translate it, and keep from giggling almost.*

CALLAWAY: Well, there was a Contra war going on, and although the controversy still rages and all the facts still aren't out about just how much we were behind it and how much we were doing, it was a serious situation and we took it very seriously. A war was going on. No matter how much you dismiss their ability to directly threaten the security of the United States, you certainly took seriously some of the actions that they were taking.

One of them that I was directly involved in was the educational system. Education and cultural affairs are part of the USIS bag and I tried to establish very close relationships, or as close as possible, with the educational institutions, especially the higher educational institutions. At the National University, the Sandinistas had moved in as communist regimes will do, because they realize the importance of instilling a doctrine in the youth, in the future leadership of the country.

One of the big disappointments that I had was a man by the name of Carlos Tunnerman. He had been a very prominent man, and very well educated in the United States. He was a brilliant man and became the minister of education. I continued to deal with him and I thought we had a dialogue going in which he would admit to certain excess. He later became the ambassador to the United States under the Sandinista regime and that is when we parted company. I could see him continuing to work in the university as a minister of education and being somewhat balanced, but taking the step to actually becoming the spokesman in this country of the Sandinista regime, I was somewhat surprised.

In our effort to interpret what the Reagan administration was saying about Nicaragua, we would try to put it in terms of some of those areas like the educational system, or confiscation of private property, literally taking over houses and forcing people out because a commandante wanted it. We would object to those specific actions.

On the war itself, we were no better informed, quite frankly, than much of the populace. The Contra effort was being run out of other countries like Honduras and in some places in El Salvador. I am sure that some people in the embassy knew more than I did about what was going on, but basically we were not terribly informed and would not address the Sandinistas directly when they raised issues. They would raise an issue and make a protest, and we would respond that we knew nothing about that particular action because it was under the umbrella of the independent Contra activities. It was a difficult situation, to answer in those terms, because it was a civil war in some senses.

*Q: Did you feel almost marginalized by these operators who were coming down from the NSC, Ollie North and company, who were kind of running things? I almost feel there wasn't much of a coordinated effort. It was as though you had this not that little of war going on, and it was run out of the NSC, and then the State Department was trying to maintain regular relations. It was a peculiar thing. Did you feel this?*

CALLAWAY: Yes, you certainly did. I indicated that when I first was assigned to Nicaragua. I said, "I don't want to go to Nicaragua. I'll be happy to work on Nicaraguan policy but I want to do

it from Washington.” And that hadn’t changed. After that I was assigned on two occasions TDY to the National Security Council and had occasion to sit in on meetings with Ollie North and watch the operation. I must say that I thought it was a highly arrogant attitude from some of these people who had absolutely determined that the Sandinista regime did represent a threat to the United States, whether it was as potential allies of Cuba, supporters of the revolution that was being fostered by the FSLN in El Salvador, or as a potential base for the Soviet Union.

There is no question that the Sandinistas were certainly building up their military and that was a worrisome aspect, not only in the terms of the threat that it could pose to its neighbors, but in terms of what it was taking away from the country. I mentioned earlier the concern about not only the educational system crumbling and becoming ideologically influenced by the Sandinistas, but the medical situation. The reason for that was that the medical supplies were largely flowing to support the military in its fighting with the Contra forces, but also building up an awful lot of camps, air bases of a size which the Sandinista air force didn’t have any need. These were concerns.

But I think about people like Ollie North and of seeing him on a couple of occasions coming into meetings - and these with people working for the National Security Council, or representative of the Department of State or the Central Intelligence Agency, or the Department of Defense, all highly qualified people, all highly cleared people - and North if he didn’t like the discussion that was going on he would suddenly stand up, whip his papers into a pad and say, “I’ve got better things to do. I don’t need to listen to this,” and he’d stalk out. That kind of arrogance which displayed itself within the inner circles, I think, displayed itself rather publicly in his declarations before the Congress; “If this is what we thought was right to do, we went ahead and did it, and we weren’t going to be bent by laws.” I think that is a danger to a democracy.

*Q: How about staffers from the various congressional committees and staffers to individual people in Congress, did they present a particular challenge?*

CALLAWAY: Staffers came down. Nicaragua at that point was enough on the scene that they would usually accompany members. It was good that a member himself or herself came down. Once again, they represented a spectrum. One that I remember very strongly, who was a senator at the time, is now Secretary of Defense. Cohen was a Republican member of Congress at the time. A very opened and balanced “Tell me, and I want to learn,” attitude.

*Q: You’re talking about Secretary William Cohen from Maine.*

CALLAWAY: Exactly. He was very good. Others came down and knew it all. I’ll tell you about the famous Kissinger Commission on Central America. There was a spread from Henry Cisneros to Jeane Kirkpatrick. They came and visited all of the Central American countries, I guess, or most of them to sort of assess the situation in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. Nicaragua and El Salvador were the focus at the time. The one that I faulted the most was Jeane Kirkpatrick who refused to come to Nicaragua, the only member of the commission that I recall, because she felt that her life was in danger. I think the embassy assured the rest of the commission, her included, that it was not in danger, but that was the extent I think of the fear of what this little country represented to some people - that they might be assassinated if they came.

I don't think a lot was learned, quite frankly, by the Kissinger Commission, but at least they came. They sat down, they met. Part of that I will hasten to add was the Sandinistas fault. The Sandinistas can be very clever. I mentioned Borge, who could go into his crucifix decorated room and be very convincing and disingenuous, and apparently very flexible. But on this occasion, they got their backs up about the Kissinger Commission and it was a very entrenched attitude that they displayed.

The worse case of that that I saw, and I think one of most stupid things the Sandinistas did in the entire two years I was there, was their reception for the Pope. Nicaragua is a very, very Catholic country. It is basically a strongly, religious Catholic country in which the people are very devout. The Pope is the head of the Catholic Church and he was coming to Nicaragua, and they were terribly proud of it. The Sandinistas were terribly proud that the Pope, as when he went to Cuba recently, had decided to come to Nicaragua.

They organized, and they did this deliberately. Women who, I do not doubt for a moment, had lost their sons in the struggle with the Contras, heckled the Pope. They said, "We want peace. Holy Father go tell the bloody Americans what they are doing." This did not go over with the Pope and it did not go over with the majority of the population. You do not insult the Holy Father. It is not his war and you simply do not interrupt the mass. They interrupted the mass which is a very sacred ceremony for Catholics and it was a dumb, stupid thing to do. They kept making mistakes like this. You would think they were about to take a step forward, and they would insert their foot solidly in their mouth.

*Q: What was the role of the Cubans and the Soviets when you were there?*

CALLAWAY: Well they were certainly there and the Nicaraguans made of point of identifying themselves much more closely with the Castro revolution in Cuba, being a Latin America country, being a country which had defied directly the United States, than they ever did with the Soviet Union. They were wise in that sense to keep a certain amount of distance. Of course, the Soviets funneled a lot of the aid indirectly through Cuba rather than directly.

The Soviets kept pretty much to themselves as they do in a lot of overseas missions, as do the Chinese to this day. They live within a closed compound so you really didn't see them very much on the scene. They did not make their presence visible. The Cubans were the same way. More of our information there came from our intelligence sources or just from sources that would go out and interview people and say, "Do you know some Cubans?" "Yes, three guys came by and had a beer in my place yesterday." For the public in Nicaragua they tried to portray it as an indigenous revolution. As I mentioned, along with the "Sandalistas," which were the followers of the revolution, there were some nasty folks in there like Libyans and others who were advising the Sandinistas on how to handle their revolution.

*Q: Speaking of the Sandalistas, how about the people coming over from Western Europe, particularly from the socialist, the left wing side? Did you see your friends from Italy and all of that?*

CALLAWAY: We did indeed, and representations from some Scandinavian countries and people like Greenpeace and Oxfam were there. Some of them were doing very good work. Some were working out in the rural areas of Nicaragua helping with crop reform, with health problems, and so on. Others were very active in the demonstrations. I talked before about the church and this was where a lot of influence came through. There was very definitely the liberation theology strain of Catholicism in Latin America which went back far before the Sandinista revolution.

*Q: The Maryknoll sisters?*

CALLAWAY: The Maryknoll sisters. The foreign minister of Nicaragua was a Maryknoll priest who had actually studied in the United States. The minister of education after Tunnerman was a Jesuit priest, and the minister of culture was a brother of the minister of education who belonged to, I've forgotten what order, but they were all Catholic priests. This gave the church in Rome problems too, because they wanted to separate political ideology from religious ideology and they were disturbed by this mix. They never went so far as to excommunicate the two priest ministers, but they did insist, which the brothers ignored, that they could not perform the sacraments, that they could not be active as priests. They ignored this. There was this liberation theology group and there were some very active ministers who came down, who were of the extreme left, extremely favorable to the revolution, from the United States. There was very definitely this element active within the populace of Nicaragua as well, liberation churches or churches of the revolution.

*Q: Did many of these people sort of bypass the embassy or did they go to shout at you?*

CALLAWAY: They shouted on occasions. A lot of people ask me, did I ever feel in mortal danger in Nicaragua? My answer is only on one occasion was I concerned and that was during the invasion of Grenada. I think when that invasion took place, the Sandinistas sincerely believed for a number of days that only a few days would pass before they were next. There were tanks outside the embassy and the turrets were pointed towards the embassy, not away from the embassy. There was concern for a few days.

The ambassador, who at time was Tony Quainton, got on the phone to the minister of the interior, Tomas Borge and there was a discussion about how it's not going to happen. There was a pretty violent demonstration which formed downtown which was maybe a mile and a half of so from where the embassy was located. It was announced, it was in the papers, that they were going to march on the embassy, but it was called off. The demonstration took place and there were rocks thrown, shouts, and so on, but they did not come to the embassy.

I think the Sandinistas themselves, within the course of a little more than 24 hours, perhaps 48 hours, accepted the assurances that the paratroopers were not coming and that that kind of a demonstration - unlike in my humble opinion what is happening in China right now - could get out of hand, so they defused it a bit. They didn't call it off entirely, but they did defuse it. That was the kind of dialogue that at times you could have with the Sandinistas.

There was another occasion that I recall very fondly. There was a very close, very young advisor to Daniel Ortega that I used to meet with. The Ortega brothers themselves were quite young at the time, but this fellow must have been in his mid-20s at the most. I've forgotten how I met him, but

we would meet almost twice a month on weekends and just go for sort of walks in the jungle, if you will, and just talk about a lot of things. He was a very dedicated Sandinista. He claimed not to be pro-Soviet Union at all. We would have extremely frank exchanges and I hope it was as useful to his side as I felt it was to our side. We both knew that we were going back and reporting on the exchanges that took place. That was the sort of thing that I never felt that I had in the Soviet Union.

*Q: As far as being communists, you say that they were amateurs, was it that things weren't ripe for it, or they were sort of communists of opportunity?*

CALLAWAY: That's a good question. I think it is a combination. I think some of them were definitely communists of opportunity, or Marxists, if you will, of opportunity. Conditions certainly weren't right. I don't know that much about the history of Russia, but I think that the Russian Orthodox Church was a strong influence which continued to be an influence after the Soviets took over. From my reading of history, one of the things that was clear throughout is that it was never as strong an influence in impeding the development of communism/socialism, the establishment of Lenin's regime and then Stalin's, as the Catholic Church was in impeding the development of Marxism in Nicaragua, at least in that short period of time. Who knows whether it could have taken place over a longer period of time, but the church and the strong deep rooted faith of the people were clearly important factors.

And another thing, I think that in spite of all the propaganda that the Sandinistas put out continually, the Nicaraguan people were basically not anti-American, they were pro-American. The history that the Sandinistas tried to draw of the U.S. intervention was always mollified for a lot of the "common" Nicaraguan folks that I talked with who remembered very fondly the uncle, or the grandfather, who had a job, or who worked with the Marines when they were there and helped them build roads, or set up the railroad system, or the telegraph wires. It was a mixture of "Wes, we weren't independent, but you are a big country and we are a small country." You have to remember that one of the things in Nicaraguan history, and I've forgotten exactly when this was, is that they petitioned the U.S. Congress to become a state at one time.

*Q: Were you sensing when you were there, that the Sandinistas really weren't getting the hearts and minds of the people as much as they thought they had, because within a relatively short period of time they had an election. When was the election?*

CALLAWAY: I can't remember. It wasn't that long ago. I don't think they lasted ten years. It was maybe '88.

*Q: Anyway they had an election and they thought they were going to win and they sure as hell didn't. I was wondering whether we sensed any of that or not because this revolution was portrayed as popular, Somoza was awful, and therefore these guys are good, and that sort of thing.*

CALLAWAY: I was not in Nicaragua at the time but I was still following it and I was still keeping in touch with people down there. I don't think there was any question at all that the Sandinistas thought that they were going to win. I don't think that there is any question that a lot of people in the U.S. government thought they were going to win too. I think the Sandinistas were overestimating their popularity, and I think the United States government was overestimating the

control that the Sandinistas had. They thought they could flip a switch and say, 92 percent voted for us, as we have seen in a lot of other elections. They both turned out to be wrong. We certainly worked for it and we poured money into there sort of harking back to earlier elections in Italy where we poured money and influence.

I think clearly that what happened was that people didn't like Somoza, but they didn't like what the Sandinistas were doing either. They wanted somewhere in between. Violetta Chamorro who was a very popular figure, turned out not to be such a tremendous politician when she subsequently became president, but she was considered to be a very honest woman, an honorable woman.

I think that Daniel Ortega was kind of a stiff figure. I saw him many times at popular rallies and so on. Tomas Borge, whom I've mentioned a number of times, was much more of a charismatic figure within the revolution and could draw more emotion from the crowd than either of the Ortega brothers who were much more in the forefront of the revolution. I think a lot of factors led to their downfall. They are still around, but they certainly haven't come back and I think they thought they would.

*Q: Part of your work is always to reach groups in a country, friendly or what have you. Did you feel that there were any groups that you could try to reach?*

CALLAWAY: I mentioned going out to the universities and we did try to do that as much as we could possibly do. We weren't allowed to do a lot of speaking engagements in the universities, so we would meet with small groups of students and professors. I thought that was effective. We tried to do cultural events. Occasionally we would be allowed to bring down a performing group and stage it, but there weren't a lot of cultural activities, period. The Sandinistas continued to have popular cultural rallies like, if you remember, the L'Unita fiestas in Italy, in which they would have a fair and that kind of entertainment. There wasn't a lot of highbrow entertainment, but jazz groups and things like that we would try to bring down.

We would try to reach the people through the media, as I mentioned, and there I think we were relatively successful; more successful than I thought possible. Another indication of that uncertainty of Sandinista control and the grayness of devotion to the Sandinista cause, even from people in such important positions as the head of Sandinista radio stations and the head of Sandinista television stations, was that they wouldn't find an excuse not to interview an Otto Reich. They would be either persuaded or bullied by us saying, "You've got to let this man have his say; you can rebut him if you want to, but let him get on." So I think in a variety of ways we reached out.

In other ways it was difficult because it wasn't a greatly developed country, and that would have been the case under Somoza or under the Sandinista regime. I traveled as much as I could. The east coast, the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, which was an area which had been populated largely by former slaves, was an area of resistance to the Sandinistas, more so than the more urban area. Therefore we were never allowed to travel to the east coast. There were certain areas of the country that we were cut off from, but we were not restricted, as we certainly were in the Soviet Union, in that we didn't have to get permission to travel; we could go out to places. In one embarrassing incident for me, I ended up in a port city on the morning after the Contras had blown up some of

the facilities there. I had to answer a lot of questions about “Who knows, and why am I here?”

*Q: What was the feeling in the embassy towards the Contra war?*

CALLAWAY: Well, you talk about gray shades again. Arturo Cruz was a highly respected intellectual and former businessman who was part of the Contra cause. The embassy tried to work as closely with him as we could while he was still in the country and we encouraged people, once he left the country, to work with him. I think the embassy attitude was that there were contras, which means against, opposition to the Sandinista regime like Violetta Chamorro who would certainly never call herself a Contra and never actively endorsed the violence of the Contra resistance. These were areas that we encouraged more collaboration and cooperating with. The more militaristic side of things is something which was not organized directly by any of the areas that we were working with in Nicaragua at the time.

*Q: Was it pretty much understood that the Nicaraguans were involved in El Salvador?*

CALLAWAY: Yes. I don't think there is any question about it. On a couple of occasions when intelligence was released saying “Here's what happened; here's a map,” the Sandinistas would admit it to the extent of saying, “Well, it happened, but we didn't instigate it, or we didn't bless it,” and they would sort of fudge it in that way. They were certainly sympathetic to the FMLN, there was no question of that. The FMLN was also divided. I didn't know as much about how they were organized as I did about what was going on in Nicaragua, but there was not one centralized command and in that way the Sandinistas could sort of pick and choose which element or faction of the FMLN they would support

*Q: What about while you were doing this, this obviously had very high priority, did you feel that, of course it was in hostile territory, but was USIA putting a lot of resources into Nicaragua that they could use?*

CALLAWAY: In terms of the resources that I could use, it was tremendous. I never had a question. Anything I asked for, I could get away with. The resources that weren't brought to bear, and I think that up to a certain level within USIA I was supported, was in an effort to get a Fulbright exchange program going, as I said. The money never came because the program was never approved. Anything that I could do, yes, the resources were there.

*Q: How about while all of this was going, was there an active Nicaraguan students going kind of on their own with their families up to the United States getting an education and then coming back?*

CALLAWAY: Much less so than had been the case in the past. The Chamorro family, for example, had all been educated outside of Nicaragua, mostly in Canada. It is an interesting choice for a family to decide that they were going to be educated overseas, but they wouldn't choose the States.

*Q: It makes good political sense.*

CALLAWAY: Exactly. A lot of the families who had the wherewithal to send their kids overseas were out of the country by that time. I lived in an absolutely fabulous house which I've never lived in before or since with a swimming pool and a garden. This belonged to a family which had fled the country. They had fled voluntarily; they weren't forced out. As I mentioned earlier, some people were forced out if the commandantees coveted a certain house. A lot of the wealthier families who would have sent their kids to school were not in the country anymore. They were riding it out in Miami, or New York, or other places. There was not a lot of income coming in for people at the time so it was difficult to continue the flow that had taken place in the Somoza years.

*Q: Did you feel the fine hand of Charlie Wick, the head of USIA, while you were there?*

CALLAWAY: Wick was the head of USIA during the eight years of Ronald Reagan, and this was certainly during that time. No, to be honest with you, the resources were there, but I dealt more directly with the Latin American area of the U.S. Information Agency at the time, and there was never any question of support. To be quite honest with you, I can't even remember if Wick came to Nicaragua during that time. We certainly had some high level visitors, as I mentioned, who came down, Kissinger and others. Wick came to Italy when I was there on a couple of occasions, and he certainly put his hand very actively in when he was interested in doing things like setting up WorldNet television, but those sorts of things were not going on in Nicaragua.

*Q: How about while you were there was the CIA, because it was in hostile territory, a quiet group or were they pretty active?*

CALLAWAY: They were a quiet group, in my observations. It was a small embassy. It had been a small embassy before the revolution, but it was even smaller afterwards. For example, after the earthquake in 1972, we had a very large AID mission there, and that was completely closed down while I was there. I think there were two people left when I arrived, the director of the AID mission and one other person, and they closed it out entirely. So those missions within a U.S. embassy overseas which tend to be large, were not there. The defense attaché's office, which had been large because we had been helping with the Somoza military effort, was down to about three attachés. They were occasionally harassed but they were not ever forced out of the country.

A number of people, including the political counselor, were declared persona non grata. They were labeled as spies and we had to deny that and say, "You've falsely accused these people and we protest their expulsion from the country." There was that kind of harassment, but in terms of the overall mission, it was a small group, we all knew each other, and, as I mentioned earlier, in difficult circumstances we came together. I can't remember what the size of the mission was, but it was not a big one.

*Q: Was there much consultation or coordination, with our embassies in El Salvador, Honduras, or Guatemala?*

CALLAWAY: Yes, I think so. I certainly did. I also met pretty frequently with Washington as well, meeting with U.S. Information Agency officials or other officials, in either Miami or Washington. At least every three months or so I would be in the States. I made several trips to Panama which is where the Southern Command was located, for briefings, talks, and exchanges of

impressions, and so on, with the military. I traveled several time to Costa Rica, El Salvador and to Honduras. The only country in the area that I didn't get to while I was there was Guatemala and that was because I simply ran out of time. There was a lot of consultation and my impression is the ambassador was certainly back quite frequently for consultations, and the military attachés would go down to Panama on a regular basis.

There was an effort to coordinate Central American policy. One of the things that I'll mention a little bit later is one of the assignments that I had subsequently in the research division of USIA, which does public opinion polling. While I was in Nicaragua, my colleagues, my counterparts, the public affairs counselors and others, would coordinate on formulating the questions that would be asked of the populace so that we could compare what people in Nicaragua are thinking as opposed to what people in Honduras are thinking about the revolution in Nicaragua, about the revolution in El Salvador, that sort of thing.

*Q: How about Voice of America, was that very important there or not, or other broadcasts?*

CALLAWAY: Voice of America was certainly there. We tried to ascertain, I think rather consistently throughout the time I was there, just how much radio was listened to. A lot of people didn't have electricity in the interior of the country and so short-wave broadcasting, which a lot of people think is outmoded, was important. I never really came to an honest conclusion on that. We formulated programs, we would have frequent interviews with opposition leaders when they were visiting the States on the Voice of America and broadcast it back into the country. There were a couple of suspicions that the Sandinistas were trying to jam the broadcast at times, but it might have been a generator which had just gone on the blitz or something. I'm not sure they ever got that organized.

*Q: You left there in '84.*

CALLAWAY: Right.

*Q: At that time how did you think things were going? Whither Nicaragua?*

CALLAWAY: I think we were still trying to be convince Washington that cooperation could give us as many benefits as violent confrontation. The position I came to back here was what I had asked for two years before. I was asked by Tony Motley, who was the assistant secretary for Latin America at the time, to come back to the State Department on detail and become the spokesman for the Latin American region, for ARA at the time. My deputy had come directly out of El Salvador so you can get some sense of what the whole Latin American region was focusing on at the time.

I thought that what I would try to do was to continue to spread the word that it was a gray situation; that it was not a black and white situation; that there were divisions among the Sandinistas; that there were people that we could work with down there. I think the assumption is sort of like what it was with the Soviet Union as late as maybe 1988 or so, that we are going to be dealing with these people for a while and we might as well try to work with those elements that can be more malleable. It became more difficult because after I came into that position in the State Department, it became more violent; it became more of a military situation than a negotiating situation.

*Q: You came back in '84 and you were with the ARA bureau at the State Department from when to when?*

CALLAWAY: For a year until '85 when Tony Motley left and Elliot Abrams assumed the assistant secretaryship. Most of my days were spent preparing press guidance for the noon briefing for the press spokesman for the Department. In those days we would coordinate very closely and have almost every morning a conference call with the White House, the Defense Department, the State Department. We would work out who was going to respond to which questions. As we used to joke, if it was good news, the White House will announce it; if it was bad news, flip to State and let them handle it.

Almost every afternoon we did backgrounding, talking with journalists who were covering Latin America very closely at the time. Some of them I had known in Latin American, and some of them covered the State Department for years. It was an awful lot of hair splitting and analysis, and just general backgrounding on what had come out in the morning, either the guidance that had been prepared for the briefings, or what had been announced in the briefings.

I found it a difficult year because as I said I thought that the policy, in my opinion, was gearing more and more towards the military. Quite frankly I sat down and had a heart to heart talk with the new assistant secretary, Elliot Abrams, who asked me to stay on. I asked him, "What's coming?" and he said more military. I said, "I'd not like to stay, thank you," and that was that.

*Q: What was your impression of the press corps working with the State Department during this '84 to '85 period?*

CALLAWAY: I was very impressed with the State Department press corps. I thought they were a very professional group. On occasion I would have to deal with the White House press people. I hold the State Department press corps in much higher esteem. The White House has to cover everything. Not only domestic policy, but the first lady eating in Omaha today.

*Q: And highly politicized.*

CALLAWAY: Yes, and highly politicized, and very domestically oriented. I was a Foreign Service officer. I am interested in international affairs. The press corps in the State Department is interested in it, too. They are knowledgeable, and they are good. I came to know some of them quite well and trusted them. I think that this is kind of the background situation that you can have. Almost every afternoon I was on the phone at great length with a lot of the journalists giving more detail or nuances to what was going on.

**ANTHONY QUAINTON**  
**Ambassador**  
**Nicaragua (1982-1984)**

*Ambassador Anthony Quainton was born in Washington in 1934. He graduated from Princeton University in 1955 and Oxford University in 1958. His postings abroad included Sidney, Pakistan, New Delhi, Paris and Katmandu with ambassadorships to the Central African Republic, Nicaragua, Kuwait, and Peru. Ambassador Quainton was interviewed in 1997 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: You were in Nicaragua from March, 1982 until when?*

QUAINTON: Until May of 1984.

*Q: Could you give a quick background of what was the situation in Nicaragua by the time you arrived and why it was like that?*

QUAINTON: The Sandinistas came to power in July, 1979 with considerable American support. Larry Pezzullo, whose place I had taken had engineered the withdrawal of Somoza and his regime. In the first period after the Revolution, there were quite cordial relations with the Sandinistas to whom we provided a considerable amount of economic assistance. There was a Peace Corps program. The Carter administration was very hopeful that the Sandinistas would turn out to be acceptable friends of the United States. During the two and a half years that ensued from the revolution to my arrival there had been a fairly steady erosion of American support for the Sandinistas. There were a number of reasons for that erosion. The rhetoric of the Sandinistas remained extremely hostile to the United States. They constantly reminded the people of Nicaragua of the history of United States intervention on the side of all sorts of powerful Nicaraguans, most recently the Somozas. There had, in fact, been a predisposition of the United States to intervene. Marines had been in Nicaragua for much of the 1920s. This left a very bitter taste and the Sandinistas exploited this legacy on every possible occasion. They put a lot of pressure on American businesses, and many of them withdrew, although at the time I got there there were still some important American businesses in Nicaragua including ESSO which ran the country's only oil refinery and controlled all of the petroleum in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas put increasing pressure on the small political parties who were on the fringes of the political system and growing pressure on the one independent newspaper, "La Prensa," which was run by the son of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, who was murdered a year before the revolution. His murder was one of the triggering events that brought the middle class over to the side of the Sandinistas in the period immediately before the triumph of the revolution in July, 1979.

So, relations were already souring and at the same time in Salvador things were not going terribly well. The Salvadoran guerrillas were getting substantial support from Cuba, but from Cuba through Nicaragua. So there was a real desire in the Reagan administration to put the screws on the Sandinistas, and I think already by the time I arrived there were those in the administration who believed that the only solution to the Central American problem was to remove the Sandinistas from power. It is, of course, an impossible situation for a diplomat: to have two policies in effect. One policy was that of the State Department, the Secretary and Tom Enders, which ultimately said, "Yes, let's put pressure on the Sandinistas, but let's find a deal under which they will change their behavior in exchange for a decent relationship with the United States." In the White House, there was no deal. There the domino theory was much in vogue and many White House officials believed that if we did not get rid of the Sandinistas, revolutionary Marxism would roll from

Sandinista Nicaragua through Salvador to Guatemala and into south Texas. There was never very much evidence for the likelihood of that happening, but it was passionately believed by many in the administration, particularly by the director of CIA, William Casey. He became a very critical figure and advisor to the President on this issue in terms of the analysis that he provided and ultimately the covert operations that were launched in support of the Contras against the Sandinistas beginning in 1983-84.

The Secret War began on March 15, 1982, when the CIA, using Nicaraguan agents, blew up the bridge that connected Nicaragua with Honduras. I stepped off the plane with my wife in a blaze of klieg lights and microphones and was asked what I thought about the developments that morning, the blowing up of the bridges and how that would affect bilateral relations between the United States and Nicaragua. I had not been told that this event was to take place on this day, although I knew that the President had approved a finding which would allow for certain “harassing” measures against the Sandinistas.

*Q: How did you respond? Was there any feeling on your part that this was designed for the activists to hurt the American ambassador’s ability to deal with the situation?*

QUAINTON: No, throughout the time I was there the covert operations that took place were rarely constrained by any sense of timing in relation to other political events that were going on. The CIA had a planning process of their own out at Langley. A good example of that, which comes much later in my stay, was the visit by Gary Hart and William Cohen, both distinguished senators, to Central America. Cohen was a member of the Intelligence Oversight Committee. On the day that they were to arrive in Managua a small plane flying out of Costa Rica bombed the airport in Managua and crashed into the VIP waiting lounge. It crashed because the little plane carried two 500 pound bombs, and when they were pushed out the door the plane flipped over because of the change in weight and crashed. It was not a very distinguished operation. In any case, Hart and Cohen were in the air en route to Managua when this event took place. Nobody in Washington thought that this might be a bad day for this operation. The Sandinistas took great advantage of this miscue. I can still remember, after a flurry of messages with our embassy in Tegucigalpa where Hart and Cohen were, that we got authorization for them to come ahead as there wasn’t any significant damage to the airport. They arrived and the Sandinistas immediately showed them the VIP lounge in which they would have been waiting had they come on schedule as well as the crashed plane and pilot’s body parts strewn around. This created a very negative attitude in those two senators about the quality of the covert operations of the CIA.

There was no suggestion and never has been that the day of March 15 was chosen to embarrass me. I don’t think the CIA knew when I was going to arrive.

*Q: I take it you waffled?*

QUAINTON: Yes. I said that I looked forward to discussing these difficult issues with Commandante Ortega.

*Q: Before you went to Managua you said you had five months to learn Spanish and get yourself into the situation. Was the split apparent between the true believers within the White House and*

*those within the State Department who were trying to come to an agreement?*

QUAINTON: It was clear to me that, particularly after the Enders mission failed and when what was promised by him to the Sandinistas was not delivered in the late autumn of 1981, there was a faction that did not want to cut a deal with the Sandinistas. On the other hand, it was politically impossible to make that public policy as early as 1982 and so there was a series of secret efforts throughout my tenure to explore a deal. Richard Stone, a former senator, was made a special envoy, and Tony Motley, who had been a political appointee ambassador to Brazil and replaced Enders as assistant secretary, also came down on an unpublicized mission. There were a variety of efforts which the State Department made and supported to see if there wasn't some way to get a negotiated outcome rather than to continue down the track of violence and Contra supported efforts to overthrow the regime. These efforts by 1984 already were highly controversial, highly costly and in fact provided great plausibility for the hostile rhetoric of the Sandinista regime. The short term effects were to make life very much more difficult for the friends of the United States inside Nicaragua, the private sector, church and others. So, in order to provide cover for the administration's policies of support to the Contras, the State Department was allowed to try the negotiating track, although there was never really serious support from the White House for this effort.

It was a very difficult situation for me. I remember on the third anniversary of the revolution in 1982, the Sandinistas celebrated in Masaya, one of the towns just south of Managua, and there was an extraordinary speech by Daniel Ortega of incredible hostility toward Reagan personally which accused him of having Nicaraguan blood on his hands. I got up and walked out of this particular speech to a fair amount of attention. As the American ambassador, I had to. The event, however, was more than just a speech against the United States. It had a very powerful religious quality to it. At some point early on before Ortega spoke, one of the other nine commandantes of the revolution read out the Sandinista mythology. It surely had the flavor of the early church. The first name of each soldier who had died for the Revolution was read out one by one, and after each one, this huge audience of a quarter million people would shout "presente," they live still, they are alive. There was the sense of the saints marching together to the promised land. It was very powerful. One of the most common slogans all over Nicaragua at the time was "Sandino ayer, Sandino hoy, Sandino mañana" (Sandino yesterday, Sandino today, Sandino tomorrow - an echo of St. Paul). There was a conscious effort to play on the fervor of those who had been part of the Revolution. They were very young, of course.

Almost every young person in Nicaragua had been affected by the Revolution. The year before we got to Nicaragua in 1981, the Sandinistas organized a literacy campaign. It was an extraordinary event. The high schools of Nicaragua were closed and every high school student was sent into the countryside to teach literacy to the villagers. In fact, the Sandinistas got a UNESCO medal for this campaign. It had a tremendous impact on the young people of Nicaragua, particularly the middle class who, had seldom been in a village in the interior. Now they had spent a year teaching Spanish to villagers. Many of the young were caught up in the Revolution. Even those who hadn't fought were tremendously impacted in this early stage by the rhetoric of the revolution. That changed, of course, as Contra fighting built up and the Sandinistas were forced to impose conscription in order to combat the organized army coming down from the north. And, of course, conscription was very, very unpopular. It forced a lot of kids to fight who had no desire to fight and whose parents did not

want them to fight either. There were casualties which were not popular. Across the entire political spectrum, the sense of martyrdom, which existed in a profound way when people died in 1977-79, began to evaporate.

*Q: Senator Jesse Helms was a very powerful figure. Central America was almost the red meat that had been thrown to the right wing of the Republican Party. This is where they concentrated. How did you fare during your confirmation hearing?*

QUAINTON: There was no hostile questioning. I think it helped having been associated with counterterrorism for three years because that was a very popular program with Republicans. Inadequate as they may have thought the counterterrorist program to have been, it gave me quite good credentials for dealing with what the Republicans perceived to be a kind of terrorist regime. In fact, there was never a security problem involving the American embassy. The Sandinistas went out of their way to make sure that nothing happened to us. They were much affected by the incident of Grenada. They perceived that the United States was looking for excuses to intervene directly with its own military forces. I don't think they ever were at risk, but I can still remember the interior minister, Thomas Borge, who was designated as the principal point of contact with Americans, calling me over to his house and saying, "Look, we have been watching Grenada and we want to assure you that there will be no provocations here. There will be no American hostages, and indeed, if you tell me how many buses you would need to evacuate the Americans if you want to evacuate them, I will make sure they are permanently at your disposal."

*Q: When you arrived, what was your assessment that you were getting both from what you read and from your staff at the embassy of the Sandinista regime and did this change over the years you were there?*

QUAINTON: The people who had been there for several years, and there weren't very many of them, were increasingly disillusioned with the Sandinistas. They had come with high hopes. They had believed the Sandinista's populist rhetoric and they saw that rhetoric being betrayed. People who came about the time I did, in the summer of 1982, were still predisposed to give the Sandinistas the benefit of the doubt. I certainly was. The rhetoric in Washington seemed to be out of line with the reality. There was still a very vibrant private sector. Land was largely in private hands. The cotton and coffee industries were functioning pretty well. There had been none of the overt hostility to the church that had been seen by the third year of the Cuban revolution. By the third year of the Cuban revolution all foreign missionaries had been expelled. Like Cuba and many other Latin American countries, missionaries, Catholic missionaries in particular, were predominant in the local churches. The Sandinistas tolerated a whole range of missionary activity. It seemed to me to be a situation which was very fluid and open, but there was a real tendency in Washington to put a label on it, to call Nicaragua another Cuba. It wasn't another Cuba and it never became another Cuba. But, some people, I suppose, would differ about that.

I quickly got to know the leaders of the revolution. I knew three or four of the commandantes quite well. I got to know top economic figures both inside and outside the government. All in all, I was quite sympathetic to the Sandinistas and what they were trying to do in Nicaragua. It was a country that had suffered greatly under the Somoza regime, and I was inclined to give the Sandinistas the benefit of the doubt. Nicaragua needed a revolution, or at least that was how it seemed to me.

The embassy was quite divided. Some of my colleagues shared my views and some were already of the view that this was a Marxist-Leninist regime and that we had to do whatever we could to stop it or thwart it. It was very difficult situation actually because there was always tension as we talked about policy choices and what we could or should do to influence the Sandinistas. There was quite a spectrum of views represented, much more than you would find in a normal embassy.

Throughout the time, I maintained an open door policy. Any American citizen who wanted to come and see me could do so. There were enormous numbers that came. They came from all sorts of different perspectives, although the vast majority were hostile to the Reagan administration. There was a steady stream of journalists, church men and women from all the major denominations, etc. They were very suspicious of the Reagan administration's policy towards Central America. They were much caught up with social justice agenda which was propounded by the Sandinista government. I remember one of the very first groups that came to see me was a group of priests and nuns. After I had laid out for them our policy with regard to Nicaragua, they asked if they might pray. This was a new experience for me, at least in the ambassador's office, but we all stood up. They asked to join hands. So there was the American ambassador holding hands with a group of nuns and priests [who were] praying for the overthrow of the Reagan administration! After that, I decided I would always be accompanied by at least one junior officer who needed this exposure to the views of his/her fellow citizens. Every Thursday, there was also a demonstration outside the embassy by Americans. Sometimes it was very large and sometimes it was small. These were not crazies, but fellow citizens deeply disturbed by the trend of American policy. Their hostility intensified as time went on. As we mined the ports, blew up Nicaragua's oil pipeline, and did a whole series of bad things, the anti-American rhetoric of the Americans became more shrill. This, in turn, exacerbated the tension inside the embassy. Many officers were resentful at these groups which were coming down to lecture us about the regime, when we, in fact, knew better than they.

I remember one delegation that came from Hollywood. They were really wound up ideologically, much more so than the church groups. I didn't meet with them in my office, as I normally would have, because the group was too big. At the end of my presentation, one of them put up his hand and said it was a fascinating presentation and he had never heard so many lies in one presentation before. He wanted me to know that the next time there were Nuremburg trials, I would be guilty.

That was heady stuff for an ambassador, actually. This constant drumbeat of moral indignation which came from both sides was hard to take. There was the moral indignation from the White House at what the Sandinistas had done to the church, etc. and there was the indignation of the American churches about the violations of international law, etc. It was the only post that I served in over a long career where there was constant questioning of the rightness of American policy, both in its detail and overall substance. Even people who were anti-Sandinista in the embassy often thought that sending a plane to bomb Managua on the day of the Cohen and Hart visit was screwy beyond belief. Washington's tactics were often criticized. But, the CIA had the ear of the president and convinced the National Security Advisor, Judge Clark, who had been not a particularly distinguished deputy secretary of State and who was not very knowledgeable, that covert operations would bring the Sandinistas down sooner rather than later.

*Q: There are a couple of questions I would like to ask and then we will move on. Did you have problems with junior officers and mid-grade officers who wanted to go off on a different tack? Sometimes they are not as professional and maybe blasé as one gets later on. That is one question. Two, you obviously had a CIA operation. What was your feeling about what they were doing and what you were being informed of? And then, could you give me an estimate of how you viewed the Sandinista leadership when you arrived in March, 1982 and how you saw them develop during that period? And then we will pick up essentially what was going on during this period there.*

QUAINTON: I would like to go into all of those things, and of course we will want to say a fair amount about the visit of the Kissinger Commission to Central America, which came in November, 1983 and which ultimately led to my recall from Nicaragua. This will remind us of things to cover next time.

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*Q: Today is May 4, 1998. Tony we have already discussed how you became ambassador to Nicaragua and something about going there. So, we are now at the core of how you dealt with it. How did you view the leadership of the Sandinistas?*

QUAINTON: The Sandinista government operated at several different levels. There were the nine commandantes of the revolution who represented three separate ideological factions. Of those nine only one went back to the very origins of the FSLN, the Sandinista Liberation Movement, and that was Tomas Borge, the minister of the interior. The Ortega brothers were very powerful figures. One was a member of a triumvirate that was the nominal head of state; the other was the minister of defense. There was a troika, composed of two non-commandantes - Rafael Cordova Rivas, a leftist, fuzzy-minded cattleman; the other, a novelist, an intellectual; the third was Daniel Ortega himself. I presented my credentials to Rafael Cordova Rivas, who was part of this troika, head of state, but my important dealings were always with the commandantes. Daniel Ortega was, in fact, the real head of state. Every visiting delegation made a call on him to express either their solidarity or their outrage about Sandinista policies, depending on the nature of the delegation. Tomas Borge was designated by the commandantes to be the point of contact with the United States government, and in my second year, he came to my Fourth of July party surrounded by other senior Sandinistas. We took this to be a gesture, an effort to see whether there could not be some limited improvement in the relationship between our two governments. The third Commandante with whom I dealt was the intellectual of the group, Bayardo Arce, perhaps the most radical of the nine commandantes. He and I frequently met and talked frankly and freely about policy issues. He was probably the smartest of the commandantes, although another, Jaime Wheelock, with whom I had almost no dealings, also had the reputation for very considerable brains. Luis Carrión was the only one of the nine who had been educated in the United States. He had gone to Exeter for a year and spoke English, although he never spoke English with me. He had been chosen by President Somoza as the smartest boy in Nicaragua and was sent away with a gold wrist watch and a full scholarship to Exeter for a year. Then he was at Rensselaer Polytech for a period of several years thereafter. But the three that I mentioned were the ones with whose I had the most to do. They came from different factions. I knew all of the others to one degree or another, but they were not central to U.S.-Nicaragua relations.

At the same time, there was also a whole network of private sector organizations with which I maintained contact led by the organization of industrialists in Nicaragua (Cosep). The then head of Cosep is now the vice president of Nicaragua.

So, there were always two large groups of people, the opposition and the government, with whom I was in contact on a daily basis and with whom I discussed the substance of U.S.-Nicaraguan issues. The most important issue throughout the time I was there was Cuban aid to Salvador, much of which passed through Nicaragua. We were extremely adamant that that aid flow would have to stop, if there were to be any major improvement in relations. Actually, by 1983 the Sandinistas did not believe that even by stopping the aid to Salvador our animosity to them would decline. At one point, I was called in by the minister of interior, Tomas Borge, and confronted on this issue. He asked what it would take to improve relations. I told him that it would take a termination of the direct support by the FSLN of the FMLN. He said with a twinkle in his eye, "I don't believe you. I don't think that could change anything. But, for the moment let's assume that there is such aid and that we would stop it. What would you do if we did?" I said, "Well, I certainly think Washington would respond in some positive way." He looked at me and said, "Well, consider it done. Your government has the capacity to monitor everything that goes in and out of this country and El Salvador. Come back in a month's time and tell me how things are going."

I reported this to Washington in a very limited distribution cable which got even more limited distribution once the text was scrutinized by people in the White House. For a month, in fact, there were no discernible shipments of arms out of Nicaragua to Salvador, but nothing changed at the Washington end. Borge called me in again and said, "What did I tell you? This was just a pretense." Now you can argue, of course, whether one month is long enough, whether there was anything serious in the change, but their perception by the middle of 1983, when their ports had been mined, and their oil pipeline had been blown up, was that it was going to take a great deal more than just accommodation of the Salvadorian issue before we would live with their regime.

The single most important event that took place prior to the arrival of the Kissinger Commission in the late autumn of 1983 was the visit of the Pope to Nicaragua. I think if anything changed American attitudes, official and private, towards the Sandinista regime it was the way in which the Sandinistas dealt with the Pope's visit. The Sandinistas were anxious to have the Pope come. There were endless negotiations about how the visit would be handled and whether he would be treated as a head of state, and where the papal mass would take place. He was in Nicaragua for a full day. He came in the morning and left in the late afternoon, so there was time for one central mass plus another non-Eucharistic celebration in Leon to the north of Managua. The issues were complicated by the fact that there were two priests in the government - one the minister of foreign affairs and the other the minister of culture - and the Pope was reluctant to deal with either of them. Their role was severely circumscribed in the course of the day's events.

Things went reasonably well on arrival. We were all at the airport in a huge line, the entire government, the diplomatic corps, etc. The Pope was greeted by Daniel Ortega who introduced him in turn to the members of his government, other high officials and the diplomatic corps. When the Pope reached Father Cardenal, the minister of culture, the minister went down on his knees in front of the Pope seeking a blessing. The Pope wagged his finger at him. Only later in the day when I had a chance to ask the minister what had happened, he told me that the Pope had said that he was

to regularize his status with the Church, not with the government. I asked what he had answered and he said, "Yes, Holy Father, yes."

As the day went on, the Pope met with the government. Then he went to Leon, where there was a large gathering. It was not a mass but an ecumenical celebration, which passed off very well. The bishop of Leon was less hostile to the Sandinistas than many, and pro-Sandinistas were allowed to present petitions to the Pope. There were prayers for peace and reconciliation, and I think everyone felt that the visit was going quite well. The Pope then returned to Managua for a mass before half a million people, which turned out to be a complete and utter disaster looked at it from the point of view of the Sandinistas. Five hundred thousand people were arrayed in front of a large platform on which an altar had been set up. The three members of the ruling junta and other members of the government sat to one side of the altar while the bishops of Nicaragua celebrated mass with the Pope. In front, there was this vast array of people all carrying flags, Sandinistas carrying the red and black flag of the Revolution, anti-Sandinistas carrying the blue and white flag of Nicaragua and the yellow and white flag of the Holy See. It was like a mediaeval pageant. There was a great deal of cheering and chanting of various slogans. It was obvious that the organized Sandinistas were a minority in the gathering, but they had the forward positions.

The mass began without great incident, but as it got time for the Pope to give his homily, slogans began to be chanted by the Sandinista portion of the congregation, notably "We want a church on the side of the poor." This became so loud that, in fact, the Pope was drowned out. You had the extraordinary figure of the Pope standing at a microphone that had mysteriously gone dead shouting "Silence, silence" to this vast array of people. I think he formally finished his remarks but they were not heard by most people. He was extremely angry, having never had a Papal Mass disrupted in this way before. But, he carried on through the consecration.

It was then time to distribute communion. The church intended to use virtually all of the priests in Nicaragua to distribute the consecrated bread, but before that could happen, a group of mothers, some 20 strong, marched forward to the front of the altar carrying portraits of young men draped in black cloth and ribbon, martyrs who had been killed by the Contras in the previous week in the northern part of Nicaragua. The women demanded that the Pope pray for those who had given their lives for Nicaragua. Of course, this unanticipated event caused considerable consternation on the part of the Papal organizers. The women also demanded to receive communion, but were denied. The Pope then announced that nobody would get communion, which was quite extraordinary. The whole event ended in considerable confusion.

The pro-Sandinistas were angry because they felt the Pope had not understood what they had suffered. The anti-Sandinistas felt that the Pope had been insulted and that this demonstrated the anti-religious quality of the Revolution. The mass got enormous publicity all over the world, particularly in the United States. Even among people who were sympathetic to the Sandinistas, it raised serious doubts about how they were comporting themselves. Indeed, the Revolution's confrontation with the Church was a constant source of discussion in diplomatic circles in Managua. I spent a great deal of time talking to the Papal Nuncio, who was caught between the two sides and who tried his best to mediate within the divided church. The bishops were by and large against the Sandinistas, but not all. The foreign religious orders working in Nicaragua, many of them Americans, were very pro-Sandinista, as were substantial numbers of laity. So, relations with

the church in many ways dominated the agenda of the Sandinistas in 1982-3.

*Q: You were at this mass.*

QUAINTON: I was at the mass.

*Q: Were you watching the commandantes as this went on? Were they understanding what they were doing?*

QUAINTON: The ministers all became very agitated and began themselves to shout pro-Sandinista slogans demanding a church on the side of the poor. I think they expected from what they had seen earlier in the day that the Pope would speak to the basic Sandinista concern, which was a preferential option for the poor, something which was much talked about then. Certainly the liberation theologians all over Latin America supported the Sandinistas. But, the Pope spoke almost exclusively of the obligation of the faithful to be loyal to their bishops and to the cardinal. That was seen as a direct challenge to the Sandinistas rather than as an understanding of the social dynamics in Nicaragua. His sermon, in fact, only further exacerbated the polarization in Nicaraguan society. I certainly felt that it could have been handled better on both sides. It was not just a simple question of the Sandinista disruption or Papal intransigence, but that the two sides were locked in such profound ideological conflict. It was impossible for either to fully adequately judge the ideology of the other side.

But, the Sandinistas were not above doing very provocative things. The other extremely outrageous event of this period was the depiction of the archbishop's spokesman on television nude: absolutely nude, without a stitch of clothing. It was an extraordinary incident, needless to say, in a Catholic country. Father Bismarck Carballo was the spokesman for the archdiocese of Managua. One day he was having lunch with a single lady who was active in the charismatic movement of which he was the chaplain. That they had lunch together is certain; but from there on the facts are in dispute. What is clear is that sometime after he arrived for lunch, a man broke into the house brandishing a gun and Father Carballo ran out of the house with nothing on at all, not even his socks, to be greeted by a television crew which "happened" to be filming in the neighborhood. The archbishop, of course, was angry beyond all belief. It turned out subsequently that the woman was an agent of the Ministry of the Interior. It is not clear whether Father Carballo indeed had any clothes on when the intruder entered. There are different versions on that point. Some believed the priest was surprised in flagrante delicto. Other asserted that he was forced to strip at gunpoint. In any event, the incident polarized the church and political life, making it ever more difficult for the two sides to talk to each other.

*Q: As you are looking at the Sandinistas doing this, provoking the church, provoking the United States, was it ideology that seemed to be driving them on or was this felt to be just a very good way to win the support of the media, following, or what?*

QUAINTON: It was hard to assess their motives. I think they were convinced that the archbishop and a substantial portion of the church wished to see them ousted. There were, of course, a substantial number of priests on the side of the Revolution, who were very passionate about it. They saw the hierarchical church as an enemy in league with the United States. Any time that I

visited the cardinal or went to mass in his church, I was likely to be newsworthy. People would note that the American ambassador was hobnobbing with the opposition. Of course the opposition press always played up the fact that I was there. It was impossible to keep one's personal religious life separate from the politics of the day.

I think also the Sandinistas felt passionately that they were in the right. It was not exactly a very clear ideology but the Sandinist vision certainly had heavy ideological overtones. Their view was a Marxist one, that they were doing history's work, that they were fulfilling a kind of plan which entailed overthrowing bourgeois institutions in order to create a more just society. There were also undoubtedly cynical individual power hungry members of the FSLN, but there was an enormous streak of idealism that animated most Sandinistas in terms of social justice. They saw themselves as reversing the policies of the pretty brutal previous regime, the Somoza regime, which we had supported over much of the previous 50 years. So, the Sandinistas always thought that they were in the right, and that the Church was in the wrong, and that the United States was in the wrong. Their constituency demanded that they show that they were standing up to those who were against them.

What was clearly true was that it was difficult for the two sides, whether inside Nicaragua or outside, to talk the same language. Not that they didn't understand each other in Spanish, but that the agenda that each side brought to the table was never adequately reconciled. By that I mean that Sandinistas came to power with a very aggressive agenda of social justice. They nationalized properties which belonged to the Somocistas, who had fled to Miami. They nationalized some businesses, but not a whole lot. They created a whole network of what they called popular institutions designed to mobilize the ordinary people in their own defense. So, for them, social justice was at the heart of their agenda.

For their opposition and for us, the primary agenda was not justice but freedom and how to get to participatory democratic institutions or free market institutions. The Sandinistas would argue that you couldn't have freedom until you had justice, and we argued you couldn't have justice until you had freedom. Because the agendas didn't intersect, it became very hard to put together any kind of meaningful dialogue. Indeed, there was such polarization that the two sides virtually never met. One of the realities was that the American ambassador's residence was one of the very few places where both the Sandinistas and the opposition could come together and talk. We had a number of dinners to which we invited prominent opposition people and prominent Sandinistas. Many had gone to school together at the Central American University or one of the local private schools, but since the Revolution three or four years before had not talked to each other at all. A wall had come down between the two sides and prevented any kind of dialog. In the whole structure that existed, there were no mechanisms for dialog which might have made it somewhat easier to come to some common resolution of the political situation.

*Q: How did you feel about the ideology that you were getting from the Department of State? I would have thought given the Reagan administration it would have been almost impossible for an ambassador to find a common ground here.*

QUAINTON: It was impossible during the time I was there. The State Department, on various occasions, with White House support, tried to get a dialogue going. Six months before I arrived, they had sent Tom Enders to Nicaragua to try to cut a deal. Later, Richard Stone was sent as a

special envoy and then Tony Motley, the assistant secretary, came to Nicaragua. There were sporadic, but repeated, efforts to engage the Sandinistas in some kind of discussion of the Salvadoran question and on other issues such as human rights and political freedom. The bottom line was always Salvador because the White House perceived that we were facing a series of dominos which, if they were allowed to fall, would lead to Marxism in El Paso. If the Sandinistas could not be stopped, if the FMLN could not be stopped, if the Guatemalan revolutionaries could not be stopped, etc., revolution would cross into Mexico and end up on the Rio Grande. In my judgment, this was a vast misinterpretation of the reality in Central America. The conditions that had given rise to the Sandinista Revolution were not replicated anywhere else, not even in Salvador, and the likelihood of revolutionary movements succeeding in Honduras or Costa Rica seemed to me to be quite limited. But, this is what many believed. So, the whole question of Sandinista aid to the Salvadoran guerrillas became the touchstone for our policy.

By the time I had been there less than a year, the White House had given up on the prospects of any dialogue. Egged on by Bill Casey of the CIA, it believed that the only way to solve the problem was to get the Sandinistas out. The means for doing that was an elaborate covert action program. At first, it was presented to the congress in an extremely disingenuous way. The administration argued that harassment would make life uncomfortable for the Sandinistas, would keep them from consolidating their power, and would bring them to the negotiating table. They would see that there were unacceptable costs to their economy if they did not negotiate. The CIA argued that this was the only way to persuade them to change their policies. As with other covert operations elsewhere in the world, it didn't seem to have the promised immediate effect. If anything, the CIA actions stiffened the Sandinista resolve to hold out against the United States. The trade embargo, the violent acts along the coasts, both on the Atlantic and Pacific side, and then, finally, the training and equipping of an army to fight against the Sandinistas out of Honduras led to a situation in which there was very little room for maneuver and dialogue.

*Q: What were your relations with the CIA within the country?*

QUAINTON: Well, I had cooperative relations with the local chief, although he was expelled after I had been there a few months when one of his colleagues was caught accepting documents from an agent on a park bench in downtown Managua. It was a front page story. He and the officer who had been caught with the documents were expelled in a tremendous hullabaloo. For good measure, the Sandinistas also expelled the political counselor, Linda Pfeifle, who was very active working with the legal political opposition. It seemed to me at the time to be a case of rather sloppy tradecraft. I was kept informed about the things that were planned although I was not always informed about the exact timing. It was clear to me that an exaggerated hope was being put in their covert operations. I remember at one point shortly after the offshore oil pipeline was blown up, I was in Washington and went to see the National Security advisor, Judge Clark. He asked me about this recent event, which had taken place about a week before. I said, "Well, the pipeline is out of operation, but it will be back in operation in about 10 days." This was what I had been told by the Esso Caribbean headquarters in Miami. Judge Clark expressed some surprise, and said that he had been told that the Sandinistas would be without petroleum for six months. He expressed the further hope that I was doing nothing to speed up the repair process. I assured him that I was not speeding up the process, but that replacing a damaged pipeline was a simple piece of work, sending divers down, cutting out the damaged bits and putting in new bits. And sure enough, the Sandinistas were

pumping oil again after two weeks.

But that was indicative, I think, of what the White House expected. I think the President was assured that if we mined Nicaragua's ports, there would be a collapse of the economy. This didn't happen. I think the CIA constantly assured the highest levels of the U.S. government that these operations cumulatively would have devastating effects. In fact, what they did was to harden the attitudes of the Sandinistas. The sabotage and the mining did give hope to the opposition, so in that sense they had a positive psychological effect on our friends in Nicaragua. There was no doubt about that. But, even the opposition became pretty skeptical about the quality of our operations, which seemed half-hearted and incompetent.

A lot of things were done which were not very carefully coordinated. A good example was the visit to Nicaragua of Senators Hart and Cohen. The Senators were to have arrived one morning in Nicaragua on a tour of Central America when, as they were flying in from Honduras, they were told the airport was closed in Managua because a CIA plane had just bombed the airport. And, indeed, a plane from Costa Rica had flown over the airport and pushed two 500-pound bombs out of a side door. It was a very light plane and as a result of the shift of weight the plane flipped over and crashed literally into the VIP lounge. No other damage was done to the airport, but considerable damage was done to the credibility of the United States. When several hours later Senators Hart and Cohen arrived, they were shown the VIP lounge in which they would have been waiting and where now lay the remains of a plane and the body of the pilot. This made quite a negative impression, and called into question the coherence and skill with which the CIA managed its operations. A lot happened which was not, in fact, even coordinated by the Agency. Money was given to a number of opposition people and they went off to do the best they could to disrupt the Sandinistas.

*Q: Did Ollie North cross your horizon?*

QUAINTON: He crossed my path only once and that was during the visit of the Kissinger Commission in the autumn of 1983. At that time, he was a fairly junior staff member of the commission and had been working in the White House.

One of the great dilemmas in this period was how to get the facts of what actually was going on. Two examples might be indicative of this dilemma, and the way in which the information was skewed by partisans on one side or the other. One of the main issues in the course of 1983 was an allegation put out by B'nai B'rith that the Sandinistas systematically persecuted Jews in Nicaragua, had driven all of the Jews into exile, and had desecrated the one synagogue in Managua to make it over into a revolutionary center with pictures of Qaddafi and other heroes of revolution on the wall. This story appeared in the *New York Times* coincidentally with the visit of human rights activists from the United States. In their honor, I was giving a reception to which I invited both the Sandinista human rights commission and the anti-Sandinista human rights commission. I said to my staff that they should go around and find out what the human rights activists thought about this story, because we had never seen any previous allegations of this kind. Not surprisingly, the pro-Sandinistas said there was no truth to this allegation, but even the anti-Sandinistas said there was no truth to it. Nicaraguans, everyone agreed, had never shown any anti-Semitism. Both sides agreed that the vast majority of the Jews fled for their own personal reasons, because of their

relations with the Somoza family.

So, I became quite interested in the subject and got the political officer to do a more in-depth report. He went and looked at the synagogue and talked to people there. It was a childcare center without pictures of Qadhafi. He found that there were not enough Jews in the city to hold a service and that the synagogue had therefore been closed. He interviewed some of the remaining Jews, who said they had not been harassed as a result of their faith. Everybody also agreed that the Sandinistas were violently anti-Zionist, pro-Palestinian; there was no question about that. So, I put this into a report, which made the B'nai B'rith very, very angry. The embassy got a fair amount of criticism for trying to protect the Sandinistas.

Eliot Abrams, who was then assistant secretary for human rights, came down and demanded to meet with members of the Jewish community and I was able to produce at breakfast one morning, Mr. Jaime Levy, a businessman and importer. We sat down and Mr. Abrams asked him about the persecution of the Jews in Nicaragua. Mr. Levy said, "Well, there hasn't been any." Mr. Abrams pressed on this subject, saying he knew that all the Jews had been forced to leave the country, etc. Mr. Levy acknowledged that they had left but said, "Look, you don't understand. I import Maiden Form Bras from Guatemala. I hold them off the market for six months and make a lot of money. Nobody here is harassing me."

Well, many people in Washington felt that somehow the story was not being told by the embassy honestly. On the same occasion that I went up to talk to Judge Clark, it was suggested that I see Faith Ryan Whittlesey, subsequently the ambassador to Switzerland, then in charge of the publicity aspects of Contra effort.

*Q: A politician from Philadelphia.*

QUAINTON: That is correct. I went to see her. She talked a bit and said, "Well, I want you to know that we read your cables very carefully, Mr. Ambassador." I expressed some gratification at that. But, then she went on to say, "I hate to tell you that you report too much great news. When you go back, we want you to report the bad news. You will not help the President unless you report the bad news about the Sandinistas." I said, "Well, I can't do that. I can report all the news, good and bad. If there is a lot of bad news I can report bad news." Well, that kind of attitude was very strong. This was an important ideological war which had to be won. Whatever ammunition could be found to fight that war must be gathered by the embassy. The embassy's job was, in fact, to do just that. Not to negotiate an outcome to the war, but to provide ammunition to the President to win the war publicly in the United States where it was going badly. There was a lot of criticism of Central American policy at that time. It was the only time in my entire career that I found that kind of attitude towards information. It was a powerful message that I got from Ms. Whittlesey.

*Q: What was your impression of Judge Clark?*

QUAINTON: He had only a superficial knowledge of Central America as far as I could see. He did arrange for me to brief the President on Nicaragua at the National Security brief the next day. I went there and after their briefing on a variety of other subjects, Judge Clark said, "Mr. President, I have somebody here from the trenches. Ambassador Quainton, would you like to say a few words

about Nicaragua?" I gave my assessment of the situation, and the President listened and asked some questions. And I went on my way. I ventured the thought then as I did later in greater detail to the Kissinger Commission, that somewhat more flexibility on our part could, in fact, have achieved some benefits on the ground and led to concessions by the Sandinistas.

*Q: Did you find the embassy at all split as far as how they were viewing the situation?*

QUAINTON: Oh yes. I think there is no doubt about that. As new people arrived in 1983 and certainly in 1984, the embassy became more hostile to the regime. Those of us who had been there a couple of years and who had a wide spectrum of acquaintances and friends on both sides, saw the situation as very much more complicated and were not so quick to rush to judgment. The acting AID director was someone who came with an ideological agenda, and felt our policy should be a very strong anti-communist crusade. The political and economic sections, and the public affairs officer were much more nuanced in their attitudes. I must say my staff supported me even when they didn't agree with me, and they didn't always agree with me. They thought I was much too publicly visible and much too sympathetic to the regime. I regarded public diplomacy as part of my job and I appeared regularly on television and radio. I was repeatedly caricatured in various magazines and publications. There was hardly anyone in the country who did not recognize me. I couldn't walk on the streets without being greeted and spoken to in some way or other.

*Q: When you appeared on radio and TV what sort of things were you doing?*

QUAINTON: Usually talking about the American agenda. About our concern about support for the Salvadoran revolutionaries, about the human rights situation, about the harassment of the Church, things that Washington cared about. Often there would be an editorial comment in the Sandinista press criticizing what I had said. One of the great dilemmas for me was the choice of whether or not to go to events sponsored by the Sandinistas and then whether or not to walk out. One of the constant problems was the Sandinista anthem, which was sung at every public event along with the national anthem. The Sandinista hymn had in it some phrase about "the Yankee, enemy of mankind." I quickly became tone deaf on this point. I always sat for the Sandinista hymn. That was always the question, what was my tolerance for anti-American rhetoric, and I did get criticized at times for sitting through things that perhaps I should not have.

*Q: What about Cuban and Soviet representation?*

QUAINTON: There was a Cuban embassy. I had nothing to do with it. On a couple of occasions I met senior Cuban officials that came to major Latin American events. The Sandinistas were great organizers of regional events. They wanted as many people as possible to come to Managua. The Soviet ambassador was a diplomat who had spent most of his career in Latin America and was a fairly influential figure on the local scene. I would see him from time to time. The Mexican ambassador was the most important chief of mission. He was very close to the commandantes and very sympathetic to the revolution. He had been a minister of agriculture and thought of himself as very much a revolutionary. He was known as the 10<sup>th</sup> Commandante. The Mexicans throughout this early period of the revolution were extremely supportive of the Sandinistas and extremely critical of United States policy.

Who were the ambassadors who were well informed? The Nuncio was well plugged into the Church and went all over Nicaragua. He tried to juggle his difficult relations with various parts of the Church. The French ambassador, René Ala, with whom I had a very close relationship, subsequently went on to be ambassador to the Vatican and then Senegal. He was a very able man and we worked very closely together. He had even closer relations with the revolution than I did. His house was one of the venues where the radical members of the FSLN met. He and I often shared our analyses. In general, we were in agreement about the trends of what was going on in Nicaragua at that time.

*Q: Did you see during the time you were there a change in how the leadership viewed things? I was wondering whether they were beginning to sort out who was in power, who was on top, when the corruption or power was beginning to have its influence?*

QUAINTON: There was very little evidence of corruption. The commandantes had all taken for themselves houses which had belonged to supporters of Somoza or people who had fled the country. They lived well and were well protected. But, one heard very little about corruption. There was great speculation both in Washington and Managua that the three factions and the nine commandantes could not stay united, but they were very conscious of the need to stay together notwithstanding some differences of emphasis. Three groups were represented among the commandantes. One group believed that a revolution in Latin America had to be peasant and rural based. A second said that it had to be based on the proletariat, and the third, the group to which the Ortegas belonged, said you had to have both. The third group was, of course, right and the Revolution triumphed because there was an alliance which brought everybody together.

After the New Jewell Party broke up in Grenada, and we intervened to protect American medical students and others, I was called in once again by Commandante Borge, the minister of interior. He said, "First of all, never think for a moment that we will become divided. We can see what happens when you become divided, as in the case of Grenada, and this will not happen here. Secondly, there will never be any American hostages here. Any American who wants to leave can leave. You can have your administrative officer come down to my office, and I will make arrangements so that any time you feel you need buses to take people out to an evacuation site, we will be most helpful to you. Third, don't think that we will provide any provocation which will allow you to invade like you did in Grenada." So, they were very conscious of the importance of not falling out among themselves, and they never did during the time I was there. There was not a sign of public disagreement. If there were rumors about differences they certainly kept them out of sight. The nine commandantes stayed together throughout the entire period of their rule. It was quite remarkable.

*Q: Was there a sizeable American presence there as far as young people working on cutting sugarcane, etc. to show that they were part of the Revolution?*

QUAINTON: There was a little bit of that. There was almost no American business community; they almost all had left. Esso was the largest American firm because they ran all of the petroleum business and for a while they had Americans and expatriates from other Latin American countries running the operations. There was a very large American missionary presence. Many Catholic orders of both women and men had representatives scattered around Nicaragua, and almost all of

them supported the Revolution. It was very hard to find an American who was living in Nicaragua who was not. There were also large numbers of temporary visitors, delegations who would come down for one week, two weeks, two or three days, etc. Sometimes, as you suggest, to cut sugarcane, but more to tour the country, to see the achievements of the Revolution, the healthcare centers, the literacy centers, etc. The Sandinistas were very good at describing what they had done and what they had achieved, particularly in the first couple of years. Later, it became less easy to do that as more and more people became disenchanted with the war effort and the need to mobilize young men for service in the draft. But, in the early days, there was considerable pride in what was taking place and the achievements were constantly being shown off to visiting delegations.

There were also a certain number of American journalists in Nicaragua. They would bounce back and forth between Salvador and Nicaragua. Central America was big news in the United States throughout the eighties and the press corps came to see me regularly. Usually, I was quite open with the press. The major newspapers were extremely responsible, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Miami Herald*, the *Christian Science Monitor*. I had only one bad experience. A representative of the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* came to see. The PAO arranged for him to see me. He sat down and I said, "Now we must discuss the ground rules." I suggested that they would be, as all my press interviews were, on background. He asked what that meant. I said, "Well, you can quote a western diplomat, but you cannot quote an American official or the American ambassador." He said that he didn't do anything in Seattle on background. I said that I could give him a handout if he would like one or we can discuss what was going on in Nicaragua which would have to be on background. We went back and forth on this and he finally said this was contrary to paper policy, but he would agree to doing the briefing on background. I discussed the Nicaraguan situation as I saw it, commented on the opposition and the government, etc. I was sent a copy of his published text several weeks later which took up the top half of page 2. The headline was "U.S. Ambassador Out of Step with Washington" and it then began "Would you believe the following quotes?" I was quoted in ten different sentences in juxtaposition to statements by the President of the United States. Needless to say, that did me no good in Washington. That was the only time the rules were broken, but it certainly was an embarrassment at the time.

*Q: I take it while you were there the Contra effort was beginning to take its bite?*

QUINTON: The fighting really hadn't taken its bite. They were just being organized and trained. There were various covert operations of the kind I described - a bombing raid here, a mining there. One scheme which got a fair amount of publicity and which was absolutely screwy was the idea that the revolutionary billboards which surrounded the plaza of the revolution where the Pope gave his mass would be burned down as a gesture showing to the people of Nicaragua how vulnerable the revolution was. I was briefed on this operation and was told it would happen on a night with a full moon. I said I would drive by the next morning, as it was on the way from my residence to the embassy. I drove by and the billboards were still standing. I was told that there were technical problems. Twenty eight days later, they tried again and again; there were technical problems. During the third time around, three Nicaraguan agents were captured and paraded before the press as having failed in an effort to burn the billboards down. Things of this sort were deemed likely to "harass" the Sandinistas.

*Q: It sounds really very amateurish, doesn't it?*

QUAINTON: It was very amateurish. A lot of high tech stuff was done. It was not so easy to mine the ports or blow up the pipeline. In one sense, the operations were technically quite sophisticated, but on the other hand the political analysis that underlay the operations was extremely simplistic and based on poor information. The White House was led to believe that the Revolution was about to collapse if only given a sufficient push from several directions. These events, of course, convinced the Sandinistas, as I suggested earlier, that our agenda was not harassment, but their overthrow.

*Q: When you were talking to your CIA colleagues did the Bay of Pigs ever come up as a subject? The reason I ask this is that the Bay of Pigs was based on the assumption that you could overthrow a regime essentially just by showing a little power and do it on the cheap.*

QUAINTON: No, we never talked about the Bay of Pigs. I do think that the assumption was there. And, of course, in the long run the tactic paid off. It can be acknowledged that the war weariness that was generated by continued hostilities in the northern and eastern parts of the country and the hostility that it engendered in women, particularly mothers of young people who were forced to fight the war, did, in fact, lead to the defeat of Daniel Ortega and the victory of Violeta Chamorro in the 1990 elections. Even that was a close thing, as you may remember. We probably could have had free elections in 1984. In fact, we came very close to it, but in the end there was no desire to have free elections then because they would have reelected and legitimized Daniel Ortega. I don't think there was much confidence in the democratic process, so we went on fighting for another five years.

*Q: Did you have any contact with Violeta Chamorro at the time?*

QUAINTON: I knew her socially. She was not a major player. The reason she was an acceptable opponent to Daniel Ortega in the 1990 elections and the reason they allowed a transfer of power to take place (there was a lot of fear that the Sandinistas would thwart the results of the elections, but as you know they handed over power peacefully), was that Violeta Chamorro was seen to be sympathetic to the objectives of [the] Revolution. Although not a Sandinista by any stretch of the imagination, she had been in the first revolutionary junta with Daniel Ortega, one of the three rulers of the country right after the 1979 revolution. The revolution's success was in part the result of the bourgeoisie, the middle class, joining the Sandinistas after the murder of her husband, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, in 1978. She always maintained a unique relationship with the Sandinistas. Of course, she was much criticized by Senator Helms and others in her first administration for not being ruthless enough in kicking the Sandinistas out and for allowing Umberto Ortega to continue to command the army and for allowing senior Sandinista officials in the ministry of the interior and police force to remain. I think she realized it was a very polarized society and needed reconciliation, and she was in a unique position to do that. There was nobody else in the opposition who had any credibility with the Sandinistas by the end. I dealt much more with her son, young Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, who was a firebrand. He was very outspoken to the point where his paper was closed down all the time. There was a constant battle going on in the press in Nicaragua. There were three newspapers, the Sandinista party newspaper, *Barricada*, and one pro-Sandinista paper, and *La Prensa*, the opposition paper.

*Q: Was there concern about hardline revolutionaries who said they weren't going to take prisoners, they were going to make things as difficult as possible?*

QUAINTON: There were certainly some very tough people in the ministry of interior, which is where the hardliners tended to be concentrated. They were people who had fought and lost colleagues in the fighting. There was also considerable militancy among the younger members of the Revolution, and I suppose they could be called hardliners. The Ministry of Interior was a mixture of dedicated revolutionaries, people who experienced the Revolution. Minister Borge was, himself, an extraordinarily problematic figure. He had three offices in the ministry which were together, connecting offices. The one through which one entered was decorated with memorabilia of the revolution, letters from school children thanking him for what he had done, weapons that he had used, etc. The office he received visitors in was decorated with the largest collection of crucifixes in Nicaragua. He had ceramic, wood, and metal. The walls were covered. He fancied himself a liberation theologian and pretended to be a practicing Catholic. In his small war office where there was a fully stocked bar and a working desk and on the desk two books; one was on Marxism and Leninism and the other a Bible. That tells you much about the Sandinista Revolution, in fact. It was a strange mixture of Christian Marxism. A great number of people who came out of the Central American University were trained by the Jesuits. There were quite a number of Jesuits active in Nicaragua sympathetic to the revolution who believed that you could have revolution and still be a Christian as well.

*Q: I have the impression that every time we were making some sort of gesture towards Nicaragua, not that there were many, one of the Ortegas or somebody would end up behind the Kremlin wall or in Havana. Was there any of that?*

QUAINTON: Some of these internal events that I have described which were so egregious often caught Washington's attention. Ortega went to Cuba a number of times and Castro came at least once when I was there. Certainly any sign of the Cuban relationship caught Washington's attention and was much publicized. Cubans were not terribly visible. Whenever something promising like talks were being set up, something bad would happen, a speech by Ortega or some other provocation, which seemed to undercut whatever efforts were being made. Or on our side, suddenly some nasty covert operation would take place which would blow the dialog out of the water on the other side.

*Q: Can you talk about the Kissinger Commission?*

QUAINTON: You may remember that the Kissinger Commission was created in the hopes of building bipartisan support for the communications strategy in Central America. They held extensive hearings in Washington. Before the Commission went down to Central America, I actually flew up and met with Dr. Kissinger in the State Department. He had an office on the ground floor there, and I went over with him the kind of program that the Commission might have in Nicaragua. I described who would be available to meet with them. He talked about wanting to see the opposition, the archbishop. I told him that the Sandinistas proposed to offer lunch in the Commission's honor. He declined, saying they would just want sandwiches and Coke. I reported that to the Sandinistas, who were very disappointed, as they had wanted to show the Commission some degree of courtesy.

The Commission arrived on their last day in Central America. They had spent six days in the region, one day in each country. They only spent a day in Nicaragua, not a night. They arrived early in the morning. I met them and took them to the old residence. The current ambassador's residence is a fairly modern, rather attractive house, which we rented, but not suitable for large meetings. The old residence was a large building on a hill close to the embassy. There were only two houses on hills in Managua - Somoza's house and the American ambassador's house. It was a very large colonial style house with a pillared portico. It was quite splendid. It was abandoned by my predecessor because of its symbolism as the home of the America pro-consul in Nicaragua. But, the house was maintained and used for receptions on the Fourth of July and other important occasions. There was a very large dinner table that sat 26 or something like that. The Commission came in and sat on one side of the table and presentations on the other. There was a series of briefings beginning with one by me. I described the situation as I saw it, having been there about 18 months at the time. I laid out what I thought were the positive aspects of the situation as well as the negative aspects. I said I thought there was the possibility of a negotiated settlement with the Sandinistas. There were people in the government who would like a negotiated settlement and wanted to do business with the United States and who might be willing to do a deal if they could be assured of economic access to the United States and that there would be a cutback on our support of the Contras. It was an overly optimistic view perhaps, but one that was based on what I knew of the players themselves and the dynamics of the politics in Nicaragua.

Dr. John Silber, the president of Boston University, was a member of the Commission. Silber asked me if the views I had just expressed were the views of the President of the United States. I said, "I couldn't say, but these were the conclusions I had reached after 18 months in Nicaragua." He said, "That is not the question that I asked you. Would the President of the United States agree with what you have said?" I realized then that I was going to be in trouble, given the terms in which the questions were being put to me. I, of course, did not know what they had heard from other ambassadors in the region.

I was followed by representatives of the private sector, COSEP, the industrialists and agriculturalists. The banana growers, cotton growers, etc., described the different problems that they faced - coffee growers, banana growers, cotton growers, etc. They ended with a fabulous touch. They produced the first day covers of a series of postage stamps which had come out the week before in Nicaragua on which there were pictures of Karl Marx. There was a picture of Marx in the lefthand corner of the first day cover and on the bottom was written, "The world's greatest thinker." These envelopes were handed around so that everyone on the Commission was able to inspect them. Needless to say, the Commission was convinced they were dealing with a communist government. I was not brave enough to speak up and tell them that the week before the Marx postage stamp was issued, the Sandinistas put out a set of George Washington postage stamps showing Washington crossing the Delaware, etc.

The Commission then went on to meet with some of the political parties who were opposed to the Sandinistas. They had a meeting with the archbishop, who was very critical of the government. They came back at lunch time and spent the rest of the day with the Sandinistas, having spent the whole morning with the opposition. And indeed at lunch they were given sandwiches and Coke. All the members of the Commission complained. They saw this as a slight. They complained that

they couldn't even be given a decent meal. But, what could I say? That was what the chairman had asked for and that was what the chairman got, but I am sure the chairman had not told them what to expect. They were not very good sandwiches, as sandwiches are not eaten much in Nicaragua.

There was then a briefing by the head of Sandinista military intelligence. There was a huge map of the country on the wall behind him with various arrows and lines showing where the Contra bases were, where the infiltration routes were, etc. The Sandinistas described in detail how they were being harassed by the United States, etc. It was a good briefing.

At the end of it, Oliver North took Dr. Kissinger aside. I was standing there, and he said to Kissinger that this was proof of Soviet control of Nicaragua. I looked surprised. He said that the Sandinistas would not have had all this accurate information were it not for Soviet satellites and Soviet intelligence which had infiltrated the Contras. So, this was another telling point, first the Karl Marx postage stamp and then Soviet domination of Nicaragua.

They then went on and met with pro-Sandinista political parties. Their representatives were not very convincing as they tried to explain the freedom of political action which they enjoyed.

Their penultimate and ultimate meetings were with the foreign minister, Father D'Escoto, a Maryknoll priest, and Daniel Ortega. Father D'Escoto gave a rather lurid, highly emotional presentation of their foreign policy, in which he was very critical of the U.S. At the end of it, Senator Domenici asked for the floor. He said, "Well that is most interesting." He reminded the Father that they had lunch together in the Senate dining room two years before, shortly after the revolution had triumphed and that D'Escoto had told him what the Revolution would do for Nicaragua in terms of justice. The senator then said, "Father, I have seen much of your country and I now know that everything you told me was a lie. I will not believe anything that you say to me again." So, the foreign minister looked the senator in the eye and said, "Well, Senator, I heard what you said. I remember you telling me about the United States and its commitment to democracy and I will remind you that for 50 years, your country has supported the most brutal dictatorship this country has ever seen. I regard everything you have said as hypocrisy and I will believe nothing you say to me either." He stood up and the meeting was adjourned.

*Q: That was a good meeting of the minds.*

QUAINTON: Yes. It was followed by a meeting with Daniel Ortega and the members of his government. We were milling around outside and Dr. Kissinger waylaid me and said, "Well, what happens next?" I said, "Well, Dr. Kissinger, at this final meeting, Daniel Ortega will be at the end of this quite large room where he always receives visitors. His government will be sitting to his left. You and your commission will sit to his right. You will come in, shake hands, and sit down. You will exchange introductory remarks and then you may ask any questions that you wish to ask." Dr. Kissinger said "You don't mean I have to shake hands with the son of a bitch?" "Well, Dr. Kissinger, it is the normal practice here in Nicaragua but, of course, that is up to you."

So, we file in. I don't know if he shook hands with Ortega or not. I was bringing up the rear of this rather exalted group. The Commission sits down and puts on simultaneous translation earphones. Kissinger looks at Ortega sitting there in his military uniform and says, "Well, Commandante,

what do you have to say?" Full stop. No introduction. There is a pause while Ortega thinks and he says, "Dr. Kissinger, I think I ought to give you our perception of American foreign policy in Latin America. And that is that you have no consistent policy in the region, that your policy is largely driven by crisis events. So, when there was the Cuban Revolution, your government responded with the Alliance of Progress. When there was a danger of revolution in the Dominican Republic, you responded with the Rockefeller Commission. Now that there is revolution in Nicaragua we have you. You know, your country talks a great deal about democracy, and I will remind you that if you had cared about democracy over the last fifty years in Nicaragua, you wouldn't have us." He then went on for some forty minutes to recount the history of U.S.-Nicaraguan relationships since the filibuster in the late 1860s, William Walker, through the American occupation of Nicaragua by Marines after the First World War: a litany of grievances and woes about which for most Nicaraguans were part of the theology of the revolution.

Ortega finally stops. As this is going on, all the Commission members, one by one, take their headphones off and stop listening. Dr. Kissinger listens until the end. He then turns to Ortega and says, "Commandante, I did not like the tone or the substances of your remarks. Any further discussion between our two governments will be in writing." And, he stood up. Such was the day of the Kissinger Commission in Nicaragua. They were tired, they were fractious, and they were not about to be lectured to by someone as un-prepossessing as Daniel Ortega. And so they went home to draft their report.

The report was actually quite sensible in terms of things it recommended in terms of focusing American policy in Central America. About a month later, I received a call from the deputy secretary of state, Kenneth Dam, telling me the President wished to make a change in Nicaragua. This would be without prejudice to my career, he assured me, but everybody felt it was time for a change. I had been there a little over 18 months. The system was sufficiently incompetent that although I had lost the confidence of the White House I stayed another six months because they couldn't get anybody else in place and they didn't want to be without somebody. I stayed until May 1984 when Harry Bergold finally was confirmed and sworn in. Of course, those last six months were difficult ones, not only because it was clear that Washington was increasingly out of step with me and I was clearly out of step with Washington. The situation continued to deteriorate along all fronts. Covert operations increased in intensity. The rhetoric got steamier on both sides.

Anyway, George Shultz, to whom I am eternally grateful, decided that I should be sent as far from Central America as it was possible to send me. Having never served in an arab country in the Middle East I was assigned as ambassador to Kuwait.

*Q: During this time had you kind of given up? An ambassador is supposed to make peace, but it looked like two railroad trains on the same track going towards each other.*

QUAINTON: I had given up in the sense that I didn't see that there was any likelihood of negotiations. I had seen the various efforts that had been made to dialog with the Sandinistas, some of them secret. Tony Motley made a night time, unannounced visit which was never publicized. The bottom line was that it was always the question of the chicken and the egg. We told the Sandinistas they had to show their changed attitude by changing what they did in Salvador if they want us to change any of our policies. The Sandinistas said they would not change everything they

did until there was real assurance that we would change our policies. They were very skeptical that we would do that. So, there was never a basis for an agreement. There were various discussions, various proposals, about limiting arm shipments to Salvador and resuming trade. But, neither side by 1984 believed in the good faith of the other. Indeed, there was no good reason for either side to believe in the good faith of the other.

So, under those circumstances it became very hard to put together any kind of reasonable negotiating plan. I spent much of my time dealing with the endless stream of Americans who continued to come to Managua. I tried to give them a balanced picture of what was going on. That continued to be a problem, as some of these visitors were extraordinarily emotional. I remember a group of 30 or 40 people from the film industry who came down. I met them in the embassy conference room and gave them my standard briefing. At the end of the briefing, one gentleman, whose name I never learned, stood up and said he had never encountered a man who lied to the extent that I did and he wanted to tell me in the presence of his colleagues that were there Nuremberg trials again, I would be one of the guilty. There was very strong applause.

That is a pretty heavy emotional burden. My staff took this harder than I did, this constant sense of insistence of visitors that we were supporting a genocidal policy against the Nicaraguan regime. On a number of occasions when delegations came to my office, they insisted on praying. They would pray for the overthrow of the Reagan administration. These groups included bishops, priests, nuns and pastors, etc., quite responsible and respectable looking people. I think the staff found it very, very hard - not so much analyzing the situation on the ground, but in dealing with a hostile American public. Most foreign policy positions enjoy the general support of the American people. The public may not be particularly interested in any particular country, but the public tends to be supportive of overall American goals. That was not at all the case throughout this period. Once a week, there was a demonstration that blocked the entrance to the embassy by 20, 30, 50, 100, 150, 200 American citizens. There were no Sandinista demonstrations against us, just American citizen demonstrations every week. It took its toll on the staff, who often had difficulty explaining to themselves why their fellow citizens didn't understand reality as the embassy saw it.

*Q: What about communications with our ambassador in El Salvador? Was there much?*

QUAINTON: There was relatively little with either Honduras or El Salvador. There were occasional regional meetings. There was one in the spring of 1984 before I left for Kuwait which George Shultz presided over in El Salvador. We also got together at a chiefs of mission meeting in Panama, hosted by SOUTHCOM. Yes, there were occasions to get together. I think we were fully informed about major political developments in each country, but not about details of things like the military operations in Salvador.

*Q: Tony, they got you out of Nicaragua and supposedly out of the line of fire, I guess. Do you know any reason why you got the appointment to Kuwait and were there any problems with it?*

QUAINTON: As I mentioned, once it was apparent that the White House was anxious to have a new man in Nicaragua, Secretary Shultz arranged for me to get an onward assignment. There were not a whole lot of posts currently vacant for which I was suitable, but Kuwait was vacant. Kuwait had been without an ambassador for the best part of a year by the time I got there in the summer of

1984. The previous ambassador had left in 1983 and then in September of 1983 the embassy had been blown up by a very substantial car bomb with loss of life - FSNs were killed; no Americans were killed - and one of the two principal buildings of the embassy had been almost totally demolished. I think probably because of my previous experience in counterterrorism and my familiarity with a lot of the issues that went with terrorism, Kuwait seemed like a fairly logical choice to which I might be assigned. I was not an Arabist, in fact on leaving Nicaragua in May, 1984, I went almost immediately, after a period of leave, into the Arabic fast course with my wife. That was extended another couple of months as we waited for the confirmation process to be complete. In three months of Arabic, you can't get terribly far, but we got to the point where we could read a certain amount facilitated by the fact that we had earlier studied Urdu, which is written in a very similar script to that in which modern Arabic is written.

**SALLY GROOMS COWAL**  
**Deputy Political Counselor to American UN Ambassador**  
**New York (1983-1985)**

*Ambassador Sally Grooms Cowal was born in Oak Park, Illinois in 1944. After graduating from DePauw University she joined the United States Information Service as Foreign Service Officer. Her service included assignments as Cultural and Public Affairs Officer at US Embassies in India, Colombia, Mexico and Israel. She subsequently held a number of senior positions in the Department of State, including Assistant Secretary for Latin American Affairs and Deputy Political Counselor to The American Ambassador to the United Nations. In 1991 she was appointed Ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago. Ambassador Cowal was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy August 9, 2001.*

*Q: Well, one of the main focuses of the Reagan administration was Central America, El Salvador, the guerilla war going on, Nicaragua being taken over by the Sandinistas, and their close ties to Cuba and the Soviet Union. How did that play when you were there?*

COWAL: Well, it took a tremendous amount of time and energy, some of it well placed and some not so well placed. Jeane had, I think, not really much understanding of Latin America, although she had done her PhD dissertation on the *Peronistas* (Peron supporters), and she spoke Spanish. Her whole orientation and her whole academic focus and her whole professional focus had really been on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Her first job was working for her husband, Evron Kirkpatrick, who was a very liberal professor from the University of Minnesota. She worked for him reading the translated interviews of refugees coming out of Eastern Europe as the Soviet Union cracked down the Iron Curtain and began to transform those societies against their will into a Communist state.

That was Jeane's formation, so I think that Jeane wanted to see Central America played out against that canvas, and, looking at it from that perspective, saw it that way. Her chief deputy was a man named Jose Sorzano. Jose Sorzano was a Cuban American, born in Cuba, who wanted to see everything the same way. He wanted to see the domino theory in effect in our region and that it

would go from Cuba to Nicaragua and suddenly there would be Communism, Soviet Communism, sort of raising up the isthmus and ending up in Mexico, where it would threaten the United States. So their cause celebre became defeating the Sandinistas on the diplomatic front. We would take a stand against Cuban and Nicaraguan Communism in the hemisphere, trying to strengthen client states, which by and large were not democracies, which by and large were committing some pretty egregious human rights violations of their own. Nonetheless, looking at it in a fairly simplistic way and saying, "Well, the enemy of my enemy is my friend," and therefore I think in many ways becoming much too much of an apologist for the goon squads in Guatemala and in El Salvador and in Honduras, who were very anxious to allow us to put bases there, to put American military there.

The whole Contra stuff was certainly playing out, our funding of these enterprises to ...

*Q: This is tape seven, side one, with Sally Cowal. Yes?*

COWAL: I think, as I said, I got hired, I think, because essentially my political views were consonant with theirs when it came to the Middle East. I must say, they've been somewhat modified over time, but I was coming right out of a four-year experience in Israel. My experience before that, of course, had been in Latin America, not in Central America, but in Colombia. I spoke Spanish and I read a lot and I thought I knew a lot. My views on Central America were not the views of the Reagan administration. I think it became increasingly difficult for me to do what they wanted done, which was in some ways very adolescent. It took the form of trying to harass and pick on the Nicaraguans, wherever we could, who were no match in many ways. However, they had a couple of clever people, and they also saw the UN as the place where they could carry forward their political message. They were determined to do that by sending some pretty articulate people, who would take every opportunity to make scandalous and scurrilous remarks about the United States, which of course I didn't like and I didn't appreciate.

It became sort of a mud fight between the United States and Cuba and Nicaragua, and, to a certain extent, Mexico, which was one of the reasons why we had such a bad relationship with Mexico. The United States was very much of the mind that the Monroe Doctrine was still what counted, and that the United States was the sovereign power in Latin America, that things should not happen in Latin America which did not happen with the advice and consent of the United States. That was certainly true of Central America.

The French and the Mexicans tried to have a peace plan and have some arrangements so that there would be some settlements in Nicaragua and in El Salvador and other places where there were active guerilla movements fighting the largely military, non-democratic regimes. This was something that the United States was just not going to stand for. Playing around in our backyard, as we would call it. So, fine enough, but sometimes the tactics were kind of adolescent in there.

*Q: Did you get any feel for, his name escapes me, Lieutenant Colonel ...*

COWAL: North, Ollie North.

*Q: Ollie North. Did he ever come on your radar?*

COWAL: No, not then. Later, yes, but not then.

*Q: Did the mining of the Nicaraguan ports come up when you were in the UN?*

COWAL: Yes, it did.

*Q: This of course was international law and all. How did this go? Was it sort of the hell with international law?*

COWAL: I think it was pretty much, "The hell with international law. It's Latin America, it's Central America, it's our backyard. It doesn't matter what international law is, this is important to the United States, and we're just going to do it." Those things were not particularly easy to defend, and I don't think we defended them very well.

*Q: I mean, I'm trying to get a little feel for the interaction. I understand the delegates' lounge is where a lot of work gets done. Were people coming up to you and saying, "Sally, what the hell are you doing?" I'm talking about other representatives.*

COWAL: The people I became closest to, my real colleagues were the 14 other countries on the Security Council. Those were the people that you saw all the time, and so they were the ones who became friends and colleagues, and you spent sometimes a lot of time with them. Because these Security Council consultations would go on for hour after hour after hour – not public meetings, but sort of behind-the-scenes consultations. So you got to know people pretty well, and, yes, you got, I suppose, an awful lot of people saying, "What's that all about?" I don't think we covered ourselves with glory there.

*Q: Well, it did seem that we over exaggerated the thing. President Reagan was saying, "Well, Nicaragua is only 800 miles from Brownsville, Texas." Well, I found myself terribly unmoved. Was it difficult for you at points to work ...*

COWAL: Yes, it was difficult for me to work. Two things became difficult for me. One was that Jeane saw her rising star as connected to how bad the UN was, and how she was this tough woman out there on the front lines, battling the UN, which would seek to destroy our way of life. Anything that we could do to make the UN look silly, to make UN countries look like they were opposed to the United States, all of that was grist for the mill. So, unlike a typical diplomatic assignment, where your job is, insofar as possible, to explain and defend your position, but it's to win friends and influence people. We were happiest when the vote was 159 to three, and that would be Israel and the Marshall Islands or something voting with the United States, maybe in those days you'd get El Salvador and Honduras. Our friends in the Eastern Caribbean would abstain, and everybody else would vote against, and we could say, once again, "There we are, the only people in the world who understand freedom and democracy, trying to defend it."

The pseudoscience to show that that was the case bothered me. The other thing that really bothered me was I became increasingly distant from the Central America policy, from the "Managua's 800 miles from Brownsville, Texas; and we must hold the line here, and we don't accept the legitimacy of the Sandinista government," even though as far as I can tell it was a legitimately elected

government. Perhaps misguided from our point of view, it was, as a Communist system, probably going to be an economy which didn't survive and didn't prosper and didn't do well. I certainly don't think we had any obligation to provide aid or anything else to a government with which we did not agree, with which we had fundamental disagreements. But I also didn't think that we had any business arming the Contras and arming forces in that country to overthrow a legitimately elected government.

*Q: On the other side, they were doing guerilla movement designed to overthrow the Salvadorians.*

COWAL: Which they were no doubt doing funded by the Soviet Union and by Cuba and by others.

**ROBERT W. DUEMLING**  
**Humanitarian Assistance Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1984-1986)**

*Ambassador Robert W. Duemling was born in Michigan in 1929. He received both a bachelor's degree and a master's degree from Yale University. Prior to becoming a Foreign Service officer in 1957, he served in naval intelligence. His Foreign Service career included positions in Italy, Malaysia, Borneo, Japan, Canada, Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Suriname. Ambassador Duemling was interviewed by Charles Kennedy in 1989.*

*Q: Lets' go to your next assignment.*

DUEMLING: I left Suriname in 1984 and returned to Washington to do a management study. The then Under Secretary for Management, Ron Spiers, asked me to make a study of the relationships between CIA and the Department. I don't think this was related to my recent experiences with that Agency, but a coincidence. What had occurred was that in a routine inspection of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR), the Inspector General had commented that there appeared to be some things that were not entirely right in the relationships abroad between the two agencies. The IG was concerned about the use of "cover" abroad. I can't get into detail on this issue because it is classified, but in effect I spent from September 1984 to June-July 1985 working on this project which was a joint project with the CIA. I always had good relations with my CIA colleagues which stood me in good stead when I undertook this project because my reputation in CIA was that I was a reasonable fellow who could work with the CIA without any hang-ups -- which cannot be said of all Foreign Service officers. This was a very interesting project. The Agency was very cooperative and thought so highly of the final report, which included 36 recommendations, that it had it printed as an internal document and made it required reading for all their station and deputy station chiefs. I was flattered that they thought of it as well as they did.

From that assignment, I went to the Inspection Corps as a Senior Inspector. That assignment lasted for less than twenty-four hours because in the course of the Summer, I had been approached by Jim Michel, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for ARA to see whether I would be willing to take on the administration of an appropriation of \$ 27 million for humanitarian aid to the Nicaraguan

resistance movement -- the Contras. I had declined to take that job on the grounds that I didn't think I was qualified for it. It seemed to me that a more appropriate person would have been someone with Central American experience, including command of Spanish, and with experience in administering aid, which I had not had. So I declined. I was asked once again by Mike Armacost, then the Under Secretary for Political Affairs -- an old friend. Mike called me in to ask me to do it and I gave him the same reasons why I did not wish to do it. I then went to Airlie House for a meeting of senior Inspectors of whom I was supposed to become one. The IG went over the agenda for the coming year and the new Inspectors were briefed on the process. While I was out there, I got a phone call about mid-day from Armacost who repeated his views that I should take the assistance job because I was just the right man for it. He said he understood my reservations, but thought that I had other qualifications which would make me eminently suited for it. He mentioned that the Secretary also thought that I was the right man. I responded by saying that if the Secretary personally asked that I take the assignment, I could not refuse. He said he would call back and within five minutes he did in fact call back saying that I had an appointment with the Secretary at 6 o'clock that evening. I returned to Washington and walked into the Secretary's office at 6 o'clock. George Shultz showed his sense of humor when he greeted me by saying : " Bob, I understand you have agreed to take the job". I said "Yes" and asked him what he expected. He gave me three major points: the guidelines contained in the legislation on how the funds were to be spent -- he emphasized that I was to adhere to those guidelines and not to test the limits of the law; he wanted the program administered efficiently and with enthusiasm; thirdly, he wanted the maximum amount possible of the assistance given to the intended recipients and the minimum amount spent on administration.

The reason he made the third point is because the newspapers carried a few weeks earlier a story about a big fund-raising dinner in the private sector for aid to the Contras. The story reported that the gross receipts from the dinner were approximately \$ 250,000 of which less than \$25,000 -- more in the neighborhood of \$ 6,000 -- had gone to the Contras. The rest went to consultant fees -- two guys got \$50,000 each -- dinner costs -- food, drink, the hall -- etc. The people who went to the dinner forked out a lot of money, very little of which actually went to the cause.

I took on the job which was very interesting because Congress had appropriated \$ 27 million, but had also stipulated that neither Defense nor CIA could have anything to do with administration of the funds. Congress was at that time very unhappy with both Agencies on how they administered other Contra programs. There had been considerable discussion among the various Executive branch agencies after the passage of the legislation and Presidential approval in early August 1985 on which agency might be able to administer this program. AID refused to do so because they felt it would tarnish their image to be associated with something that was so politically charged. George Shultz did not want it in State Department because State was not an operating agency for administering assistance. It went around and around until it was decided that the only solution was to establish a new semi-autonomous agency which would be under the political guidance of the Department. That is what was done and I was given a Presidential appointment which did not require Senatorial confirmation. It was up to me to create this new little agency. In light of Shultz' admonition to spend as little as possible on administration, the obvious way to proceed was to select people with appropriate experience and background who were already on the federal payroll who could be seconded to me without reimbursement to their agencies. This proposal was warmly received and that is what we did. My deputy was from USIA -- he had long experience in Central

America and particularly in Honduras. I finally got a commitment, after much haggling, out of AID to give me three officers who had experience in administering assistance programs. Then I got some people out of State Department. I put together a small staff of under ten people. Besides myself, there were two State secretaries, a political officer from the Department, there were three AID officers and one from USIA.

We set up shop in rather austere offices in a building in Rosslyn. There was no precedent for administering aid like this. We were doing something totally new. It was ill advised but we had no choice because of the constraints placed upon us by the Congress in the legislation. My first task was to talk to people who had experience in assistance management looking for potential prototypes. I found the closest parallels to what we were trying to do was in AID's Emergency Relief Office and with the Department's Refugee Relief program, which were used to fast actions. We had to take rapid action because the Contras by that time had not had any US official assistance for over a year and were in dire need of aid. We had to crank up very fast. The White House and the NSC and George Shultz were very anxious that the program move ahead as fast as possible. I was on a spot because speed in getting the program underway was one objective; the other was that the program was to be administered in a way that accountability would be preserved. I had to create processes that would channel these funds in an efficient manner with the records kept appropriately, making sure that the channels were viable and were reliable.

*Q: There was considerable scrutiny and criticism at the time?*

DUEMLING: There was indeed. This had been fiercely contested legislation and it had some bitter opponents. Therefore, even after it had passed into law, there were many members of Congress who would have preferred to derail the whole program by putting road-blocks in front of the process for implementing the law. I felt very unhappy about all of that because I believed that since it was the law of the land, it was not appropriate for members of Congress -- and there were a couple of Representatives I can think of -- to harass the proceeding. Mike Barnes of Maryland was the principal opponent. He was the chairman of the Latin American subcommittee of House Foreign Affairs Committee. Barnes had been opposed to the legislation and even after it was passed he held hearings. Within a couple of months of passage, we had an anonymous letter sent to the Inspector General alleging financial irregularities in my operations and accusing us of malfeasance. The IG immediately called me and told me he had the letter. I asked him to send his inspectors over right away so that we could be watched every minute. I was operating this program in clear daylight and wanted anyone who had any questions to watch. I had also gone to the Intelligence Committees and asked for their auditors to advise me on what procedures I should use to implement the law. They declined to participate on the grounds that it would probably be unconstitutional for the Legislative Branch to be telling the Executive how to conduct its business. That I think was a bit of a cop-out, but I understood.

The next thing that happened, Barnes asked the General Accounting Office (GAO) to get in the act and the FBI also got into the act. Within three months of establishing this program, I had in my office representatives of the Department's IG, of the GAO and of the FBI. Everything was open to them. They saw everything. They were there for months and months.

*Q: Did they help in setting up the system?*

DUEMLING: No, they wouldn't play that game. That would have been nice. I would have appreciated their advice. At the end of the program, no one was able to come up with any significant assertion of malfeasance. There were a couple of episodes where there were funds that were misused, but it was our organization that discovered those, with the help of the CIA and we brought them to the attention of GAO. The GAO in turn reported these to the Congress, as they are obliged to do. The senior GAO official most closely involved with our program was a Ms. McCabe. She was excellent, highly professional, entirely realistic. The only difference that I have had with the GAO was on questions of theory. GAO maintained that the accountability checks were inadequate for it to be able to certify with certainty that the aid was reaching the intended recipients. My response was that I agreed, that I understood the point, but that I was operating under constraints, not of my own choosing, namely that this was an overt program in the US, but we were in effect delivering covert aid in Central America. This fact forced the aid to go through Honduras, which did not wish to be seen cooperating with our effort to aid the Contras, because that was not helpful to their own bilateral relationships with Nicaragua. They wanted to be able to disavow any assistance, although the aid delivery was being assisted by the Honduran military. This is now all in the public domain even though it was no secret even then. It was this game of deniability that everyone was playing.

Another problem that arose concerned the location of my staff. I had expected to put them in Honduras both at the airport and in the forward areas along the border where the supplies were being delivered to the Contras. However, I was not permitted to have my staff in Honduras. I was told the government of Honduras did not want us there, but I have very good reasons to believe that it was the US Ambassador-John Ferch -- in the fall of 1985 who was the real block. He was very much opposed to our program as was his DCM, Shep Lowman. They were personally opposed to the program, so much so that a few weeks later, Elliott Abrams, the then Assistant Secretary for Latin America, had to telephone Ferch to tell him if he didn't support US policy toward Honduras, he would have to be recalled. At that point, Ferch decided he would join the team. But until then, he opposed our program because he felt it would be inimicable to US relationships with Honduras. Of course, I was trying to carry out a policy fully approved by State Department and Elliott Abrams, to whom I looked for political guidance. I was trying to get the program off the ground, while being watched by all the different agencies. When it was all over, there were only two cases involving about \$ 75,000 -- which we reclaimed in large part from the Contras in cash because we felt that the expenditures were not in accord with the legislation. Overall, then, the loss to Uncle Sam was in the \$ 5,000-\$10,000 range, which was very small. People have told me, after it was all over, that they have never seen an aid program administered as efficiently as this was. We had spent slightly over 1% of the principal for administrative expenses. The normal percentage runs between 10% and 25%. We were considerably under the average. That was in response to George Shultz' admonition to get the maximum flow through to the intended recipients. We not only administered the program to the best of our abilities under the constraints imposed on us, but I am confident that that aid in fact did reach the intended recipients. We tried in every way possible to check that, including audit of our in-country suppliers. We procured items in the United States -- boots, ponchos, web belts, rain gear and pharmaceuticals -- and shipped them by air into Central America. Within Central America, we procured food and other daily necessities -- paper products, fuel oil, some vehicles (Jeeps), boats, etc. One of the ways we were able to check whether any material was being sold in the black market -- that is people accepting the material and then selling

it in the black market for cash to buy weapons which would have been misuse of the funds -- was to monitor the market places in the small towns where deliveries were being made. We were able to determine that our material never entered the black market.

*Q: If you couldn't have people in the field, how did you conduct the checks?*

DUEMLING: We checked through the CIA, which had a sizeable operation in Honduras, including a separate base that worked entirely on the Contra issue. CIA had its agents in the field, right on the border. Under the legislation and with the full understanding and agreement of the two intelligence oversight committees of the Congress, CIA was able to provide surveillance and report back to us. We got a steady stream of reports, eye witness accounts, on the delivery of the supplies from the airfields in Honduras or El Salvador through the truck supply system to the actual deliveries to the Contras. CIA people were reporting all along the line at various points in the delivery system. That is not to say that we had 100% coverage of the deliveries; we did not. But we had a significant percentage and there were spot checks all along. We were pretty confident that the reports were reliable.

I want to make another observation. I was running a program of \$ 27 million, which in the federal budget, is a very small program. Compare that with aid to Israel or Egypt. We were talking about peanuts. People with experience in the aid business will tell you that there is a certain amount of "spoilage or corruption" that is to be expected. I think that in retrospect we looked very good. The other irony is that with all the scrutiny focused on us, there were far worse abuses taking place in the Federal Government, such as in HUD, Savings and Loans, etc. There you see malfeasance of dimensions that absolutely dwarfed our program. Yet for political reasons everyone was fixated on our program, thanks to the political opponents. One of the things that motivated Mike Barnes was his desire to grandstand and grab headlines because he was going to run for the Senate. In the spring of 1986, he was trying to build up his public image by making a lot of headlines. I think that was part of his motivation. In fact, he lost in the Democratic primary to Barbara Mikulski and has passed into some degree of obscurity, at least for the moment. I have to say that as a hard working civil servant, trying to discharge my responsibilities under the law of the land, I took a very dim view of Congressmen trying to derail what I was doing by putting obstacles in front of me. A lot of it was pure harassment.

There is another dimension of all of this that is noteworthy; namely, the role of Oliver North. Oliver North, who subsequently achieved a lot of notoriety, was the person to whom I was directed for information about the Contras and the resistance movement in terms of their resources, etc. Elliott Abrams and others in the Department directed me to North, a Marine Lieutenant Colonel on the NSC staff. I was told that he had worked closely with Contras and that I should call on him, which I did. I had known him slightly through a conference that we had both attended when I was Ambassador in Suriname. The conference had taken place in Panama. He is a very engaging person. He told me one evening at the conference his world view. He said he thought that the administration had an extraordinary opportunity to turn Communism back around the world. This could be done in Central America, in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the world. He thought that would be a great turning point in history. I listened with some interest. I confess a degree of disbelief; it sounded a trifle apocalyptic. That was my first encounter with Oliver North. A year later, I went to talk to him as head of the Nicaraguan Humanitarian Assistance Office -- that is

what my organization was called. I talked to him about the Contras; he gave me a lot of information and some help; he mentioned to me a private citizen whom he knew who had been working with the Contras by the name of Robert Owen. Owen, in fact, called on me in September, 1985 when I was trying to organize the staff for the new office. He came to volunteer his services; that is to say he wanted to be employed. He had spent the summer in Central America, working with a member of the Tom Dooley Foundation assessing the medical problems and needs of the Nicaraguan resistance. They had written a report which he gave me. He said that he knew the Contras, he knew Ollie North, he was a true believer -- by that he meant that he was a loyal follower of Ronald Reagan -- he was a strong supporter of the policy and that he was the right guy for me. I had some qualms about involving someone who was so clearly identified with the Contra cause because although I was about to provide aid to the Contras, I saw my operation as an arms-length, objective, government program. It was not meant to be highly partisan, in my view. My second reservation was a very practical one. I only wanted people already on the federal payroll who had security clearances. Owen didn't have that. I explained that to him and told him that I didn't have a place for him.

In the course of those first six weeks devoted to creating this new semi-autonomous agency, I was casting around for ideas on how this might be done as well as to identify people who could join my staff. I was discussing all these matters with the inter-agency group which was a standing committee at the Assistant Secretary level, chaired by Assistant Secretary for Latin American affairs, Elliott Abrams. The other representatives on that group were officers from other agencies of equivalent rank, including such people as Oliver North, representing the NSC politico-military section. There was also another fellow representing the NSC political section. There was someone from Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff and the CIA and a few others. That constituted a kind of steering committee which discussed policy and the implementation of policy in the Latin American area. I met with that group perhaps as much as twice a week in the initial stages to discuss with them how I was approaching my task, what decisions I was making and to seek their guidance on how to implement the legislation -- what was permissible, what was not permissible in terms of the kind of aid that could be given. The legislation forbade anything having to do with armaments or guns or bullets or armed vehicles, etc. It had to be "humanitarian" -- food, clothing and the necessities of daily living, pharmaceuticals, etc. In the initial discussions, I explained how I intended to proceed.

Ollie North took a very vigorous role in the discussions of the committee. He was a very engaging character, but I thought he had the temperament of a "naughty altar-boy". He is very handsome in a boyish way with a little lock of hair that falls engagingly across his forehead. He has a wonderful grin. He has the classic all-American boy looks -- trim, erect military bearing, handsome, engaging, personable. He knows all that. He is an actor, he knows how to use his appearance, his voice, his expressions, his eye-brows, his grin. He can bring all of that to play and does it very effectively, as was often shown during his testimony in Congressional hearings. I had reservations about North, going back to that conversation I had with him on the beach of Panama, which I described earlier. Also I felt that I had been put in charge of this program and I believed that I should decide what it would be and how it should be run. So I made certain assertions on how I wanted to do things. North didn't take exception particularly but kept hammering on the urgency. He felt that the material had to be moved rapidly. He thought the Contras were in very tough shape and dying. He always wanted quicker action. I told him that I was as anxious to get started as he

was, but that it had to be done in an orderly fashion because I was the one who was accountable and had to answer to the Congress on how the program had been administered. I also was accountable to George Shultz, the GAO, the FBI and the Inspector General. I refused to be precipitous. There was a hell of a lot of heat being put on me to move in a precipitous fashion.

Ollie was pressing me very hard to take Rob Owen on my staff. I explained to Ollie why I didn't want him. I felt that Owen was tainted politically, because Owen was publicly identified with the right wing friends of the Contras in the United States. I felt that my program had to be apolitical, particularly if I was going to be able to defend it against the attacks from the left. They were already coming from Mike Barnes. I certainly did not want to get into bed right away with the right wing. So I didn't want Rob Owen for these various reasons. My position finally forced a kind of a show-down meeting in mid-October, 1985. It was a Saturday morning in Abrams' office and North had been haranguing me on getting going and on Rob Owen. I had discussed the Owen matter privately with Abrams and with Jim Michel, his principal deputy. They understood my position, which I made very clear in the inter-agency meetings. Finally, Abrams turned to me and suggested that I find a place for Owen. I had become totally isolated with everyone, except me, feeling he should be employed on my staff. They were all backing down in front of North. I had also received a letter signed by all three of the Contras leaders -- Calero, Cruz and Robelo -- asking me to hire Owen to work with them. I finally agreed, but I said that I would only do so by making a grant to the foundation of which Owen was the titular head. This was a one-man foundation called IDEA (Institute for Democracy and Education). That grant would enable him to devote full time to assisting the Contras and to act as a kind of liaison between the Contras and me. He would work for them and I would specify the areas in which I wanted his assistance. I wanted him to work especially on the medical program because he had been involved in that before. I wanted him to expedite things, but he was not working directly for me and was not on my staff. I also told the group that I was in charge of the program and that it would be managed my way. If they didn't agree with that, I asked them to tell me right then and there because then I would resign. They all backed off because they knew I would resign. That was the moment I drew the line on the sand and made it clear that I would not be pushed on how I would administer the program. Ollie North backed off and said he thought that I was wonderful in the job and that I had his full confidence. From that moment on, I had no more problems with Ollie North. I did of course have Owen, but I was able to fence him off to my satisfaction. He made a number of trips to Central America from which he wrote reports which were reasonably useful. He did some very useful things with respect to the medical program. But he also, unbeknownst to me, was playing a double role, which became subsequently public knowledge when he testified before the Congressional investigative Committees. There he confessed that on the side, he was doing exactly what I feared; namely he was working for Ollie North and the Contras and involved himself in the private arms supply pipeline. There was nothing illegal about the arms-to-the-Contras. It was just that my program could not have had anything to do with arms. Although Owen was under contract to me full time, he involved himself in the arms supply effort. He lamely excused himself before the Congressional Committees, when asked about this dual role, by saying that the arms work was done after five o'clock on his own time. The contract had stipulated that he be full time and exclusively a contractor to my organization. He had violated his contract. Then the Committee asked him what I would have thought had I known of this dual role. Owen responded that I would have been very disappointed, which would have been the least.

The program continued and the aid got there. There was very little cash; that was primarily used to buy cordobas, the Nicaraguan currency. You could buy the cordobas at a huge discount outside of Nicaragua because they were almost worthless due to the terrible inflation. The only cash that we ever gave to the Contras were these cordobas for use when they went into Nicaragua. Otherwise, everything else we gave was in-kind assistance -- food, pharmaceuticals, clothing, boots, ponchos, web belts, canteens, etc. In essence, we had completed the disbursement of the available funds by about July 1986. The legislation required that all the funds be committed in the pipeline by April 1, 1986. We did that. Forward contracts were written and the actual supplies had cleared the pipeline by about August, 1986. By that time, we were over the hump with all the investigations which had come to little. In the meantime, a whole separate matter -- the Iran-Contra scandal -- was beginning to bubble up. We were going out of business. By August, 1986 most of the aid had been given. I spent the Fall of 1986 writing the final report covering all of our activities. Two of my colleagues wrote parts of it, but it was mostly mine. We outlined in detail all of our procedures, we discussed all of the criticisms received, we appended a full accounting of every nickel, etc. We had lots of invoices to back up our expenditures. That report was about sixty-five pages long. It analyzed the experience in great detail. I wrote it for the benefit of anyone who might find himself in similar circumstances in the future. The report had great utility in part for unforeseen readers. Aid to the Contras lapsed in April, 1986. It was cranked up again in Summer or Fall 1987 with a new program. This time it was under the auspices of AID, which is where programs of this kind belong in any case. The first thing the AID people in charge of the new program did was to pull out my report so that they could build on the past without having to reinvent the wheel.

There were other problems beyond the ones I have already mentioned. There were difficulties with the procurement practices of Contras. We had inherited a pipeline system which I used to a considerable extent although much of their procurement policy was seat-of-the-pants which we of course couldn't use. There were some suppliers we didn't use because we thought they were undependable. There were some other problematic areas. They had to do with flights because we had to charter aircraft and there were some allegations at one point that some of our flights were involved in drug running. What happened was that we did charter private flights from air charter companies, over which we had no control. We were simply hiring a plane and a crew to fly our stuff from New Orleans to Tegucigalpa, which then completed their obligation to us. Whatever else they did, we had no knowledge of or control over. It therefore might have been entirely possible that some of those private charter organizations could have been involved in drug running, but never to the best of our knowledge, did anything that involved us and they wouldn't have because we were moving goods from the United States to Central America in the opposite direction from the drug flow. When the flights returned to the US they were no longer under our charter. There were also some questions about arms drops and we had consulted with the House and Senate Intelligence Oversight Committees about whether we could be allowed to pay for "mixed" loads. We got some guidelines from those Committees because they recognized that if we were making air-drops in Nicaragua, you couldn't send in more than one flight to a single destination and therefore if arms had to be delivered, could they be put on board a flight that we had paid for? The Intelligence Oversight Committees agreed that some limited amount, without specifying how much -- I decided unilaterally on 10% -- would be permissible. So there were two flights that actually did drop arms -- two other were aborted -- but it was less than 10%, so that we stayed within the Congressional guidelines. (The arms were not paid for by us, of course.)

There was one episode in which there was an unauthorized arms loading on one of our aircraft flying inside Central America from Salvador to Honduras. That was against the rules and when we heard about it, we refused to pay for the charter. That caused a bit of a problem, but we overcame it by disavowing the flight and by refusing to pay the bill. It was paid by the Contras from their own funds.

The one other comment I want to make about this experience is that I had the unique experience of creating a new federal agency and disbanding it. It went out of existence when it had fulfilled its mission. That is unusual in the federal government where most new agencies go on forever. I cranked it up and cranked it down. Frankly, I am quite proud of that. A lot of people said to me when I took the job that I was opening a can of worms and couldn't understand why I wanted to participate in the Contras-aid program. I thought it would be very challenging. Moreover, the Secretary of State had asked me to do it and you don't say "No" to the Secretary. As Foreign Service officers, we are to do the bidding of the President and the Secretary. I feel very proud about having done that, under extremely difficult political circumstances. We discharged the Congress' mandate efficiently. That was my last assignment in the Foreign Service and I am very pleased in many ways to have gone out on that note.

*Q: You mentioned Michael Barnes. Did you get fired at by Jesse Helms, the Senator from North Carolina?*

DUEMLING: We never heard much from Jesse Helms. We heard a lot from Congressman Henry Hyde. He was strong proponent of the Contras. I was not involved in the political battles, but Elliott Abrams was and he kept me out of those, quite rightly. I almost never testified on the Hill, although I did testify before the Intelligence Oversight Committees, because they wanted to know how it was coming along and what I was doing. Incidentally, while I was catching flak, Senator Durenberger, who was a co-chair of the Senate Committee, issued a press release in June, 1986 strongly defending me and my program. He in effect said that the flak was totally unfounded and that we were doing a magnificent job for which we should be commended for what we were doing and the harassment should stop. That was greatly appreciated. I never had any problem with the Oversight Committees. It is a very different thing to testify in a closed session of the Intelligence Oversight Committees because there the members are entirely professional, serious, rational and business-like. It is when Congressmen meet in open session that you get all the grandstanding and all the politicking and all the mugging for the cameras and all that stuff. So it is a totally different environment inside the Intelligence Committees. I never had any problems with those Committees.

The program was very political. The Contras had strong proponents of which I am sure Jesse Helms was one, Henry Hyde was another. There were many others. The Administration and Ronald Reagan and Poindexter were strong proponents of the Contras. After all, the Administration was able to get aid through the Congress on that occasion. There were other occasions when Congress refused to grant assistance to the Contras.

*Q: In Suriname, you were out of the Administration's focus in Central America. So when you were brought in, although you were part of the Latin American Bureau, you were not tainted. What was your impression of the atmospherics, particularly around Elliott Abrams and other personalities?*

DUEMLING: First of all, I admired Elliott Abrams. Not everyone liked Elliot. I think he is very intelligent, very quick, very shrewd. His politics were more partisan than mine -- I am a centrist. But I respected his operating abilities. Some people didn't like him because he had a sharp tongue and he sometimes had a nasty air about him -- a little bit vicious. That never particularly bothered me, but then he was always very polite to me and even friendly. We got along just fine. Jim Michel, Abrams' principal deputy, for whom I had great regard, had an unparalleled experience with the Congress. He was very good at knowing how to work with the Congress. Michel was a lawyer, having been in the Legal Advisor's Office for many years. He was very quiet, very shrewd, savvy, thoughtful and worked with Congress extremely effectively. They all liked him very much; they like Michel in a ways that some people couldn't stand Elliott Abrams. In terms of others, I had very high regard for Allen Fiers who was the CIA man in charge of the whole Contras operation. Fiers unfortunately came a-cropper later on in the Iran-Contras business. He must have testified in close session at some length with the Investigating Committees. He was accused of doing some things that were unknown to his immediate superiors. Fiers was forced into early retirement. I had worked very closely with him because I could not have done my job effectively without the assistance of the CIA for the oversight of the delivery pipeline. Fiers was our principal link on an operational basis with Central America and the Contras. Of course, I was in touch with the Contras in Washington all the time. They had offices both in Washington and in Miami. So I dealt with the Contras directly all the time. I thought Fiers was very professional, very savvy, very operational. There was another fellow who got fired from the Agency for doing things that were unauthorized. He was the chief of the base I was using in Honduras. He once said to me that he was there running the base to help the Contras. He said that he had been in Vietnam, involved in the assistance to the Vietnamese Army. The way we "left our Vietnamese friends behind" made an indelible impression on him. He said he would never, never again be involved with supporting people that we would then turn our backs on. He apparently did some things for the Contras which were unauthorized and perhaps even contrary to official policy. He was therefore sacked. He felt that on the one hand, we were promising to support the Contras while on the other withdrawing aid to them. Of course, he was partially right since our assistance was often on again, off again. He felt that it was unconscionable to draw people in, then welsh on the commitment.

I would further say that if I were to fault the administration for any part of its Latin America policies, it would be that they became so preoccupied with Central America that they neglected other important US interests on the South American continent. There was too much preoccupation with Central America to the detriment of other more important issues in Latin America.

*Q: They also drew down a lot of good will by forcing Latin American countries to support our efforts in Central America.*

DUEMLING: That was true. We were using up a lot of good will from the Hondurans, the Costa Ricans and perhaps others. I must however add that I don't think that all Latin American countries covered themselves with glory. For example, the Sandinistas came to power through the active assistance of the Costa Ricans and the Colombians and the Venezuelans. Then when the Sandinistas had proven to be fully as tyrannical as the Somozas had been, they refused to assist the democratic forces, including the Contras. I am not saying that all Contras were democrats. The Costa Ricans particularly like to posture as being very correct and very democratic. In fact, they

were at times very partisan when it served their own interests.

I never had much regard for Adolfo Calero. I thought he was out of the classic Central American caudillo mold. Unfortunately, the Central American countries historically have been ill served by a succession of strong-men -- the caudillos. It is very much ingrained in the political tradition of Central America. You could even argue that that is what the Central American people want and expect. Costa Rica is one of the few exceptions to that rule, but elsewhere you have seen a succession of strong men. That is what Calero would have been. He was not much of a democrat. Cruz was much more of a democrat, but was rather weak-willed and rather indecisive. Robelo was smarter, somewhat more of a democrat, but he too comes clearly out of the privileged classes of Nicaragua. He was a little ambivalent in some of his attitudes. After working with the Contras, from the top leadership to the lowest echelons, I have the highest regard for the rank and file. I made two or three trips into Central America to inspect the supply lines, the warehouses and the advance bases. I came to have great regard for some of the people in the medical side -- the doctors and the orderlies -- who were operating under extremely difficult conditions. These doctors could have made a lot more money elsewhere, but they elected to work for this cause because they believed in democracy in Nicaragua. They were doing a wonderful job. There were a lot of others in the supply side who believed in what they were doing and who were subjected to considerable personal privation and discomfort. I had to admire their willingness to work under those conditions for a cause. I did not have that high regard for the leadership which I thought was in large measure rather self-serving. Some of their immediate assistants were pretty good and some were clearly involved in self-interest. They were living well and enjoying themselves.

*Q: You came to the Contras issues rather late. Did you feel you were essentially involved in a holding operation for a doomed cause?*

DUEMLING: At the time I went in to it, I did not think it was a doomed cause. First of all, I would not have done it if I did not have at least a general agreement with the policy. I was in general agreement with the Administration's policy of trying to support a democratic resistance to the Sandinistas. I saw the aid program being a factor in pursuit of that policy. I also felt that it was a reasonable proposition. As I got into it deeper, I did feel that the Contras leadership was a weak reed and that the whole operation was weak, if it were to be the primary instrument for the restoration of democracy in Nicaragua. I thought that the Administration was pinning its hopes much too heavily on the Contras as being the instrument for the restoration of democracy. I didn't think the Contras could hack it. The more I saw of them, both in terms of the leadership's venality and the ineffectiveness of their military operations, the less confident I became of the chances of success. In the long term, it was doomed to failure. But I couldn't see or know that until I had been into the operation for six to nine months.

*Q: What about the other Foreign Service Officers? Were they divided into true believers and skeptics on whether the Contras would succeed?*

DUEMLING: Yes, it did divide people. I always had the impression that the Central American Office had very mixed feelings about the humanitarian assistance and the Contras themselves. I felt that Bill Walker, who was Abrams' deputy for Central America, was very ambivalent on the subject. He was very careful to keep a certain distance; he had to be involved, but I noticed that

Walker and the Central American Office director and staff, wanted to keep the Contras assistance program at arms-length. They were always nice to me, polite and friendly, but they were careful not to become too involved themselves. They appeared to have reservations about it, intellectually, but they also thought it was pretty high risk politically and they didn't want to get brushed with this program if it might become detrimental to their careers. There seems to be an increasing concern for careerism in the Department of State and among Foreign Service Officers. Foreign Service Officers have been pushed into that. There is a certain inclination among some to indulge in careerism. Increasingly, FSOs have been pushed into being careerist -- self seeking for personal advancement -- because there is less merit promotion at the top, there are fewer jobs at the top because more and more go to political appointees. That makes the competition increasingly tough and vigorous and in some cases, vicious, leading inevitably to careerism at lower levels. So I always felt that there were intellectual reservations, which are legitimate and genuine, but also other factors at work. No one in the Department put up any barriers in my way. They recognized it was the policy and they were going to discharge their responsibilities. I worked with one middle-grade officer in the Central American Office who was always very supportive who saw it as his professional responsibility. But there were people senior to him in the same Office who were much more aloof. The Nicaraguan desk officer never wanted to be involved. So there was a mixed picture.

**RICHARD MELTON**  
**Office of Central American Affairs, Director**  
**Washington, DC (1985-1988)**

*Richard H. Melton was born on August 8, 1935 in Rockville, Maryland. He received his BA from Cornell University in 1958. He later attended Wisconsin University where he received his MA in 1971. He entered the Foreign Service in 1961 and served in many countries throughout his career including Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Portugal, England, Uruguay, and Costa Rica. Mr. Melton was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 27, 1997.*

*Q: Then in 1985, you were assigned to the Department as the Director of the Office of Central American Affairs. That was a quiet time--only a civil war and a counter-revolution simultaneously.*

MELTON: When I was in Uruguay, I received a message asking me to return to the Department for consultations. It was a period of turmoil for ARA personnel with five DCM vacancies and other senior positions still to be filled after Reagan's re-election of 1984. So the Bureau decided to bring to Washington as many candidates for these jobs as it could identify and to conduct a mini job fair, with the DCM candidates being interviewed at the same time by the ambassadors to those five countries. These chiefs of mission were to select their DCMs through this round-robin interview process--it was a unique approach to senior personnel decisions. I was interviewed by all five ambassadors, although I had some reservations about taking another DCM position. It was an interesting experience; I was offered several of those vacant DCM jobs, including Honduras and

Peru, but in the final analysis, I thought I had already served as a DCM and I would gain greater experience in an executive position in the Department--as an office director.

These five ambassadors were all looking for different attributes depending on their own desires and the needs of the posts. They were a mix of career and non-career ambassadors; the career ones, generally speaking, were more sophisticated in what they were looking for--the smart ones looked for people with complementary skills, different from their own. The non-career people, if they were smart, also looked for candidates who cover gaps in their own backgrounds as well as people with whom they felt comfortable and who were not "yes" men. The smart ones selected good officers; the others didn't do so well.

I returned in 1985 to be the Office Director for Central American Affairs. There was a new Assistant Secretary, Elliott Abrams. As a career person, I didn't give that much thought. But while on home leave before starting my new assignment I got a call from Abrams' secretary asking me to come to the Department to talk to the Assistant Secretary. We had a very pleasant chat; I did not consider it to be a job interview, but in retrospect I am sure that was exactly what it was.

Central America was a highly charged domestic political issue. But it was not true, as some at the time asserted, that policies were set by the ideologues while the "moderates" were on the outside looking in. The issues were important, as they were controversial; people of all shades of opinion, participated in the policy process. When people are deeply involved, it is more likely that personal attacks will be made and that excesses may occur. That certainly was true during my tour as Office Director. People often took things personally, even though the debates were about policy. Outsiders don't fully understand the policy process. If they disagree with the policy--and many did--too often they engaged in personal attacks, including vilification of working-level officers both in the field and Washington. This legacy, unfortunately, lives on in some areas.

Many of the policies had already been extensively debated by the time I arrived in the Office. The U.S. government had begun several years earlier, and was continuing, to build up its capabilities in the region. The Washington bureaucracy--in all agencies--dealing with Central America had also grown. In the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, my Office had already gone through an expansion; when I took over, I think it was the largest Office in the Department--more than 25 officers. There was also a significant turn-over of staff at the time. So there were a lot of new people working on Central America--in all departments and in the field as well. It was clear that there were major stakes for the U.S. in each of the countries as well as considerable domestic political interest.

The situation in each of the countries was different. There were some common threads, but the differences were quite significant.

Let me start with Panama, which also fell under my office. It was ruled by Manuel Noriega at the time--directly or indirectly. He was undoubtedly calling the shots. The main issue was corruption in the leadership. It was only later that the drug connection surfaced. Panama was available to the highest bidder. Noriega maintained relationships simultaneously with us and with Fidel Castro; Panama was ambivalent about which horse to back in the several struggles underway in the region. Noriega was not constant to any policy except the one of greed and avarice. Our main effort was to try to move the country toward more democracy and stronger political institutions. An election had

been held and Nicholas Barletta, a World Bank official, had won the Presidency. We had high hopes that he would be the instrument through which democratic institutions could be strengthened. But he ran afoul of Noriega, who had him deposed by a pliant legislature. Barletta was pressured to resign; it was highly controversial and we had lengthy discussions about possible US reactions. It became much clearer later how Barletta was pressured to resign. Noriega took more direct control and then Barletta repudiated his resignation.

Within the U.S. government some people pushed for a visible gesture of support for Barletta. The problem was his case was suspect because on the surface at least he had resigned and the Panamanian Congress had accepted it without much reluctance. To seek to restore him in such circumstances would have been difficult to sustain, although in retrospect, it was probably the best of a number of relatively poor policy choices available.

The military-embassy relationship in Panama is and may well still be a continual source of some concern. For many years, the U.S. military was by far the largest and most visible US presence--we had something like 10,000 troops there at the time. The Embassy was small and a relatively minor player in the policy game. Large Panamanian issues always tended to have military implications which meant that USSOUTHCOM, the Panama-based US unified military command, had usually the predominant voice. Of course, the military was not always of one view. The USSOUTHCOM commander was not very keen on using his troops for what he deemed to be essentially political matters; so if incidents occurred, the U.S. commander favored conciliation over confrontation. There had been incidents between US military and Panamanian National Guard personnel from time to time. Some of our soldiers had been injured; in one case there had been an abduction which resulted in a wife being assaulted and a US soldier being beaten. When the question of a US response arose, the U.S. commander's attitude seemed to be "this too shall pass and we have larger issues at stake." The civilians wanted to take a tougher stance partly to prevent any misunderstanding by Noriega, who controlled the National Guard. They felt that limits had to be set to prevent the Panamanians from using the "salami" approach and whittling our rights away slowly but surely.

During the brief Barletta-Noriega struggle, had we--the US--been more vigorous and had we been able to internally reach consensus on a strong response, the outcome might have been different. Instead, we accommodated to what was a *fait accompli*. I must say that to his credit, our Ambassador, Ted Briggs, argued strongly for taking action against Noriega; in retrospect, he was absolutely correct. As I suggested earlier, unfortunately the "legal" case for action against Noriega was not very strong. Furthermore, I think Washington found the issues facing us in El Salvador and Nicaragua to be of greater priority and that we had all we could handle with those two countries. There were also some factors of which I was not aware at the time--and still do not have a complete knowledge--that may have weighed against taking firmer action in Panama. For example, it is now known that there was a long standing relationship between Noriega and the CIA; I don't know to what extent that was a factor.

One of the results of this chapter in our relations with Panama was that I was asked to take greater responsibility for Panamanian affairs. Until that time--and for many years--although Panama was, according to the organization chart, the responsibility of the Office of Central American Affairs, day-to-day management of the relationship was handled by a deputy who had considerable

autonomy and who reported directly to a deputy assistant secretary. I believe that this situation came about because of the importance and volume of work that Panamanian affairs had previously generated--primarily stemming from renegotiation of the Canal treaty. But after the Barletta ouster, the officer in charge of Panamanian affairs was put explicitly under my supervision, and I took a much more direct interest in issues that arose from our relations with Panama.

When I reported to ARA in 1985, we had a bump and shove relationship over the Canal. The timetable for our turning the operations of that waterway to Panama had been established by treaty, but each time some action had to be taken--e.g. transfer of territory or change in the composition and functions of the Panama Canal Commission--there were endless debates in Panama City and Washington on the interpretation and implementation of existing agreements. The Canal gave Panama an important role in the region and was of strategic importance to the United States, and time had to be devoted to its issues as well as those arising from El Salvador and Nicaragua.

Costa Rica was significant at the time because it was one of Nicaragua's neighbors. Efforts were underway to strengthen our relationship with Costa Rica in the hopes of putting additional pressure on Nicaragua and the Sandinistas. That effort was almost fatally flawed because it failed to take fully into account traditionally strong propensities in Costa Rica. In the first place, Costa Rica resisted being drawn into the Nicaraguan situation. The Costa Ricans always considered themselves to be somewhat superior to the Nicaraguans in most respects. Second, Costa Rica had taken a firm neutral position in all Central American struggles; it had effectively abolished its armed forces years before, although maintaining a very significant police force which was as large as many military forces in Central America. But officially, Costa Rica did not have an army. It had a strong tradition of civilian rule based on democratic principles stemming from the days of Jose Figueres, who was still a political force although he was no longer President. The Liberal Party of Figueres has long been the dominant party in the country and had provided some support to the Sandinistas in their struggle against the Somoza dynasty.

There were some signs in 1985 that the neutrality view might be shifting. We had had a good cooperative relationship with Costa Rica based on containment of the Sandinistas. That changed somewhat when Oscar Arias came to power; he became more engaged in the Nicaraguan question; he looked for a diplomatic settlement. One of his motivations was the Costa Rican concern for the Nicaraguan refugees pouring across the border. Costa Rica had a high standard of living for a Central American country. Its social indices were well above those of the other countries in the region. The refugees were placing an increasing strain on the social and even political fabric of the country. So Costa Rica had a very strong interest in finding a settlement acceptable to all sides in Nicaragua. Arias was also looking for a democratic outcome, but felt considerable pressure to reach a settlement--almost any settlement. This drive lasted throughout his administration.

I don't think our personnel selections for Costa Rica were the best choices. Curt Winsor and Lew Tambs, both non-career ambassadors, were very, very conservative. Oscar Arias was a liberal in the classical sense. Tambs did not have the warmest of relationships with Arias. Tambs was aggressive in his ideology; he had been our Ambassador in Colombia where he had made a reputation as a vocal opponent of the drug traffic. His strong position on drugs may have led people to overlook some of his deficiencies--e.g. lack of subtlety. I went to Costa Rica as Chargé after Tambs abruptly resigned during the Iran-Contra hearings, and had considerable contact with

Arias. I found him to be a very sophisticated, urbane individual with views about politics and other matters which were quite subtle. I don't think the nuances had been captured by our Embassy; they certainly were not fully conveyed to Washington.

When I talk about people, I do so with some reluctance. I recognize that it is relatively easy to pass judgments now after time has passed and we have knowledge that we may not have had at the time. Judgments that are clear now were much murkier at the time. So some of the proposals and perspectives popular at the time do not seem nearly as reasonable now. So some of Tambs suggestions may have looked much better then than they do now. We were working under pressures which placed El Salvador and Nicaragua at the head of the Central America agenda; issues with other countries were almost secondary. So, to a significant extent, our policy toward Costa Rica--and to an extent toward Panama--was dictated by events and outcomes we were seeking in other countries. Our Ambassador in El Salvador was quite clear that his country should have top priority; solutions should first be sought in El Salvador, he argued, and then the puzzle in Nicaragua would almost automatically sort itself out. Others said that this was self-serving; the Sandinistas appeared to have a greater staying power than the rebels in El Salvador. This was a subject for lively debate.

We knew of Winsor's and Tambs' ideology, but I don't think we ever dismissed any of their recommendations because of it. That is almost impossible in Washington anyway because policy issues are seldom compartmentalized--i.e. a Costa Rican issue could not be discussed separately from the whole of Central America. So a recommendation from San Jose was most likely to touch on broader perspectives which would raise the level at which it was discussed certainly above the desk and frequently above the Office Director. There were a few issues, such as the elections, which were *sui generis*--that is limited to Costa Rica--but they were the exception. That was true of most of the "think pieces" from our ambassadors in Central America; their recommendations tended to be applicable to most if not all of the region and not just their country. I should point out that I didn't overlap with Winsor very much; he left soon after I started my job in Washington. So it was Tambs primarily with whom I dealt in Costa Rica. If he felt very strongly about an issue, he would call Elliott Abrams or one of the deputies directly; rarely would he call me or communicate directly with me. For him, I was a relatively low level player.

I should mention that during the 1984 US election a number of ambassadors had signed a letter supporting the re-election of Jesse Helms (R-NC). Lew Tambs and Curt Winsor were among the signatories. That was completely inappropriate, and Secretary Shultz said so. One had to wonder about the judgments of individuals who ignore the distinction between partisan political advocacy and the professional approach demanded of all chiefs of mission. As time went along, I noted questionable judgments by Tambs. On one occasion, he crossed the line in entering into an unauthorized agreement with anti-Sandinista leader Eden Pastora. Pastora was one of the original leaders of the Sandinista movement when they overthrew Somoza, but later had a falling out with the Sandinista leadership and went into semi-retirement as a fisherman in Costa Rica. Some efforts were made to get him to rejoin the struggle against his old comrades; Lew Tambs figured in those efforts, but I always thought the "understanding" which he reached with Pastora, previously mentioned, crossed the line, and I so advised Abrams. The "understanding" was disavowed.

One of the considerations of dealing with recommendations from Tambs was that I was never quite sure what agenda he was pursuing. It was not, I think, always the Department's agenda. I was at times not quite certain where he was coming from or where he was heading. Was it the same direction that we had agreed on? I think it is true that if the two ends of the communication line do not have the same agenda, the same operating assumptions, then your level of confidence at both ends is bound to be affected.

Next let me talk about Nicaragua. When I became Office Director, our policy did not seem to be working. The Sandinistas seemed to be growing stronger and were certainly more negative towards us and at the same time were more aggressive and expansionist. So they appeared to be a greater threat than they had been in the past. They were clearly our major concern in Central America. They were providing aid and comfort to the guerrillas in El Salvador and any other groups in the region that had the resources and the will to rebel against the established order. The most significant of these relationships was the one they had with the Salvadoran guerrillas.

The principal advantage the Sandinistas held for other guerrilla organizations in the region was that they were an established government--they held the reins of power and effective control of a country. The rebels from other countries could come to Nicaragua without fear of being harassed or expelled. They were received sympathetically and, to limited extent, could expect some material support. So Nicaragua had become a refuge for all the insurgents of Central America--a R&R place for them.

The Sandinistas were driven by ideology. They were supporting crusades against the established order, which frequently was corrupt and military dominated. The object of the crusade was to "liberate" Central America. The Sandinistas viewed themselves as the vanguard of this crusade and as such, believed they owed support--material and psychological--to their brothers in arms in neighboring countries. They had prevailed in Nicaragua and now believed they had a revolutionary obligation to help others win power in their countries. This was the situation in the mid-1980s.

In the United States, a number of prominent Americans supported the Sandinistas. Nicaragua was not normally a tourist mecca. But many Americans were drawn there after the Sandinista take-over. It was much like the days when people went to Cuba after Castro's victory, chopping cane to show solidarity with Fidel. Many Americans went to Nicaragua to be hosted by the Sandinistas; they went to see cooperatives and other symbols of Sandinista "progress." Every week, on a Wednesday morning, these Americans would gather in front of the U.S. Embassy for a regularly scheduled demonstration of solidarity against the "imperialistic" policies of their country. So we had a very active debate in the U.S. on our Nicaraguan policy, which spilled over onto the editorial pages of our leading newspapers.

Issues generate their own constituencies; as they grow, support networks also expand. So by the mid-1980s, the Sandinista support in the United States was quite sizeable. There were active centers in many universities--both around Washington and around the country. These centers focused on US policies and were by and large critical of the U.S. government. I personally did not view these issues through an ideological prism. Like most Americans, I tend to favor the underdog and favor democracy over dictatorship. One of the reasons I decided to make the Foreign Service

my career was because I wanted to be involved in these policy issues, particularly in Latin America, where I thought our policy had been on the wrong track for many years. We had sided too often with military dictatorships and oligarchy and the economic interests of a few large firms, such as United Fruit. So I had hoped to be able to influence our policy by participating in its development.

But I must say that as time went on, I began to feel that I had been ambushed on some of these issues. When I had served in Nicaragua, I certainly was not a fan of Somoza or any military or authoritarian figure in the region. In this, I believe I was reflecting American values; if I had any biases, it was against those regimes that the U.S. left also tended to oppose. But I found that the dialogue on Central America became quickly personalized. I would talk to people, but I seldom felt that my views were heard at all; their response was almost automatically that, as a member of the government, I could not possibly be anything but the "enemy" whose views were not worthy of consideration or even hearing. That had not been my experience before, although my experience at Wisconsin was a foretaste. Before the mid-1980s, regardless of audience, I think I got a fair hearing wherever I was appearing, both in the U.S. and overseas--with one exception that took place in London when I was talking to some students about El Salvador and US defense policy. There I pretty much heard what was to be the standard position; namely that I was the representative of an odious government and therefore not worth hearing. I was shouted down. It was a throwback to the University of Wisconsin in 1970-71.

So I had some experience with intolerance and found it disturbing. It left a very bad taste in my mouth when people, in the name of democracy, did not allow views contrary to their own to be expressed in open forums. There was far too much of this. Both sides of the issue took some very peremptory stances; issues were personalized and people demonized, which was unhealthy and fueled paranoia on both sides.

Let me talk about El Salvador now. Napoleon Duarte had been elected President; he generated hope because he was clearly a democrat with impeccable credentials. He was a strong leader coming out of the Christian Democratic movement in which he had participated for many years. He had been abused and tortured by the Salvadoran military who had denied him elective office on several occasions. There was great hope that Duarte would bring greater democratic freedom to El Salvador; he was a fresh breeze, unfettered by ties to past excesses. Many hoped that Duarte could bring peace to his country. There was some optimism, even though the situation on the ground did not look promising.

The Salvadoran military, as in most of the Central American countries, did not have a very good reputation--deservingly so. They had been associated with abuses--both human rights violations and corruption. An escalating armed confrontation with Marxist guerrillas, which inevitably put greater power in the hands of the military, was not only distasteful, but worked against the introduction of democratic reforms.

The situation in El Salvador in 1985 then was not good. There had been predictions in years past that El Salvador had turned the corner; in fact it was still looking for that corner. Still, Duarte provided hope that a settlement could be reached. Later there were discussions about how we should set our own priorities--should we concentrate on helping Duarte reach an acceptable

solution in El Salvador or should we concentrate on Nicaragua? Given the small size of Central American countries, one would think that the U.S. government would be able to pursue policies appropriate to each country. But that was hard to do.

The Salvadoran guerrilla view was to "stay the course" because the U.S. had no staying power--a view derived from their assessment of our Vietnam experience--and would eventually lose interest in the region particularly if some American blood was shed. In 1985, the guerrillas murdered several Embassy Marine guards at a restaurant in San Salvador to bring the costs of war more directly to the attention of the American people. It was a calculated act. From time to time, other Americans were targeted for the same reason. They hoped that the first Reagan administration would be defeated and that the next one would be more sympathetic to their views.

There were mixed views about the origins of the guerrilla movement. Some thought they were creatures of the Soviets, some of the Cubans, some of the Sandinistas. I don't think it was a simple matter to determine paternity. The Sandinistas clearly had connections to the Cubans, certainly through Tomas Borge--the Minister of the Interior in charge of the police--and to a lesser extent through the Ortega brothers who had been given sanctuary in Cuba during an earlier period. The Sandinistas clearly received support from the Cubans--Soviet arms and other subsidies. But to characterize them as creatures of the Soviets or the Cubans would have missed the point. The Nicaraguans had a strong Marxist home grown faction; the Sandinistas had a history and an ideology--Marxist--which guided their actions; their blueprint for consolidation of power was a combination of their own experience, ideas that they had picked up in Cuba, and classical Marxist theory. To dismiss them as mere puppets of Cuba or the Soviets with no domestic base would have been a misreading of reality. Not many, I think, really believed otherwise although in a debate they might charge that the Sandinistas were tools of foreign powers--to underscore the view that a Central American foothold by the Soviets and Cuba could be a real threat to the US.

Throughout Central America the standard of living was--and is--very low. There are significant inequalities in living standards, land tenure or any other economic index; Central America ranks near the bottom in Latin America. The grievances of the population are numerous and legitimate; that was what gave popular support to the guerrilla movements--not to mention wide support in the United States. Many Americans resented their government being allied with repressive regimes which did nothing to try to raise the standard of living of their people; on the contrary, these regimes used abusive policies to try to suppress any manifestation of discontent. Our relationships with these authoritarian regimes suggested complicity with these odious policies; that raised further opposition in the U.S. to our policies in Latin America by groups consisting of, in large part, altruistic, idealistic people--many of them from religious organizations and many with considerable knowledge of the region. They could not be easily dismissed as ideologues and dupes of the communists; they were solid citizens who felt deeply about the political, economic and social conditions in Latin America. My quarrel with those people at the time was that they did not give us and others the benefit of the doubt and would refuse to believe that there were people in their government who shared many of their concerns and who were also trying to do something about the appalling conditions in the region. The most vocal critics refused to believe that there were any other remedies than their own; they would not listen to any suggestions of other approaches.

The most effective religious organizations were associated with the Catholic Church-related. Although the population of Central America is heavily Catholic, religious orders have long been in decline throughout the region. That vacuum is filled by priests and nuns sent from the U.S. and Europe; so there were many active Catholic orders in Central America. In the 1980s, a number of them were actively engaged in providing camps in the region--the way to change the economic conditions, they came to believe, is through political action. So many priests and nuns became involved with some of the political movements in Central America--as a way to improve the economic and social conditions of the people they served. That support continues even when some of the groups being supported took to arms to change the political structure. The attitude of the priests and nuns was frequently supported by their colleagues in the religious orders in the United States who then became a factor in the political debate in the United States.

In the case of El Salvador, there were organized efforts to bring Salvadorans to the US--to provide refuge from persecution and violence. There were legitimate pressures put on the U.S. political system to legitimize this inflow of refugees by changing the presumption of the law that to be a legitimate refugee, the applicant had to prove persecution. The law was changed for the Salvadorans and later the Nicaraguans; it allowed temporary refugee status for people from those countries which allowed them to be employed in the U.S. while the conditions from which they had fled persisted. But before the law was changed, some American religious groups were harboring illegal refugees--as a protest against the laws and policies of their country. We were only indirectly involved in this area since immigration issues were the responsibility of INS, within guidelines established by Congress. Because of the underlying policy issues, however, we would be demonized along with our colleagues in the INS and other agencies. Elliott Abrams became a man with fangs and horns, and we were depicted as his mindless clones.

Now let me turn to Honduras. Of all of the Central American countries, Honduras would be in the second tier. It was traditionally the poorest country in the region. There had been an effort in the late 1950s and early 1960s in Central America to break away from dependence on a single agricultural product--sugar cane, bananas, coffee, pineapples, timber. Honduras never made the break. There were efforts, but they were modest indeed. El Salvador was the most successful in this effort. It was the smallest country, but it had attracted enough investment in industry to have built a respectable base. A simultaneous effort to achieve economic integration in Central America essentially benefited established industries--those that were already dominant in one or more countries of the region. So countries like Honduras, with no industries, fell farther behind. El Salvador did achieve significant benefits from economic integration as did Guatemala. Benefits elsewhere were modest.

Honduras was left largely behind. There was a separation between inland Tegucigalpa and San Pedro Sula, on the coast. San Pedro Sula was doing much better. Honduras was traditionally controlled by conservative military leaders, regardless of the form of government. Honduras had not been friendly towards either El Salvador or Nicaragua--wary of the latter and in frequent conflict with the former. Much of the tension resulted from population spill over from fast growing, but tiny El Salvador. The famous "soccer war" between the two countries reflected these tensions. Animosity between Honduras and El Salvador had existed for many years. We had tried in the 1970s to balance our military assistance between the two countries--at low level. By the mid-1980s, the situation had changed; El Salvador and Nicaragua had risen to the top of our agenda; Honduras

had become a partner in our policy; El Salvador was a zone of conflict between the Duarte government and the Marxist insurgents, the FMLN.

Honduras had gone through a political transformation; it had held democratic elections which resulted in a civilian President. But democratic institutions were non-existent or very weak, so that the military remained in *de facto* control. Our policy to build democratic institutions in the region first had to deal with ongoing conflict both in Nicaragua and El Salvador; Honduras took lower priority once again.

The Salvadoran guerrillas established training and rest and recuperation facilities in UN-run refugee camps just over the Honduran border, which the Honduran military viewed as a threat to the security of their country. On their other border, the Salvadorans saw the major build up by the Sandinista armed forces. So they obviously supported all our efforts to reduce the power of the Sandinistas and the Salvadoran guerrillas. When the Nicaraguan Resistance or Contras were formed, the Honduran military were quite sympathetic because they viewed this force as a buffer between themselves and the Sandinistas. So the Hondurans cooperated in our efforts to support the Contras.

Guatemala was a terrible story. It had long endured low-level indigenous guerrilla warfare. The population was heavily Indian--the most in the region. The guerrilla movement had started with the Indians. The regime's response was ruthless and much bloodshed ensued. The country had always suffered from violence--individuals were personally armed. That was true in much of Central America; they were violent societies and the shedding of blood seemed to come much too easily. The guerrilla warfare in Guatemala was low level, but persistent. It had not captured much attention, except from some US groups--which highlighted the human rights abuses taking place in the region. These groups quite properly were applying pressure to reduce the level of the abuses and the violence.

Many of these groups blamed the abuses and violence on US policy. That was a problem; most of those involved in the policy, on all sides, would agree that the abuses were taking place, but differences would appear when it came to assessing blame. The critics maintained that US policy was at the root of the problems; some even suggested that the U.S. itself was guilty of some of the abuses. The policy makers focused on how the abuses could be mitigated while keeping the focus on other policy issues, including economic development and democratization. So efforts at dialogue between policy-makers and critics quickly broke down with each side accusing the other of bad faith.

In one case I recall, one of the critics was calling attention to some human rights abuses in Guatemala and holding US policies responsible. One of my staff said, "That is factually wrong. We should answer that allegation." It was not the specific case that was at the issue; it was overall U.S. policy that was being challenged. In retrospect, by publicly responding to specific allegations, we may have actually heightened the level of the polemics. That might have been inevitable, but I look back with some regret on that episode, which appeared to pit us against the human rights advocates. People who were calling attention to the abuses were correct to do so, as were we in defending US policy. It was unfortunate that the two sides could never have a meeting of minds. If we could have, we might have made more progress quicker.

In Guatemala the leadership was suspect. The level of violence and the power of the military tended to drive the democrats out or underground. The U.S. government is not monolithic in its views on military regimes or the political role of the military. Some elements of the government are more comfortable than others on working with the military in power. Our policy over the years has encouraged the establishment of strong relationships between the U.S. armed forces and foreign military services; these relationships are often very helpful, but sometimes can also be negative. You can never be quite sure that all elements of the U.S. government are communicating the same message; the informal contacts between people--US and their foreign counterparts--at times may convey different signals that can confuse and, in some cases, actually undermine US policy. Our military-to-military relationships may not have always helped in Central America.

Belize is an appendage to Central America. While conflict raged in the rest of the region in the mid-1980s, the central issue in Belize was its dispute with neighboring governments. So in addition to the other problems we had to deal with, we had to face this possibility of armed conflict between the two countries. There was a residual--small--British military presence in Belize to stabilize the situation. This was most helpful. We were looking for a negotiated settlement. Eventually, with good sense all around, it came.

What I have done to this point is to describe essentially the situation which I encountered when I reported for duty in 1985. Let me talk a little more about what happened in the 1985-88 period.

As I have said, one of our principal goals in the region was to foster democratic development. Progress was hindered by endemic human rights abuses and violence. Add to that mix the guerrilla movements which perpetuated the violence. Our challenge was to find means to change this situation over the long run. The policy makers viewed the Salvadoran guerrillas and the Sandinistas as essentially anti-democratic. They were authoritarian and based on a Marxist philosophy which certainly was not democratic. In addition, these insurgents were guilty of extensive human rights abuses. They were certainly not the democratic answer for the region. So our priority was to find democratic alternatives to these guerrilla movements.

In Nicaragua, pursuit of our objectives led to the development of an armed resistance movement which operated from bases on the Nicaragua/Honduras border and in the south of Nicaragua as well. We gave this group--which became known as Contras--heavy support. Contrary to how they were characterized by their detractors, the Contras were essentially a peasant resistance movement; most came from very humble origins--most from the rural areas of Nicaragua. They did not like the Sandinistas and their authoritarian ways. Ironically, both the Contras and many of the original Sandinista supporters might have agreed on a broad reform program, including land reform and other societal changes. But the ideological schism which separated the two groups was so large that dialogue was impossible--even among family members some of whom may have backed the Sandinistas and some of whom may have backed the Resistance. I have no question that the Contras were fully committed to their cause; they could not have organized otherwise. There has not been sufficient analysis of this grass-roots army; I think it would be a very interesting story.

Ollie North was a relatively junior member of the NSC staff in 1985. He was not even a member of the NSC office which handled Latin America; he was part of the politico-military staff focusing on

terrorism and national security issues. Gradual, however, he became more and more involved in Central America. He was a strong personality who seemed to have very little supervision in the White House. In retrospect, it is interesting to note that North was really a low level staffer--he was a Lieutenant Colonel in the Marine Corps. Lieutenant Colonels do not make policy. But Ollie North did not fit the norm. I first met North at an anti-terrorism conference in Panama when I was DCM in Uruguay. I was surprised by the deference shown him by people much senior to him. When he stood up to make comments, general officers and senior Washington officials who knew who he was paid attention. So did I.

I had no further contact with North until I had been in my Office Director's job for some time. There were occasional inquiries about specific issues, but little more. Only later did he emerge as the key NSC staffer on Central America, pushing aside the State Department officer on the NSC staff who formally carries that responsibility. He became the NSC representative on a restricted inter-agency group which reviewed most of the major Central American issues, particularly as they related to Nicaragua.

I had more exposure to him later. Our laws changed; initially Congress had authorized US government support for the Nicaraguan resistance; then it cut off support and then changed again to allow limited support--humanitarian assistance. A separate organization within the Department was established to provide that assistance. Ambassador Robert Duemling was brought in to head up this new office. He was a very good choice; he was scrupulously honest and made sure that his mandate was scrupulously observed. I know much more now about this than I did at the time the effort was organized. For example, I now know, from Oliver North's testimony, that a parallel organization had been established in which he was involved. There was a question of how humanitarian assistance would be delivered to the resistance. It had to be done by air, which limited the numbers of people who were willing to undertake this effort. There aren't many independent contractors who are willing to drop supplies into hostile territory. And there aren't many companies or individuals anxious to expose their aircraft to enemy fire.

Therefore among Duemling's first task was the hiring of contractors to undertake the supply operation. Ollie North knew some people; it was not clear at the time--as it is today--that these people had been involved in the off-the-books army supply operation to the Contras. To Duemling's credit, he was very scrupulous in ensuring that the letter of the law was followed. He did not knowingly allow any of the aircraft he contracted to be used for simultaneous arms deliveries. He only allowed his contractors to deliver humanitarian assistance on flights his offices paid for as authorized by law. He was under pressure from a number of quarters to deliver more than humanitarian assistance; resistance wanted more than just food and medicines. Duemling made sure that all of his activities met the letter of the law; that was much to his credit.

As I said, the assistance to the resistance was run by a separate office in the Department. A lot of the work of this office had to do with logistics and contracting. We did not have any day-to-day association with that office. In our Office Directorate, as is usual in the Department, we had desk officers for each of the Central American countries; they handled the day-to-day matters. Although we were involved in larger policy issues, by and large fundamental policies were decided above our level. The desk officers, who were most knowledgeable about their countries, might suggest different approaches than the prevailing wisdom; a debate would follow--that happened frequently

and to good effect. But the larger issues were dealt with in the restricted interagency group in which we were not normally represented.

I don't think we had any major disagreement with the policies developed in the interagency group. The transgressions that did take place did so outside our purview; we did not find out about them until some time later. Much of what came out of the North's hearings was news to us. There were aspects of the Central American operations that were not under State Department control. For example, when the Contra supply plane was shot down over Nicaragua--which occurred toward the end of my tour--the first question to us was "Who is he?" He turned out to be an American citizen who had been captured by the Sandinistas. We later found out that he was a member of a support network that was not related to the humanitarian assistance effort in the slightest. The issue then became what would happen to this American citizen. As far as we knew, he was not on the government's payroll. There was a common sense issue. I had learned that when an American citizen is in real peril, one of our most common failings was not how the case was ultimately decided, but rather how we managed the process, e.g. what contacts and information do we provide the family. The hostage taking in Iran, for example, had demonstrated the importance of being supportive and forthcoming to families of the victims.

So in this case, I wanted to make sure that that past shortcoming would not be repeated. We were in touch as soon as we could with the family of the American airman and tried to provide all the information we had available. The Sandinistas wanted the family to come to Nicaragua so they could make some political points through a show trial. Mrs. Hassenfus wanted to get her husband out of Nicaragua. She engaged a lawyer. Even though the lawyer served on a pro bono basis, the cost to the Hassenfus family quickly mounted. Our desk officer had been acting as an intermediary with Mrs. Hassenfus. He reported that Mrs. Hassenfus was increasingly anxious about the costs and her own support while her husband was being detained. He asked for guidance. I told the desk officer just to take no further action and went to see Elliott Abrams. I told Abrams that I didn't think it was proper for the desk officer to be involved in the issue of resources; this was not something the U.S. government should be funding. He agreed. So we didn't get involved in the Hassenfus case beyond what we might do in a consular sense.

It is clear now--it wasn't then--that Mrs. Hassenfus believed her husband was a US government employee. We did not. So we were starting from two entirely different premises. Mrs. Hassenfus wanted US government officials drawn into the case, and believed that it was a US government problem because the principal was an employee. We on the other hand viewed the case as a protection and welfare matter which did not require any further involvement than a normal case of this kind would require. We wanted to be helpful in assisting a US citizen and to limit public diplomacy losses but that would be the limit of our involvement; we stopped the desk officer from participating any further in this matter.

CIA's role in managing assistance to the Contras was circumscribed by law. The legislation changed several times in the mid-1980s. For example, the bill authorizing humanitarian assistance to the Nicaragua resistance movement specifically gave that responsibility to the Department, which was almost unique in some respects. Activities of this kind would in the past have been the exclusive preserve of the Agency, but by this time the Congressional debate focused on whether the management of this program belonged in the Agency. The support to the resistance was duly

authorized by Congress, but it was subject to an unusual amount of public debate and scrutiny. It was unique that the Department and some of its personnel were involved in an activity that before would have been the exclusive province of another government agency.

I think there is always a concern that in situations such as in Nicaragua--and much of Central America--the fine hand of the Central Intelligence Agency might be involved. There is a division of responsibilities in the U.S. government which is quite proper. Problems arise, however, when the Department does not have access to all information it needs concerning a specific issue, particularly when other agencies are involved. Reliance on agencies which are not open to public scrutiny and failure to include in the decision-making process all those with a legitimate interest in the outcome can produce very poor results. I think a more open process would have been better, but this is said with the advantage of hindsight.

Nicaragua under the Sandinistas was a very interesting problem in diplomatic relations. We conducted normal relations with the Sandinista government while giving assistance to people who were intent on overthrowing that government. We had a modest Embassy in Managua, headed first by Tony Quainton and then Harry Bergold. It must have been an interesting experience for the Sandinistas as well, dealing with representatives of a government bent on replacing them. On the ground, the Ambassador's access to the government and those associated with it was completely controlled by the Sandinistas. The American Ambassador has always had high profile in Managua; he travels in a large chauffeur driven limousine; at that time he was protected by the Sandinistas, with a government provided personal police riding in the front seat of the car. So that his every movement was well known; every contact was recorded. Those constraints certainly limited the Ambassador's access both to the government as well as to the opposition. Within the government, the Sandinista leadership would decide who would see the American Ambassador and how frequently. So if the Ambassador wanted access to one of the Ortegas; Interior Minister Tomas Borge; or Miguel Descoto, the Foreign Minister, or anyone else, the Sandinistas would decide who and when--or if at all. So our ability to conduct business in Managua was highly circumscribed, although an Ambassador's style was obviously an important factor in our ability to conduct business with the Sandinistas.

Our Ambassadors developed some access. I don't like to characterize the points of view of my predecessors, but I think I had more exposure to Bergold's approach. Quainton was in place when I began my job in Washington, but was not there long thereafter. Bergold was certainly not a Sandinista supporter, but he reached the conclusion that the Sandinistas would probably be in power for an extended period. That analysis suggested a re-examination of some of our policies and activities; his view challenged some of the assumptions on which our policy was based, principal among them that the Sandinistas should not be considered a permanent fixture. Harry felt that we would be more effective if we would accept the reality that the Sandinistas would be governing Nicaragua for many years and therefore deal with them as we might with an Eastern European communist state, whose policies and attitudes we also did not like--governments which Bergold knew well. So he questioned some of our anti-Sandinista activities. While intellectually I could appreciate this point of view, I was loath the support and approach which might actually contribute to the Sandinistas ability to remain in power.

On the other hand, the Nicaraguan representatives in Washington had wide contacts with a variety of support groups in the area. They had extensive contacts on the Hill, both with members of Congress and staffers, to whom they made their case in effective ways. They had less contacts with the Department; we would see them from time to time, but not on a regular basis. They had a small staff in Washington, as we did in Managua. We would periodically call in senior Nicaraguan diplomats to chastise them about excesses on Nicaragua or to notify them of restrictions on their mission, usually in retaliation for action against ours. Those contacts were proper and formal. I suspect that the Nicaraguans had calculated that they would not get much out of the Department or the administration in general and that they needed to make their pitch to a more sympathetic audience provided by non-government organizations and certain Congressional officials. They used public diplomacy in a very effective way, taking full advantage of our open society. The Nicaraguan Foreign Ministry spokesman, Alejandro Benaria, was their most effective public figure; he had attended the University of California at Berkeley. Many Sandinistas had attended American universities and colleges and spoke perfect English; they made very good spokesmen for their cause on US TV talk shows on which they appeared regularly. On those TV shows, including the network evening news, the U.S. position was usually presented by a non-administration person who may not have been familiar with the most current information; Elliott Abrams was the only official who would appear regularly. While Abrams was more than a match for the Sandinista representative, the U.S. government's position was not always so well represented and the Nicaraguans often made the better case. When Abrams appeared, it was a different story; he knew his brief well and was an aggressive and pugnacious protagonist--which may be one of the reasons that he had so many problems later.

The polarization that took place in the U.S. over Central American policy was evident among Congressional staffs. There was a lot of more heat than light generated by public discussion. People had made up their minds before the debate began. They took ideological stands, minimizing any possibility of an intelligent discussion. One either agreed with a staffer or you didn't; no conversation was necessary. Our Office staff was on the Hill frequently; we passed out a lot of information. But since we supported US policy, we were viewed by the opponents of that policy with great suspicion. Further aggravating the situation was the fact that the administration was Republican while Congress was in the hands of the Democrats. So we were subject to criticism from the majority in Congress. Since the Democrats had controlled Congress for many years, the committee staffs were also led by the Democrats; the minority staffers were fewer in number and generally not as experienced since by and large they had not served as long as the majority staff. So the staff which handled Central American matters tended to be quite critical of the administration.

There seemed to be more give-and-take on policy within our own bureaus. There was a debate at the time about our policy vis-a-vis El Salvador. The view from Embassy San Salvador, not surprisingly was that the U.S. should be giving priority to that country. If the support for the Salvadoran guerrillas could be cut, the Embassy argued, then a satisfactory solution to that country's political problems could be achieved. So the suggestion was that we begin to move in that direction, including reaching some accommodation with the Sandinistas if that would end their support of the Salvadoran insurgents. The other view was that, until the Nicaraguan issue was resolved, no lasting settlement was likely in El Salvador. So the problems in both countries had to be tackled simultaneously. The latter view was the predominant view.

My impression then and now was that President Reagan was primarily interested in the big picture, he was not that interested in details of policy implementation. These were left to others; they managed the policy implementation process. But the approval of the broad outlines of a policy and its public articulation was a presidential responsibility; I think he was very effective in that role. The President was also involved in discussions with foreign leaders who came to Washington, like President Duarte. Day-to-day implementation decisions were left to the policy managers.

When I left the Office Director job, the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran issues were moving in a new direction. A substantial fatigue factor had set in for all parties. In the U.S. revelations of wrong doing and excesses had come to light. There were new efforts to find solutions to the issues raised by the Sandinistas and the Salvadorans. Speaker Jim Wright's involvement is well documented. President Arias of Costa Rica had become very involved in trying to find a way out of the quagmire. A new Assistant Secretary, Bernie Aronson, had been appointed. He had been involved, as a private citizen, in efforts to support the Nicaraguan resistance; he now focused his and the bureau's efforts on finding a political solution to end the fighting in Central America. Gradually, the "problem solvers" took over; to the great credit of all who were involved, they found a formula to end the fighting, the Nicaraguans, a democratic election eventually led to an end to the bloodshed.

The key to finding solutions to Central American issues was to get beyond the partisan sniping both here and in the region to find acceptable accommodations unrelated to politics. We wanted a peace process which would expand democratic institutions in the region. The settlement eventually reached provided only the possibility of a way out of the problem on El Salvador and Nicaragua. The lion's share of the credit should go to the people of both countries, who, given the opportunity, caused democracy.

I should mention two additional interesting matters. Toward the end of my tour in the Office of Central American Affairs there were ambassadorial vacancies in Honduras and Costa Rica. The first vacancy occurred when Ambassador John Ferch was relieved of his duties in Honduras by Secretary George Shultz--in the midst of negotiations and active US diplomacy. Ferch got at cross purposes with Shultz and Abrams and was called home. The difference between Ferch and Washington was largely one of perceptions. This was a delicate period in our relationships with Honduran authorities in large part because the Nicaraguan resistance was operating from the Honduras/Nicaragua border area. That required some understanding from the Honduran authorities, including the Honduran military which played a major role in the politics of the country. The bilateral relationship had its ups and downs partially because the military were hard to deal with; they extracted a price for their cooperation. Shultz and Abrams felt that we could only get the cooperation we needed through aggressive diplomatic representations; they believed that Ferch did not meet their requirements. So Secretary Shultz decided to relieve him of his mission.

Shortly after that, I was asked to go to Managua to act as Chargé while decisions were pending about Embassy leadership. So I went for about a month until Bob Pasterino, the new DCM arrived to assume charge. My job in Honduras was essentially to hold the fort until the necessary personnel decisions had been reached. It was nevertheless a very busy month: there were many things going on. We had some disruptions in our operations; the USAID building had previously

been sacked by an unruly mob. Though the relationship at the formal level was very friendly, there were many undercurrents which made the relationship somewhat precarious. My job was to keep things together. We had the normal mission operations and a major peace initiative underway. While I was there, a Honduran married to an American contract employee was murdered. The American was attached to a military facility far from Tegucigalpa. The episode raised questions about the authority of the chief of mission because the American employee involved worked for a military contractor; he was not a direct hire employee. The contractor urged that the employee be spirited out of the country, thereby removing him from Honduran jurisdiction. When I was so informed, I called the contract director to my office and told him that he and his employees came under chief of mission authority and that meant that his employee would not leave Honduras until host government authorities authorized his departure. The contractor appealed my decision through military communication channels, but DoD supported me and the employee stayed. He was processed through the Honduran justice system which in time found him "not responsible." So every day, it seemed, something new would pop up in addition to the daily decisions that had to be made on mission operations.

There were continuing programs of assistance to the Nicaraguan resistance. At a minimum, as Chargé, I had to be kept informed about this activity to make sure that Washington was fully aware of what was going on in Honduras. There was a lot of activity; this was not your traditional diplomatic program. There had been a long tradition in this area of activities by other agencies; the chief of mission was not as completely informed as he or she should have been. It was very hard for a newcomer, particularly a short timer, to establish an appropriate process to ensure full disclosure; so I did have a feeling of being on a treadmill. Much more needed to be done to bring all U.S. government activities under the purview of the chief of mission. The other agencies were very active with their own programs and were not entirely under the control of the chief of mission.

I found the Honduran civilian authorities to be quite good--particularly the President and Foreign Minister, Foreign Minister Lopez was a distinguished lawyer and a very impressive individual. But the military leadership was another story. They did not inspire a great deal of confidence, but since they were in their positions we had to deal with them. But it was difficult; the military high command had its own agenda which was not always supportive of democratic institutions. Furthermore, they did not exude honesty.

**CLAYTON E. MCMANAWAY, JR.**  
**Nicaragua Program**  
**Washington, DC (1987-1989)**

*Clayton E. McManaway, Jr. was born in North Carolina. He graduated from the University of South Carolina and served in the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps. He served in Phnom Penh and Saigon, and as Ambassador to Haiti. Mr. McManaway was interviewed in 1993 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Elliot Abrams was a controversial figure. Certainly he was taking much of the flack for the media and all this on Nicaraguan policy and support of the Contras. What were you getting from*

*[his people]? You were involved in going down and talking to the embassy desk people. How was he viewed by the people working with Central America within the State Department as far as you can gather?*

MCMANAWAY: As far as I can gather is that he had [their] support there. [I didn't detect any] lack of respect. He was a very bright man and quite able to take the heat. He didn't seem to deal well with people who questioned... you know substantive questions. They were not meant to be questions of, you know, [coming from some] kind of disloyalty or anything like that. But he didn't seem to handle those sort of things very well. I didn't detect any lack of support. Quite on the contrary, he had good support from the people working with him.

*Q: In Counter-terrorism from '87 to '88, what are you talking about?*

MCMANAWAY: I was there from '87 to '89, when I left. So it was a little over two years.

*Q: What was the bureau? What were its concerns?*

MCMANAWAY: The bureau?

*Q: Counter-terrorism, was that a bureau at that time?*

MCMANAWAY: No. It was an ambassador-at-large reporting back to the Secretary of State. The Department had floundered for quite a few years on how to deal with this subject of counter-terrorism, where to put the organization, how to organize what. How it should be managed. It was in M [Office of the Under Secretary for Management] for a while, it reported to D [Office of the Deputy Secretary] for a while, it was back to M. It was finally decided to have an office under the Secretary. It was S/CT. That had occurred in the fall of, or slightly before Jerry went in there. Jerry went in in October 1986 and he was reporting directly to the Secretary. He was attending the Secretary's morning staff meetings, etc. He had direct access which really made a big difference. It really made a huge difference in the ability to do the job because it is a single-issue office and you went to deal with a bureau, the geographic bureau, you were dealing with people who had multiple concerns in the individual country. We were a pest. We were just trouble makers. We would go in there telling them "You've got to do this, you've got to do that." We were looking only at one issue so we couldn't go to the bathroom without getting into a bureaucratic fight. Fighting all the time, trench warfare, constantly. Particularly with the Near East bureau.

*Q: I suppose some of the major threats were probably Syria and Libya, weren't they?*

MCMANAWAY: Syria, Libya, Iran, and Lebanon of course where we had all the hostages. We had most of our dealings with the folks in the Near East bureau and they were pretty stormy. One of the first major issues that I can recall getting engaged in was the issue of returning our ambassador to Syria. You'll recall the terrorist who was supported by Syria. In fact he was using a Syrian passport, not a [full diplomatic] passport, they'd have something just short of a [diplomatic] passport. He was in one of those. He used a diplomatic passport to get the materials for his bombs into London trying to blow up the El-Al flight and they caught him. He was using this woman, his girlfriend. He had duped her into carrying this bomb onto the plane and the Israeli security had

caught her. At that time England, the UK, broke relations with Syria and in support we withdrew our ambassador. The bureau wanted to return him. They were very uncomfortable not having an ambassador there. We were very much opposed until... Our position was that the ANO, which was the terrorist organization Abu Nidal Organization, until they ejected him, or did something to him, and that took months to accomplish. But finally they did, finally the Syrian government kicked him out. He went to Libya and at that point our ambassador was returned to resume this wonderful dialogue we supposedly had with Assad. Of course there was no such dialogue.

*Q: It continues today.*

MCMANAWAY: Anyway that was one of the major battles.

*Q: I suppose with Iran, this would have been in the hands of the CIA?*

MCMANAWAY: One of the things that perhaps I should take a minute to explain. There had been a decision, I guess an NSC decision to give the responsibility for coordinating the United States government's counter-terrorism policies and responses to international terrorist incidents to the State Department. For domestic instances, it was the Justice Department, the FBI was the action arm of the Justice Department. The whole effort was an intensely inter-agency, one of the most intense inter-agency operations I've been involved in, and I've been involved in a number of them. We had the CIA, the FBI, the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Finally, we brought in the Justice Department later on, at the Secretary's insistence; [the Defense Department]. All of those agencies were involved daily and weekly in forming policies, or responding to incidents, or trying to track down terrorists, and of course [dealing with] the hostage situation. Also we were recovering from the setback of the Iran contra-incident. The only country which hasn't stumbled on this issue of hostages, the only two countries were Kuwait and the UK. Everyone else has stubbed their toe on that combination of dealing with terrorists over hostages, as we did during the Iran-Contra affair.

*Q: While you were there, pretty much were you all agreed about how one deals with hostage situations.*

MCMANAWAY: Yes, there was a good, uniform consensus among the different agencies.

*Q: Which is essentially "Don't deal," isn't it?*

MCMANAWAY: Don't Deal. You can talk, but don't deal. That's one thing we ran into all the time, people not really understanding what we were saying when we said we don't negotiate. What we were saying was not that you don't communicate. In some way you try to communicate, but you don't cut any deal, you're [not making] concessions. That was widely supported among all the agencies.

*Q: The Iran-Contra thing had blown up by this time?*

MCMANAWAY: It was over by this time.

*Q: Was this serving as a strong lesson? Don't let amateurs get in? Does this serve as a worse-case*

*example of what happens?*

MCMANAWAY: Yes, but because Iran-Contra created the image we were negotiating with hostage-takers, it took a while to recover from that, dealing with other countries like France in particular, to convince them that [we really did mean it]. We didn't want them making concessions either. That was one of the things that we worked on quite well.

*Q: Do you find that the NSC was duly chastened on this type of thing? Because the Iran- Contra thing had been run out of the NSC.*

MCMANAWAY: Yes. That was the one agency I forgot to mention was I was listing. The NSC was involved.

*Q: I would assume that having received this very bloody nose, they would have been careful.*

MCMANAWAY: Yes, they were very careful and very supportive not doing anything like that again. One of the things we were able to do was... We snatched a terrorist and pulled it off. We had seven agencies involved. It took us months to plan it and pull it off. We lured the terrorist out of Lebanon into international waters and snatched him. We brought him back to the United States and tried him. He is in jail. One of the things we patted ourselves on the back for, we felt that we'd proven that you can do it without doing it the North way. You could do it within the system.

*Q: Without doing it the Oliver North way?*

MCMANAWAY: Yes. You could do it within the system. You didn't have to go outside the system. We were able to pull that off without a leak.

*Q: Did that seem to have made an impression on the terrorist organizations? The fact that we got somebody...?*

MCMANAWAY: I think so. It's hard to say. You can't get inside the [system]. It's very hard to penetrate these organizations. I would have to assume that it did. I can't say for certain.

*Q: What about Libya? At this time we didn't have diplomatic relations then did we, but we had some Americans there.*

MCMANAWAY: There were some Americans there but you were not supposed to be traveling there, nor were you supposed to be traveling to Lebanon at that time. Libya, Qadhafi had [pulled back] by that time, because of the raid on Libya...

*Q: This is a bombing raid which narrowly missed Qadhafi and...*

MCMANAWAY: He pretty well kept his head down and has since then. He's worked through surrogates. Some of his people of course are now saying he's involved in the [Pan Am 103 bombing]. I have my own theory about that, but I was not there at the end of that investigation. I'd left before they had... When I was there they were on a different track. The investigation was

turning in a different direction and it shifted only after I left. So I don't know, I don't have access to all--except what you see in the papers--as to how that shifted, and Libya having been involved. The changes that have been made in the State Department since that period have been really [major].

*Q: Changes which result in the program losing clout?*

MCMANAWAY: It loses clout within the Department, it loses within the U.S. government. It loses clout internationally. When we traveled, either Jerry or Al Adams or I traveled... Because we all had the title of ambassador but we all would be working at the level that... We'd call on ministers when we were abroad, visited foreign countries. At the [current] level, I don't believe they can do that.

*Q: At the time you were there - we're talking about '87 to '89 - what was the prime motivation of these various terrorist groups or were there various ones that we were concerned with?*

MCMANAWAY: You know terrorists are looking to make a political point, trying to damage U.S. interests wherever they can. Of course with television the way it is now... For example, the Kuwaiti [Airbus] hijacking took place within that time frame. We were not directly all that involved but there was one American on board. No one knew that. We only knew it because before switching and using an Egyptian passport as he caught the flight out of Bangkok, he had shown them an American passport, so we had found out that he had an American passport. He did not show it on the plane to the hijackers. So they did not know it and we were very careful not to let anybody else know it. We knew it and we were very interested and were following it. We followed it overseeing it as well as we did through the television agencies because they were right there, they had better booms, they had better equipment. They were everywhere the flight was so we literally followed it on CNN. So they get a huge audience for whatever message they want to get across. In that case they wanted seventeen colleagues released by Kuwait. They had been jailed for terrorist acts in Kuwait.

*Q: There'd been attacks on the American or French and also on Kuwaiti ministries by Palestinians.*

MCMANAWAY: One of the seventeen terrorists that were held was in fact the brother-in-law of one of the leaders of Hezbollah.

*Q: Which is one of the Iran supported terrorist groups?*

MCMANAWAY: There are several factions within Hezbollah. Hezbollah was largely responsible for a lot of the hostage taking.

*Q: How did you find support from some of the European countries and Japan during this time?*

MCMANAWAY: Japan was not a big player. I made one trip out there. They were not a big player in the counter-terrorist... Of course they have a reputation for paying off. When they have people kidnapped, they pay off. Therefore they have more people kidnapped. Usually big businessmen and the companies pay off right away. France's support varied with the administration that was in. The current interior minister was also interior minister during the latter part of the time I was there,

Pasqual. He was very supportive.

*Q: He is a very hard-nosed...*

MCMANAWAY: He's an ex-cop. He is a law-enforcement guy and he is a tough bird. I don't know what the story is on this...

*Q: Right now we're having a political brouhaha over this but anyway...*

MCMANAWAY: But he was very supportive. And they were very supportive of Spain because in Spain there is a terrorist group who crossed over for safe haven into France.

*Q: Some Basque type things?*

MCMANAWAY: Basque type thing. They were very supportive in helping Spain and they got a number of the top guys and they were very helpful there. They were very supportive in the international forum which we met on account of terrorism during that time. Other times, you know, France for a long time had a policy of laissez-faire, if you like. As long as you didn't do anything on French territory, the French wouldn't do anything against the terrorists. So their policy is not consistent. It's been somewhat inconsistent. The UK was always very supportive. Italy was very supportive, Spain...

*Q: Germany?*

MCMANAWAY: Germany was pretty good. In fact the Germans picked up one of the principal terrorists involved in the highjacking of the ship "Achille Lauro." We tried to get that fellow extradited to the States but they refused. But they tried him in Germany and the FBI did a lot of work on that, provided a lot of evidence and witnesses at that trial. Greece was pretty hopeless. We tricked Greece. There was one terrorist... After we snatched this one guy whose name escapes me, maybe it will come back. Eunice was the guy's name. We got him out of Lebanon. We told him he was going on a big drug deal. He was going to make a lot of money. The Agency had the contact with him. Lured him out. How much of this can we get into I don't know. It's already been made public. They had got a hold of a yacht and had it stationed out there, in Cyprus. Of course it was manned by a CIA agent, a girl, a female of the agency in bikini, etc. They were just out beyond the border, in international waters. Took him out there in a speedboat and once aboard he was clapped and he was arrested, then took him to a navy ship which then took him to an aircraft carrier and we put him on a plane and we flew him on back nonstop. It took about three refuelings, broke several records of flights off an aircraft carrier which I guess we'll never get into the record books, but... After we'd done that we had been tracing and following another terrorist who had been involved in the bombing of an American plane some years before in which a teenager was killed. We knew he was in Sudan and we were planning an operation. We were having a lot of trouble with the lawyers because this time we were going to go into a country and take him. We had a pretty good plan, but then we found out he was going to be traveling, and he was going through Athens. So we notified the Greek authorities that there was going to be somebody going through on false documentation. Only after the arrest did we tell them who he was. Because if we had told them before, they probably wouldn't have let him in.

*Q: I served four years in Greece and we had a terrorist attack. We had a bombing of a TWA plane there and the Greeks' whole idea was: "Get him out. We just don't want to deal with this problem."*

MCMANAWAY: We didn't try to get him extradited. Again they tried to... He's in jail and that was all.

*Q: How did you get him out? Did the Greeks finally, using publicity?*

MCMANAWAY: We didn't get him out. They tried him in there.

*Q: It's easy in a way to deal with the Arab terrorist, but all of a sudden we get into a politically sensitive thing like the IRA. The IRA very obviously are terrorists of the first water, but at the same time there's still an Irish heritage. This is a Kennedy talking to a McManaway. Was there a problem, an internal political problem in dealing with the IRA?*

MCMANAWAY: Not very often. You know we were supportive of the UK. It was really a UK problem. They weren't really killing any Americans. Terrorist activities that don't involve Americans, we didn't get involved in. The only problems we had were with some of the spokespersons for the IRA who wanted to come to the United States. You'd get into some bureaucratic squabbles over that. We were able to block one or two times one of the fellows who's since been let in. But that's about the only connection we [had]. We did get involved a little bit in providing intelligence of Libyan shipments of munitions and weapons and stuff to the IRA. We didn't get too much involved.

*Q: By the time, when you left a new administration had come in 1989 which would have been the Bush administration and you retired at that point. Looking back on it all, one, on the counterterrorism, what was your impression of how our efforts had been at that time?*

MCMANAWAY: I thought we'd done pretty well. We had improved international support which is obviously an international problem. We had made a couple of dents in their several organizations. We had disrupted the ANO pretty badly...

*Q: The ANO is...?*

MCMANAWAY: Abu Nidal Organization, one of the worst of all the terrorist organizations. We had improved significantly efforts against states who had been supportive and who were supporting terrorist groups. We had improved our capabilities to track and identify them, and track them down and keep them off balance. I thought we'd done pretty good. We had very strong support from George Shultz. Bush of course had got involved in counter-terrorism when he was vice-president, so we had good support from his staff. It was really running well. We had a couple of inter-agency organizations. One was a big organization, I'd have to go back and count them. Lots of agencies involved. That group got involved in some of overt policies and activities that we did such as supporting the government of South Korea during the Olympics, the government of Canada during the Olympics in Calgary. But we didn't rely on that. The real group that really made policy and made decisions was a small group that met over at the NSC, and we had a very strict

rule. There were no notes, minutes taken. It was gloves off. We said whatever we thought. One agency would tear into another and it just cleared the air. We had a rule that only one principal from any agency could attend the meeting. So we kept very small and that's where we planned the snatch of Eunice, that's where we planned a lot of different...

*Q: Also by not having too many people, it kept people from posturing for their own staff and all that which is always a problem when you have a large...*

MCMANAWAY: That's true. And unlike the anti-drug organization, they never had anything like that to my knowledge and they've never been able to get a really good coordination. But we had that inter-agency coordination and it was really humming. It was going on extremely well. My impression is that on the Busby...

*Q: This was Morris Busby...*

MCMANAWAY: Yes, it must have worked very well because of the job they did prior to the war in the Persian Gulf on Iraq I thought was just super...

*Q: Well they certainly buttoned up Iraq as far as...*

MCMANAWAY: Just super job. They got, I forgot the number, I think it was two or three hundred so-called diplomats PNG all around the world. They blocked an operation in one country that I know of that would have been spectacular, and they pulled it off. They did a super job. It seems to me it's gone downhill since then, but it was going well. We'd done a good job particularly in our agency's side. We had done some very tough things. I spent nine months negotiating a treaty on what would happen if we sent... We had an inter-agency response capability which extended to the military. What would happen in any given country between the American ambassador and the Commanding Officer of the unit that went in there. How that would work and when the Command would (shift over when it would shift back?). It took me nine months but it's probably gathering dust on some shelf somewhere now.

*Q: But still this is an important thing because you had a little bit of this happen down in Sigonella, Sicily prior to your time when they'd picked up the Achille Lauro.*

MCMANAWAY: Yes, a little bit of it?

*Q: There was a big confrontation there, from the Italians, the Americans who snatched the hijackers, and the American authorities in Italy. That was I guess the instigation.*

MCMANAWAY: We were still suffering from that with regard to our dealings with Italy all during the time I was involved. We also worked out understandings on debriefing of hostages. Who was in the lead, how to handle that? We did a lot of things. We ran a lot of exercises. If we'd ever been called on to respond I think we would have done quite well.

*Q: One of things I think you really have to deal with this. Every agency if they have their choice really wants to be paramount and they run in and it all looks unplanned. We end up looking stupid*

*because of this.*

MCMANAWAY: We also end up missing opportunities and messing up situations. But it also stems from legitimate interests and concerns. For example, you always have this tension between the FBI and the CIA, because the CIA is interested in intelligence. The FBI is interested in evidence and you don't disseminate evidence, you keep that. You're going to have to use it in court. They're trained that way, they've lived that for twenty-five years. It's just ingrained in them. So sharing is just unheard of. Breaking that down, making sure that we did get evidence that we might need if we ever were going to prosecute anybody, at the same time not miss any tactical intelligence. Of course the military are interested in an entirely different thing. For example debriefing hostages, trying to figure out where they were held and how you get in there if you ever get a chance to go in and try to rescue hostages. Which way does the door open. They want to know all that stuff. They all have legitimate interests and concerns, so reconciling that is not an easy job.

*Q: State of course is concerned about the sensibilities of the country where it happens...*

MCMANAWAY: But also making sure that we're staying in the league and our responsibility was coordinating all this. We got a lot of that done which hadn't been done before. For one thing, the period just prior to Bremer taking over and Al Adams and I joining them had been a horrific time. There were just one incident after another. Bob Oakley was there and Parker Borg were there that previous year, that year of 1985. I've forgotten how many incidents there were. You had highjackings and... Those poor guys were just running from one crisis to another. So a lot of the stuff couldn't be... There just wasn't time. Before that, it wasn't well organized within the State Department. It wasn't put together right to do any of these things. So it was really the first chance anybody had to tackle some of these things. I don't know what's happened to them.

**RICHARD T. McCORMACK**  
**US Ambassador to Organization of American States**  
**Washington, DC (1985-1989)**

*After attending Georgetown University, Mr. Richard T. McCormack assumed a multitude of administrative roles for the Nixon Administration in addition to serving under Governor William Scranton of Pennsylvania and Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina. Mr. McCormack's career also included positions as the US Ambassador to the Organization of American States as well as Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs. Ambassador McCormack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2002.*

*Q: Did you get any feel for the Senator's policy towards Latin America? We said at least at some point, around the time you were there when Reagan came in, he seemed to be a great supporter of what we call the right-wing dictatorships and all that.*

McCORMACK: Remember this: 1980 was the height of the Cold War. You had active Cuban and

Russian attempts to destabilize and communize Central America. When I was on the Senator's staff, I went to Nicaragua in 1980. I got to know all the Sandinista leadership, including Borge, Ortega, and all those people. The message I had for them was this. "We don't particularly like the government of Mr. Tito in Yugoslavia. We know he runs an authoritarian or a quasi-communist government. If you refrain from exporting your revolution and treat your own people halfway decently, you, like Tito, will not have problems with the U.S. government. But if you start exporting guns and revolution to the neighborhood, we will be on you like a frog on a June bug." They assured me that they would not export revolution and guns or attempt to subvert the region. But in fact they did. The rest is history. The third world counter attacks by the Reagan administration and other measures increased the cost to the Soviet Union. Eventually the Soviet Union's economy cracked under financial pressure. The defeat in Afghanistan in particular also helped break the morale of the muscular side of the Soviet security services.

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McCORMACK:....There was a case during the 1986 OAS General Assembly in Cartagena, Colombia, where a resolution attacking U.S. economic sanctions against Nicaragua was passed by the General Assembly of the United Nations 94 to 4, and three weeks later it was re-introduced in Cartagena. It was reintroduced by the beautiful and legendary Vice Minister Nora Astorga, who represented the Sandinista government. She was an extremely effective diplomat. That key resolution, however, was defeated 15 to 16. Some of the foreign ministers who voted against the United States in New York voted for us in Colombia. Of course, the results of this vote shocked my colleagues in New York who wondered how this could happen. But it was simply a classical exercise of diplomatic skills where you did some logrolling and a little maneuvering here and there. I was later given the superior honor award for outstanding sustained performance for my OAS service.

You can make multilateral diplomacy succeed if in fact you employ appropriate methodologies and if you avoid embarrassing people. I never held press conferences after successful votes like that. We just quietly pocketed the victory and went on to our other business. You want to make it easy for countries to go along with you. There are people who are involved briefly in high profile public service who want to make a national reputation for themselves and are not above a little demagoguery. This is not the way to get the job done in multilateral diplomacy.

*Q: There is usually someone who has to clean up after them.*

McCORMACK: Then they depart and sometimes cash in on the publicity they have generated for themselves. Because I had intended from the very beginning of my career to be a long-term player in our system, I never had the slightest interest in press attention. I basically wanted to make useful contributions to our foreign policy over a very long period of time. So when you don't give a damn about credit and newspaper publicity, this makes it much easier for you to quietly get important things done.

*Q: While you were dealing on issues, did you have any coins to use? I am not talking about money, but logrolling sort of thing. Can you give some examples?*

McCORMACK: Yes, I can. At that time, one of the most influential career diplomats in Barbados was a wonderful man, Peter Lorie. He had made a commitment that he would support the United Nations resolution against us on the Nicaraguan sanctions issue. He was of English extraction. His boss, the foreign minister, was also a very intelligent man, and of African extraction. I noted to his boss that “if we make it impossible to use economic sanctions against the government in Nicaragua, we will never be able to use them against a country such as South Africa, should we want to press them at some point to abandon their apartheid system. Surely you would not want to be party to a process that would restrict the international community’s ability to put sanctions on places like that.” He promptly reversed the vote. Lorie was so mortified that he got on the next plane and returned to Barbados. When Barbados went for us, the whole rest of the Caribbean joined them, none of whom had much sympathy for communist revolutionaries anyway.

Bolivia and Chile had a territorial dispute, and I began to hint that maybe we would review our long standing neutrality on that issue. This brought the Chileans around. When the Bolivians realized that I was considering tilting on behalf of Chile, they also supported us. So we got two votes on that account. In the case of Haiti, I just mentioned to the foreign minister how pleased I was to help out with their mango exports to the United States, and that as a personal favor, I would be enormously grateful if he could support me on this. He said he would.

The people you sit next to at the General Assemblies are determined by the luck of the draw. At this three-day meeting, I was seated next to Nora Astorga, the Vice Foreign Minister of the Sandinista government. I had known Nora for years before I came into government. I had traveled to Nicaragua and had met her and her Sandinista colleagues. I had talked with her at some length. Frankly, I always liked Nora. However, she was supposedly involved in killing a Somoza general by luring him to her apartment. She was a typical upper middle class radical who was disaffected with the earlier authoritarian political system and went too far. So we sat there chatting amicably for two or three days. It was very clear to all that I was not some U.S. gringo bully, beating up on this little lady. In fact the picture of us in the newspaper in Colombia was subtitled “The friendly enemies.” That improved the atmosphere there.

*Q: Very definitely rather than sitting there grim faced.*

McCORMACK: Nora was shocked at the vote on the sanctions resolution when it came. I had done all of my work quietly, myself. I didn’t even talk to my staff about some of my bilateral chats. I just quietly circulated and persuaded first one colleague, then another. When the vote was announced, 16 to 15, she looked at me and said, “My God. This is a strange organization.”

When the Sandinistas first took power, I was working with Senator Helms. Some prominent people from his state called to say that the Sandinistas were not as bad as some press accounts suggested. They and their friends were having a meeting in Costa Rica with the Sandinistas, and invited the Senator to join them. The call was diverted to me. So I went to the Senator and said, “These are influential people in your state, Senator, and I believe they are being misled by the communists.” I said, “I don’t think you should go to Costa Rica and meet with the Sandinista foreign minister and others, but I think I probably should go, just to get a sense of what is going on.” Later, I flew to Nicaragua and met some of the other Sandinista leaders. Several other meetings followed. The message I eventually delivered to them was this: “We didn’t particularly

like Mr. Tito, former head of Yugoslavia, but we got along reasonably well with him because, while we were not enthusiastic about his economic system, he wasn't bothering his neighbors. If you don't bother your neighbors, we probably won't bother you. But if you start violating human rights and exporting revolution to your neighbors, we will go after you. You need to understand that." Well Borge, Ortega, and Astorga, and all those people assured me that they were not going to export their revolution, and would maintain an acceptable minimum of human rights, etc. Of course they subsequently violated these pledges.

By the most extraordinary coincidence, the day in 1985 when the announcement was made that I was going to be the OAS Ambassador, another friend, the daughter of a former Prime Minister of Honduras, Elizabeth Zuniga, was actually meeting with the Sandinistas when the news came in. She reported to me that the Sandinistas actually put their hands to their heads and said, "No, no, not McCormack. Now we can never use the OAS."

We were also blessed in Washington by the fact the OAS Sandinista Ambassador, Father Perales, was not a very skillful diplomat. At one time, he decided he would remove the statue of a great historic Nicaraguan hero from the OAS and replace it with one of Sandino, a leader in a 1930's conflict. Every country has its own statue of their hero in the Great Hall of the OAS building. He organized a huge ceremony to which he invited hundreds of press and diplomats to unveil a magnificent new statue of Sandino. I wrote him a letter saying I would not come to that event because I said, "Mr. Sandino was an authentic patriot. He was also an anti-communist. You basically have stolen the name and the reputation of a decent man and misused it for your communist revolution. I will not be a party to this sham." To my astonishment during the subsequent ceremony, where I was not present, the Nicaraguan Ambassador made his speech, and then he whipped out my letter and said, "Now I want to tell you about the supreme insult that the people of Nicaragua have just received," and he read my entire letter and passed out copies to the press. This letter, of course, was prominently featured in the press accounts throughout the hemisphere. He was promptly withdrawn as ambassador after he had become the laughing stock of the Washington diplomatic community. The Sandinistas replaced him with an abler man, Mr. Tunnerman, a former Sandinista foreign minister, and the diplomatic struggle continued.

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*Q: Well let's talk about 1985 when you came in. What was the status of Central America and talk about how you viewed it and what you were doing.*

McCORMACK: Problems in Central America began when Nicaraguan Sandinistas abused human rights and began killing and jailing people. Ortega and Borge also began looting the country with their colleagues. A disgruntled former Yugoslavian comrade of Tito, Milovan Djilas, wrote a wonderful book called *The New Class*, which described what happens when communist rulers come to power. The big houses of the rich men have new occupants. Mercedes cars are driven by other people: a new class. The Sandinistas became the new class. They started getting kickbacks on every imaginable business angle. That was not the worst part. The worst part was they began serving as a conduit of weapons to the communists, who were fighting in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras. This is what brought the United States down on them hard.

*Q: What was driving them do you think? I mean was this ideology?*

McCORMACK: It was ideology. Remember the Brezhnev Doctrine about communism marching in only one direction? Remember the KGB? Remember Che Guevara in Bolivia? This ideology of spreading communism backed by a forceful KGB was a real and a grave threat. The world was different in those days. Our friends had lost in Southeast Asia and in Afghanistan. We had serious problems in Angola and elsewhere. Things were going badly for us in Ethiopia. At this time, you had this group of Central American communists who thought they were the wave of the future. They were given weapons, money, and assistance by the Soviets, from the KGB, and from Cubans who were the conduits. That was a strategy that went back to the 1920s. So we were anxious not to let that unfold without challenge in our hemisphere.

Of course the CIA was involved in this struggle, and there was some tension in the administration on overall strategy with regard to dealing with communist insurgencies. Central America was part of a larger effort that was being made to confront the Soviets anywhere they were supporting insurgencies, so there would be no more cheap victories for them.

*Q: How was this battle fought during your time at the OAS?*

McCORMACK: We would have periodic meetings of the OAS General Assembly where specific issues such as the economic sanctions issues against Nicaragua would be raised. Efforts to condemn our economic sanctions on Nicaragua were raised in resolutions every year. I always defeated them. The main battle in Central America was not fought by us in the OAS. The main battle was fought by other parts of the U.S. government. I was not on the Central American Strategy Committee, thank God. Some of the things planned there with Iran/Contra got them in serious legal trouble. I would have been happy to have been on the Committee, but Abrams kept me off.

*Q: Well, as we began to build up the contras and sort of building up a backfire within Nicaragua, how was that playing within the OAS? What were you getting?*

McCORMACK: Well bear in mind that the heavy lifting on that issue was done before I became OAS Ambassador. These were ongoing, up-and-running programs by the time I was there. There was a war going on. The question was, was it going to be successful or not? There were major propaganda operations underway. The OAS was one of the theaters for various propaganda efforts that were being made to either support or condemn the war. But the real work on the Central American issues was being done by the CIA and NSC. The only time I got involved was when I thought the State Department was about to make a mistake. Then, I would write a memo and send it to the Secretary of State. There were a few times when I did that and in fact prevailed.

*Q: What sorts of things were these?*

McCORMACK: One of the more contentious solutions to the Nicaragua conflict had to do with commitments of United States and others under the Rio Pact. Bob Sayre and I saw a few people privately and killed efforts to undermine it. I was also an old friend of Bill Casey, the CIA Director. From time to time, when I wanted to know what was happening, I would go over by

myself and see him alone. There was never anyone else present except him and me. If I had something that I felt that I wanted the President to take note of, Bill would do that at his regular morning briefings. I didn't do it very often, only if I felt that something really needed to be brought to the attention of the President for action. When all else failed, this channel never failed.

*Q: Did Oliver North ever cross your track?*

McCORMACK: Briefly, but only very distantly. I earlier mentioned Bromley Smith. Bromley was the longest serving employee of the National Security Council. He served as Executive Secretary for Johnson and Kennedy and Deputy Executive Secretary for Eisenhower and Truman. Later he was brought back and became sort of a permanent advisor at the National Security Council.

One day I went over to see Bromley Smith during the Tower commission investigation, which was reviewing Iran Contra. Bromley looked strangely pale. I said, "What's wrong, Bromley?" He took the copy of the Tower Commission report, and he threw it across the desk. He said: "Have you seen this?" I said, "No." He said, "This is an advance copy of a report that is going to be issued tomorrow. These people have prostituted an institution to which I have given my entire life." He was referring to the Iran-Contra people he thought had abused the National Security Council process. "Now this Commission has compromised the whole concept of executive privilege, which I successfully defended for 40 years. "I am resigning today." He went home and died three days later. Mac Bundy and I were pallbearers at his funeral at the National Cathedral. Bromley had undergone a medical examination one week before this event, and he had been given a clean bill of health.

*Q: What were they trying to do?*

McCORMACK: Basically they broached the principal of executive privilege. That was the smaller issue. The main issue was his complete disgust at how people had misused the National Security Council structures. It literally killed him. Anyway he was a great and wonderful patriot. Subsequently, a magnificent tribute appeared in *The Washington Post* by Joe Layton. The headline read: "Bromley Smith, Confidant of Presidents."

I did not have anything to do with any of these Iran Contra events. Later when Bush Sr. became President, I was helped to rise higher in the system.

**MARY ANNETTE WHITE**  
**Consular/Political Officer**  
**Managua (1987-1989)**

*Mary Annette White was born in Oklahoma in 1946. She graduated from Hendricks College and the University of Arkansas, and served in the U.S. Army and Navy from 1968 to 1976. After entering the Foreign Service in 1987, her career included postings in Managua, Grenada, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan, and Mongolia. Ms. White was interviewed in 2003 by*

*Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: When you came in how did they treat you as far as where did you want to go and what sort of work did you want to do?*

WRIGHT: At that time we still had the program where you already had been designated to go into a cone when you came in. I was in the political cone. The first assignment was going to be at least partially consular but I did get one of the rotational positions that gave you one year in consular and one year in political. There wasn't really much concern for your desires on the type of job and location of your first assignment. But I'd say maybe thirty percent of the people got the kind of the job that they had hoped for. But as things play out with the Foreign Service, nothing is in concrete. My original assignment was to go to Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. I wasn't thrilled with the assignment as nothing extraordinary was happening there compared to countries in Central America. I was in Spanish language review when a vacancy opened up in Nicaragua. That was a much more interesting place and time – with the contras fighting the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. And with my recent military experience in Central America that was certainly a place that I was most interested in going to. So it ended up that I got to go to a place that I really wanted to.

*Q: So you were in Managua from when to when?*

WRIGHT: From '87 to '89.

*Q: What was your position there?*

WRIGHT: The first year I was a consular officer and the second year I was to go into the political section. The rotation from consular to political officer occurred earlier than was scheduled because one-half of the embassy staff was declared personas non-grata (PNGed) by the Sandinistas for U.S. Embassy "support" for the newly formed political opposition to the Sandinistas. Virtually all the senior staff of the embassy was kicked out of the country, and all of a sudden the three junior officers that were there became three senior officers. *[laughs]*

*Q: Who was the ambassador when you arrived?*

WRIGHT: We did not have an ambassador. We had a Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Later, Ambassador Melton arrived and lasted only a short time until the Sandinistas declared him persona non-grata. After Ambassador Melton left, Jack Leonard was sent in as the Charge. Jack later became the Director of Central American regional office and then headed up Cuban affairs before he retired.

*Q: What was the state of relations with Nicaragua when you arrived there in 1987?*

WRIGHT: It was a very difficult relationship. The U.S. was financing the contras who were fighting against the Sandinistas. The contras were being trained by the CIA in Honduras and being sent across the border to fight the Sandinistas. So when I first arrived there it was very, very tense. The relationship between the Sandinista security force and members of our embassy staff was tough. Every time we would go out of the embassy or out of our residences we were followed, our telephones were tapped – when you picked up the telephone you knew the intelligence people were

in the background listening. Sometimes they would sneeze or even talk to you. *[laughs]* They wanted to let you know that they were watching your every movement and hearing what you said.

*Q: What were you doing in consular work there?*

WRIGHT: That was a fascinating and tragic time for consular work. We interviewed thousands of young Nicaraguan men who did not want to serve in the Sandinista military. They wanted a visa to scoot out of Nicaragua and go to the U.S. and wait out the war there. They didn't necessarily want to be in the contras either; they just didn't want to be a part of the war at all. And many families wanted to get their whole families out. Every consular day was very difficult because you sympathized with the plight of the people that wanted to leave. They didn't want to be in the crossfire of the contras and the Sandinistas. They didn't want to live under the tyranny of the Sandinistas – the tyranny of course continuing in the visa line because they would have to pass through the Sandinista police to even get into the consulate to be interviewed. So it was a real drain on you as a consular officer to face these people who just wanted to escape violence.

*Q: What were your instructions? How did you deal with these people who were trying to get the hell out?*

WRIGHT: The general instructions were that just because a person did not want to serve in the Sandinista military did not make a person a qualified non-immigrant visa applicant. So you didn't issue a visa to the U.S. to those who said they didn't want to serve in the Sandinista military. What was so interesting though was that if a person could get from Nicaragua illegally into the United States, he could then apply for political asylum once they got in there. He couldn't apply for political asylum outside of the United States, but if he could get into the U.S. legally or illegally then he could apply for it. So all they were essentially asking us was to help get them to get to the U.S. cheaply, safely and quickly with a visa so they could fly to the U.S. rather than paying a coyote \$3000 and the dangerous trip through Honduras, Guatemala and Mexico taking three weeks. Once they got to the U.S. they could take care of themselves as they knew how the system worked.

*Q: Were you able to do something at the margins? You know, looking up and trying to figure out reasons for giving somebody a visa.*

WRIGHT: Yes. There was a certain amount of that that certainly did go on. If we could be convinced that a particular person really was in imminent danger, if they could portray that to us, then there were many visas issued on that basis. But you also had to be very careful because you didn't know if some of the young folks might be Sandinista agents that were just using that as a way to get to the States and then wreck a little havoc within the Nicaraguan community in the United States. As all consular decisions are, it was pretty much a gut feeling of what you felt was right in that particular case.

*Q: Were you by yourself or were there others with you?*

WRIGHT: No, thank god there were others *[laughs]* because to do that by yourself would've been just torture. You certainly need the comradeship and the advice of other consular officers.

*Q: I was going to say, you almost have to go into something collegially to share the burden.*

WRIGHT: You certainly did. Some days you could handle it very well and you could make your decisions and do it quickly and feel good about them. Other days you'd have a very difficult time; if you had a case that really did bother you and you knew the problems that the family was having, or the person was having, but for some reason you just didn't feel you could issue the visa, you felt badly about that. So you needed the comfort of the other consular officers who hopefully were having a little bit better day than you were having. But what was so interesting too was that of course the applicants could tell in the first thirty minutes – the word would go back through the lines; as people would be coming out they would say to the other people in line, "Well, try not to get in the line with the blonde-headed woman because she's not in a good mood today," or "The black-headed guy is a real bear." And you could see this start about an hour into the interviewing process. All of a sudden long lines would be forming in front of one person's window and we'd look out into the waiting area at the lines and then at each other and laugh. Sometimes we would have to go out into the waiting room and physically move people into the lines that were not full, much to the displeasure of the applicants. At that time, there was no fee to be interviewed so people would come several times a week hoping they would be lucky.

*Q: Were you getting much in the way of suggestions, support from the visa office and all, or were they kind of leaving it to you?*

WRIGHT: Pretty much leaving it to us although of course we did have to send back to Washington for advisory opinions on some people. If you got certain categories of people in, and through the name checks, there was definite guidance particularly for Sandinista government officials. But for the average Nicaraguan it was left up to us. We scoured the local newspapers to keep track of what persons were allegedly doing –human rights violations, etc to help us do our job in the best way possible.

*Q: How about the Nicaraguan Foreign Service nationals (FSNs); how helpful were they?*

WRIGHT: They were very helpful. They were dedicated, tough people who had to endure a lot of harassment from the Sandinistas for working with the U.S. Embassy. We had instances, at various times, of our FSNs being arrested, being put in jail, being humiliated. It was a very, very difficult time for them. But they, in their own way, could indicate to us if they knew anything about a visa applicant. But then, as in virtually all areas where you have conditions of political strife in the country, or great economic stress, they too kind of have to watch their backs because the word out on the street is that the Foreign Service national staff runs things. If you can get them on your side, or one person in that consulate, then you've got a better chance of getting a visa. Of course we have had, in the history of all of our consular operations, enough times that people have been bribed and succumbed to the temptations of money, or threats of intimidation, threats of physical violence for us to always to on the lookout for FSNs that were not doing their jobs properly.

*Q: Did you have much of a social life with the Nicaraguans? Particularly the time you were in the consular section.*

WRIGHT: *[laughs]* that usually is the greatest social activity of any Foreign Service officer's career, when you're the consular officer.

*Q: Everybody wants to know you.*

WRIGHT: That's for sure. You get more invitations than you will have in the rest of your career! The first week or two when all of the invitations come in, you think, my goodness, how friendly everybody is. Then when you go to one of the social events, the first question or first comment out of virtually every person's mouth is dealing with a visa issue for themselves or some family members. Pretty soon you get jaded. But yes, the social scene in Nicaragua was remarkably vibrant considering that they faced the brunt of the Sandinistas to be seen with Americans. Certainly not all of the contacts were just for visas. There were a lot of Nicaraguans that became good friends. We would go to their homes for parties and to their rustic beach houses on the Pacific shore.

*Q: From your take the whole time you were there, did you get a feeling that the Sandinistas – the leadership and those identified with the Sandinistas – stood apart from most Nicaraguans or not?*

WRIGHT: Yes, by that time the Sandinista leadership was standing far apart from ordinary Nicaraguans. In the early days of the Sandinista revolution against the Somoza government, the Sandinistas called themselves part of the people and I think at that stage were a part. But the longer they stayed in power, the more corrupt the power became. At that point there was an ever-growing distance between the society and the senior leadership of the Sandinistas.

*Q: What happened when about halfway through? When you were there, a lot of people got declared persona non grata?*

WRIGHT: Yes, indeed.

*Q: Was there anything that caused it?*

WRIGHT: Yes, by that time a deal had been cut between the U.S. government and the Sandinistas. If the U.S. would stop the support for the contras then the Sandinistas would agree to hold elections. The Sandinistas allowed political opposition parties to form and to begin campaigning in Nicaragua. Once that agreement was made it seemed like every Nicaraguan formed his own political party. If I remember right, there was something like twenty-five political parties that formed. Many of the political parties were paid for and supported with U.S. funds. We did not pay the parties through the embassy. Leaders of the parties traveled to other places where they were bankrolled. As a result political opposition politics was a growth industry. The creation of political parties and the political campaigning that then started at the grass roots level was fascinating because it's the first time that had ever happened in that country. Prior to the Sandinistas the dictator Somoza was pretty heavy-handed and had no political dialogue with the people. So this was the first chance the Nicaraguans had had to actually try this thing called democracy, to see if they could defeat the Sandinistas so that there could be a democratic form of government started.

As the party formed and many events held by each party throughout the country, the Sandinistas were shocked at the amount of support that was out in the countryside for the opposition parties.

The political rallies were large. The larger they got then the bolder members of the groups became. At one particular place called Naidame, if I remember right, six opposition parties had a combined campaign one Saturday afternoon. As the leaders of the parties were speaking in the city square, Sandinista police started creeping up into the alleyways surrounding the square. When the people saw the Sandinista police coming in they started throwing rocks at them. Well, they rocked the police really, really hard. The police were wounded badly and of course the Sandinistas could not put up “civil disobedience” and they threw in jail the top leaders of six of the parties, including like a seventy-year-old woman who was one of the most dynamic of all of the opposition leaders. They threw them in jail and then they said that it was the U.S. embassy that was behind all of the “civil disobedience” and then tossed out one-half of our embassy staff, including most senior officers.

*Q: What did the embassy do then?*

WRIGHT: We reorganized the remaining embassy staff. We closed the consulate and the three junior officers moved over to the political and economic sections to take the places of the senior political and economic officers that had been PNGed. That was an exciting time. We worked extremely hard to provide Washington with information on what was happening in Nicaragua during this very sensitive period. Besides kicking out half of our staff, the Sandinistas put a travel restriction on the remaining staff. They said that if any remaining embassy member left Nicaragua they would not be given a reentry visa prior to leaving. The Sandinistas required that Embassy staff members who left had to apply for readmission to Nicaragua after we got to the U.S. The Nicaraguan embassy in Washington took at least three weeks to process our requests for readmission. That Sandinista policy meant that those of us that we left were stuck in Nicaragua as we had no one to replace us. It was a very, very difficult time. But at the same time, it was a great challenge for us junior folks to be able to move right in to more senior positions.

*Q: What were you doing when you were doing political work? How were your contacts? What were you seeing developing there?*

WRIGHT: I was the political officer that was the liaison with the twenty-five political parties. I tried to meet with the leaders of the parties at least once a week to find out what their plans were for the upcoming weekend and the following week. It was fascinating to see how some of the parties were really trying to organize themselves as a grass roots movement similar to what we have in the U.S. While others were just working the system to get funding but weren't so much interested in doing the things needed to develop a strong political base and be the part of the opposition that was ultimately chosen to stand the election against the Sandinistas.

*Q: In a way I think this could be tricky because I'm sure there were elements in the United States, for example a union or a political action group or something would be supporting one of these opportunistic parties and all and get identified with them. Were we able to say, "Don't play with this group. It's not for real."?*

WRIGHT: We didn't have many groups that were trying to make contact with the various opposition political parties in Nicaragua. I think part of it may have been that they knew they could still get thrown in jail by the Sandinistas if they personally arrived there. Some of the opposition leaders would go to the U.S. and meet with some of these organizations.

*Q: Were you personally harassed when you did this sort of thing?*

WRIGHT: Oh yes. Being blonde-headed in Nicaragua, or any Latin American country, you stand out. So it was easy to identify the American woman political officer from the embassy in the crowd when I would attend Sandinista rallies or political opposition rallies. Sandinista security service personnel were always close by. Sometimes they would be aggressive to make sure I knew they were around. Sometimes you got pushed around a little bit.

*Q: In a practical sense they weren't going to beat you up or anything like that?*

WRIGHT: No, I didn't feel that they would do that but they certainly did want to let you know that they were watching every person you spoke with and every movement you made.

*Q: Were you all sensing an increasing shrillness or something in what the Sandinistas were doing as they became aware that...I mean, this was supposed to be a walkover for them and they agreed to this thing and all of a sudden they found it was their worst nightmare. [laughs]*

WRIGHT: Indeed.

*Q: Did you see a change as they became...*

WRIGHT: Yes. As more and more Nicaraguans began attending the opposition rallies, the Sandinista leadership became concerned. Their concern changed into action with they jailed six key opposition leaders. Once the opposition leaders went into jail, then there was an international outcry, "How could you throw these people into jail?" The Sandinistas were fighting on all fronts in an international public relations campaign to show that they had the right to classify opposition leaders as organizers of "civil disobedience" who were breaking the laws of Nicaragua by inciting their followers to attack the Sandinista police.

*Q: Within the embassy from early on why did the Sandinistas sort of sign on to this election business?*

WRIGHT: Because they were sufficiently frightened about being beaten militarily by the contras. The U.S. had spent a lot of money and had trained a lot of Nicaraguans to fight the Sandinistas. There was enough military pressure that they ultimately decided that they would agree to hold the elections.

*Q: Did you get to meet any of the Ortegas or any of the others?*

WRIGHT: I met Daniel Ortega only once in the two years I was in Nicaragua. In late 1989 I accompanied Connecticut Senator Christopher Dodd's Congressional delegation to a meeting with Ortega. Dodd didn't want any U.S. embassy staff to go to the meeting, but we underscored the need for the embassy to know what Ortega said during the meeting. The Sandinistas would not agree that our Charge d'Affaires could attend the meeting. I as a junior member of the embassy staff was allowed to attend. (End of tape)

*Q: Was there much of a Cuban presence or a Soviet presence when you were there?*

WRIGHT: Yes, there were both. They both had large embassies. We had very little dealings with them except at the monthly diplomatic social gatherings. We could not meet in any other venue and we had to be careful in the social gatherings.

*Q: Early on, when the Sandinistas first came to power after overthrowing Somoza, they became the darlings of the left and the intelligencia around the world, including sort of the glitterati of Hollywood and all this. By the time you got there had that died down? Was there much of sort of leftist French types or Americans and that?*

WRIGHT: It had pretty well died down because of the brutality of the Sandinistas toward many Nicaraguans. Their earlier claim of doing more for the people of Nicaragua in education and health than Somoza did was the central reason why so many people initially supported them. Somoza and his gang were not good to the people of Nicaragua either. The Sandinistas, in the early days, did provide better education and better healthcare. But as their political rule became more and more oppressive and there was no opportunity for dialogue and discussion with people who did not agree with all of the themes that the Sandinistas had, then the shine wore off of them. There were some terrible cases of brutality by the Sandinista security service.

*Q: In what manner?*

WRIGHT: There were elements of the Catholic Church that were quite supportive of the Sandinistas, the liberation theology group. But the Archbishop of Nicaragua spoke out strongly against the treatment of Nicaraguans by the Sandinistas. The arch bishop subsequently was paraded naked through the streets of Managua by the Sandinista security forces.

*Q: Good god.*

WRIGHT: Yes. So when that sort of heavy-handedness started, the shine really was wearing off the Sandinistas, I think, to the glitterati. Senator Christopher Dodd was accompanied by Bianca Jagger, Mick Jagger's former wife, who was a Nicaraguan. I ended up seeing her again fifteen years later in Kabul, Afghanistan where she was investigating whether her NGO could help Afghan children.

*Q: Well, at one point, when the Reagan group came in the election of 1980 and they got very heavily involved in the contras and all of this and it was quite controversial; it was almost Republicans versus Democrats or something of that nature. I'm thinking by the time you got there the landscape had changed a bit. One, the contras were having an effect, and two, the Sandinistas were the nice liberal types that people thought.*

WRIGHT: Yes.

*Q: Had that sort of changed the feelings by yourself and others in the embassy too?*

WRIGHT: Yes. From serving in the embassy and living in Nicaragua and hearing the stories from Nicaraguans of the heavy-handedness of the Sandinistas, it was quite apparent to us that the good part of what the Sandinistas had tried to do on education and health was torpedoed by their extreme security measures. In the early days when the contras were created, there was certainly a big outcry in the United States questioning why the U.S. should be funding a group to overthrow the Sandinista government. It's all reminiscent of what we have twenty years later with protests of the U.S. removing Saddam Hussein in Iraq. And some of the same U.S. political figures have reappeared - Elliot Abrams – who was the assistant secretary of state for Latin America - who's now reappeared in the Bush administration working on the Middle East.

*Q: By the time you got to doing this had the Ollie North business more or less been over? The expose...*

WRIGHT: It had already unfolded. In fact, I remember being here in Washington in the summer of 1987 before going to Nicaragua and watching the hearings in the Congress with Ollie North testifying. The admission that North and Poindexter had arranged arms sales to Iran to get money to fund the Contras was out in the public. That did, I think, undermine the credibility of the whole contra operation. But as much as one disapproves of how North got the funding for the contras, the effect of it was that the Contras had applied sufficient pressure on the Sandinistas that they agreed to holding elections.

*Q: Was anybody from the embassy going out and looking at how the Contras were behaving, and the Sandinistas, during this time?*

WRIGHT: No. The embassy itself was not involved with the Contras in any way. We were prohibited from traveling into the border areas where most of the fighting was going on. The CIA was in charge of that operation, but not our CIA station in Nicaragua.

*Q: Were you there during the election?*

WRIGHT: No, I left just before the elections. I followed the elections from my new post in Grenada. The lead-up to the election was fascinating because the twenty-five political parties were vying to have their presidential candidate selected to be the candidate of the opposition to stand against the Sandinistas. There was a great bitter fight among three or four opposition leaders. I remember being in Nicaragua when the twenty-four hour marathon among all the opposition parties was taking place to determine who was going to be the opposition's candidate. Neither one of the three male candidates won; it was the compromise candidate – a woman, Dona Violeta Chamorro, the wife of an assassinated newspaperman, who was the person put forward to stand against Daniel Ortega. We had had lots of contacts with her over the years. Her family was quite fascinating because she had four adult children. Two were Sandinistas and two were opposition.

She was an elegant lady and certainly knowledgeable about everything happening in Nicaragua. But we had our doubts as to her ability to manage a political campaign against the Sandinistas, and then what if she won? What would happen then? She had not been the driving force in the newspaper after her husband was assassinated; that job fell to one of her sons. If she won, would she be able to manage the country? We were all keeping our fingers crossed that somehow she

would be able to rise to the occasion. She certainly did in a very valiant way. She defeated Daniel Ortega and then served as President of Nicaragua for a four-year term. She was an excellent person on the international level to go out and talk about the need for the international community to help Nicaragua at this critical time in its history. She had major challenges trying to organize the first democratic institutions in the country.

*Q: You say you left there in '89.*

WRIGHT: Yes, in late '89. I left just before another set of PNGing took place, right before the elections. Our embassy was cut from half down to a third. *[laughs]* There weren't a lot of people in the embassy when the election actually took place.

*Q: What caused that? For the uninitiated, PNGing is a short-cut for someone being declared persona non grata; in other words, being kicked out of the country.*

WRIGHT: You know, I can't really remember exactly what the cause was. I was already in Grenada at the time and remember hearing on the radio that the Sandinistas had kicked out another fifteen people. Our GSO (General Services Officer) got to stay, our regional security officer and a few others, it was a lean and mean group that remained. I'll have to go back and find out exactly what happened, but no doubt yet one more allegation that the embassy staff was doing something inappropriate with the opposition.

*Q: While you were there, were all of you under embassy constraints to be careful not to do something that's going to give the Sandinistas an opportunity to claim that you were interfering?*

WRIGHT: Yes, absolutely. For example, when I would go out to attend the opposition rallies, I would not be doing this single-handedly. There would be a security officer that would be with me. Everybody would know that I was on official business. But in the eyes of the Sandinistas my official business was pretty questionable from their point of view. The U.S. government programs and policies were undermining their authority in Nicaragua. But since they'd already signed the agreement that they would let elections take place they had gotten themselves in a corner. But they didn't go down fighting without a few punches to the embassy.

*Q: What brought about in '89 your movement over to Grenada?*

WRIGHT: A very tragic incident had happened in Grenada. Our one political officer in the very small embassy in Grenada had been killed. He was sitting in the office of the commissioner of police office discussing allegations of corruption of an assistant commissioner of police. We felt the assistant commissioner had diverted some U.S. government funds that were to be used for police training. Our political officer was talking to the commissioner of police about this when the assistant commissioner came in and shot and killed the commissioner of police and our political officer. The embassy administrative officer was also in the room and was able to dive behind a desk and was not shot. Our political officer was killed and they needed someone in there pretty quickly. I had served in Grenada seven years before when I was in the military during the U.S. intervention in 1983. So I knew everybody in Grenada. I was just finishing my two-year assignment in Nicaragua, my first tour, so they asked if I would go over to Grenada quickly to

help.

**RICHARD H. MELTON**  
**Ambassador**  
**Nicaragua (1988)**

**Mexico, Caribbean, and Regional Economic Affairs, Assistant Secretary**  
**Washington, DC (1988-1989)**

*Richard H. Melton was born on August 8, 1935 in Rockville, Maryland. He received his BA from Cornell University in 1958. He later attended Wisconsin University where he received his MA in 1971. He entered the Foreign Service in 1961 and served in many countries throughout his career including Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Brazil, Portugal, England, Uruguay, and Costa Rica. Mr. Melton was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 27, 1997.*

MELTON: Soon after returning from Costa Rica, the ambassadorship in Nicaragua was coming open with the scheduled departure of Ambassador Bergold. I was asked whether I would be interested, and I said that indeed I would be. Once my nomination had been sent forward, I left my duties as Office Director and focused on preparation for my hearings. As is becoming increasingly the norm, my nomination was held hostage by the Foreign Relations Committee--and Senator Helms--who wanted certain papers relating to Nicaraguan policy to be handed over by the administration. Those papers had no relationship to me, but the issue became a contest of will between the ranking minority member of the Committee and the administration, which was not willing to release some of the papers. This standoff held up my confirmation for about six months, and I didn't get to Managua until May 1988.

In anticipation of my confirmation hearings, I went through the usual preparation process. There are several levels of scrutiny depending on whether the country to which one is going is important to the U.S. or in the headlines of the day. If the country is of policy importance--as Nicaragua was--efforts are made to ensure that you see not only the Chairman and ranking minority member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, but as many of the members of the Committee as possible. This gives the Senators an opportunity to express their concerns and for the nominee to get to know them and to exchange some views. I went through the process; I called on Senator Pell and other members of the Committee. It soon became apparent that I would not be the issue in the confirmation process; it was our policy toward Nicaragua which was the issue. Senator Helms, as I said, also sought to use my nomination as a vehicle for extracting certain documents from the Department; he clearly was not as anxious to have a representative in Managua as was the administration. He was willing to block consideration of my nomination for a considerable period of time. And he had the ability to do so.

Eventually, an accommodation was worked out, primarily because the question of the documents lost much of its significance. I did have a hearing, and my nomination thereafter went through without difficulties. The hearing focused on US policy toward Nicaragua and what we hoped to

achieve there, but it was not a heated exchange. Once the issues were laid out, there were no major differences. The argument was more about means than ends. Everybody agreed that strengthening democratic institutions in Nicaragua through elections should be the principal objective.

By this time, the Arias proposals were gaining momentum. The proposals advanced by House Speaker Wright had come and gone. The fatigue factor increasingly seemed to overwhelm all other considerations. It was clear to all protagonists that neither side would prevail in Nicaragua, at least in achieving their full agenda. Some compromises were necessary, although I think that the Sandinistas felt in control of the situation and believed that they could afford at this point to make compromises, including agreement to new elections. But it was not certain that elections would actually be held or, if held, they would be fair. So there was considerable uncertainty about the future in Nicaragua.

We of course pushed hard for free, democratic elections. That was my main focus when I arrived in Managua.

*Q: So you served in Nicaragua from May 1988 to July 1988.*

MELTON: That is right. It was a short tour of 90 days. I was declared *persona non grata* in July. As I said, my focus was on the holding of free, democratic elections. I presented my credentials to Daniel Ortega in the old Nejapa country club, a Somoza favorite, which had been converted by the Sandinistas to a convention center and was used for a variety of ceremonial occasions. I made a brief statement in Spanish about our intent--the strong support for democratic institutions in Nicaragua. After that Ortega and his Foreign Minister sat down and we chatted. I sat between the two Nicaraguans. That was the beginning of a dialogue. My unsuccessful efforts at dialogue with the Sandinistas. I followed up this initial conversation with efforts to make the usual calls on government officials that a new ambassador makes. I asked to see Cabinet Ministers. I had one scheduled and several requests pending when we received word that all my requests for calls had to go through the Foreign Ministry. I resubmitted my requests via diplomatic note, but weeks went by without any meetings being scheduled or any response at all from the Sandinistas.

I did go around to see leaders of the democratic opposition from all parties. I also saw the press and other elements of society. But the government officials refused to see me. It was obvious that a general policy had been established--I would have to show "good behavior" before contacts would be established. The exception to that rule was a friend that I had made during my previous tour in Nicaragua. By 1988, he had become the head of the Social Security administration and a relatively senior Sandinista official. I had asked for an appointment to see him, which he granted. Later he found out that he had made a mistake. He was a very strong Sandinista, a doctrinaire Marxist; he had been a Christian Democrat, but his views became radicalized--in large part because he had not been able to make much headway under Somoza. So he joined the Sandinistas to fight Somoza. But our old friendship stood the strain between our governments, and we were able to establish a person-to-person dialogue.

I had several meetings with the Foreign Minister, but the other Sandinistas gave me a wide berth. This was a unique situation which contrasted sharply with the relatively cordial relations the Sandinistas maintained with Ambassador Quinton and Ambassador Bergold. They were received

regularly and had no problem conducting business with the government. I think the Sandinistas made a judgment that that was the way they would conduct business with the U.S. at this time. Their assessment of the individuals may also have been a factor, but I would not make too much of this. It is likely they would have treated any US representative in much the same manner.

I was increasingly vilified almost from the first day. The tone in the media became increasingly strident. I was associated with all sorts of Somoza crimes; I read in the Sandinista press that I was virtually Somoza's right hand man during my previous tour--when I was a junior officer. My role in fact was quite the opposite; I was certainly not a fan of Somoza. I think anyone who knew me then--as did my Social Security friend--understood that and knew that I did not sympathize with the Somozas one iota. But the Sandinista press vilified me daily. If this campaign was intended to intimidate me, it missed badly. I continued my efforts to get in touch with the Sandinistas, even as I continued to meet with leaders of the opposition. After my initial meeting with the Foreign Minister, I was referred to the head of the Americas division of the Sandinista Party. I was told that my contacts would be more fruitful with the Party and not the government. I said that would not do; that as representative of a government I would have to deal with the elected authorities and not party officials.

I did, as I said, see leaders of the democratic parties and I did everything quite openly. As is true in all countries, the host government is responsible for the security of all diplomats accredited to that country. I had several guards riding with me in my vehicle plus a follow car. These guards were provided by the government. The only American guards were the Marines at the Chancery. It would have been very difficult to do anything without the Sandinistas knowing about it. In any case, I wanted to conduct my business quite openly. That transparency became an important factor after the Sandinistas decided to declare me *persona non grata* and, at the same time, to crack down on the opposition. I was expelled along with six members of my staff. The action that the Sandinistas took was part of a series of actions which they took to crack down on all opposition elements.

Most of the personal vilification took place in Nicaragua, although occasional anti-Melton pieces appeared in the American press as well. There were daily attacks in the Managua press and weekly demonstrations in front of the Embassy. These demonstrations were part of a regular tour given to visiting Americans by the Sandinistas, who also organized visits to communes and other Sandinista show cases. Some of the Americans would spend time in the rural areas chopping cane, working along side their Sandinista comrades, but on Wednesday they would join the regularly scheduled demonstrations in front of our Chancery. Periodically, we would meet with these Americans, if they asked for appointments. During the demonstrations, I became one of the favorite targets.

The unwillingness of government officials to see me, unless I was willing to accommodate to norms laid down by the Sandinistas, was part of their approach. I would on occasion be asked why I didn't conduct myself as some of my predecessors had. I frequently spoke with Sandinista officials at receptions and other public events. In group settings, if the Sandinistas said something critical about the US, I would not hesitate to take issue. So I did have some access, and sometimes they would try to bait me. It became almost predictable.

I think the Sandinistas viewed my activities as qualitatively different from those of my predecessors. The circumstances were different since we were in a pre-election period and the opposition was accorded a degree of toleration. The main issues in the Nicaraguan political dynamics were: would there be elections? If so, would the anti-Sandinista parties stand together?--which they had to do if there was any chance of winning. They had to present a unified slate of candidates; multiple slates would have ensured a Sandinista victory. Historically, Nicaragua had divided between liberals and conservatives. But following the Sandinista takeover, traditional alignments had fragmented, and in 1988 there were literally dozens of parties. The Sandinistas of course benefitted from this situation and tried their best to keep the democratic opposition parties divided. The Sandinistas held most of the cards. I urged the opposition to work together as the only way for the democrats to win at the polls; I made no secret of my interest in these democratic parties participating in the Nicaraguan political process. In the end, that is the policy that these parties adopted; they did field a unified slate and won the elections, much to the shock of the Sandinistas and the surprise of most foreign observers.

As I said, early summer 1988 was still in the pre-election period. The Sandinistas had not even made the decision to hold elections. There were some signs that they might agree, but the final decision had not been made. When they finally reached their decision, many factors obviously were weighed. One of them, I believe, was the Sandinistas confidence that they would sweep the elections--without much difficulty. They did not think that the opposition could come together. Agreeing to elections would, moreover, give the Sandinistas a major public relations victory by eliminating one of the major arguments against their regime--that they had not been voted into power in democratic elections. The legitimization of the Sandinistas would, according to this view, at the same time erode the support for the resistance--particularly in the U.S. Congress.

I had contacts with Violeta Chamorro. She was then and is today a very courageous person. In many respects, she was the essence of Nicaragua. She had the ability to bring factions together--she was unique in that skill. There was very broad spectrum of views within the democratic opposition. Almost every leader had a different approach to political organization and objectives. The U.S. government had divided views as well--even the desire to hold democratic elections was an issue. Not everyone agreed that elections organized by the Sandinistas were a good idea. There was deep skepticism that the elections would be held or that they would be fair even if allowed. There was concern that flawed elections against a divided opposition would just legitimize Sandinista rule--the mirror image of the Sandinista expectation. In the Embassy, we became increasingly convinced that democratic elections should be supported; there was a continuing role for the resistance, but that was primarily to force the Sandinistas to hold elections which would eventually resolve the outstanding political issues. That was our view which we communicated to Washington.

There was also the probability that the resistance, if victorious, might shun the democratic approach and claim the spoils of victory. The resistance had not produced a political cadre; it was a Campesino-based guerrilla army. Some of its commanders and leaders were impressive, but no single leader had emerged--Enrique Bermudez, the top military commander lacked the political skills required. Some of the resistance "stars" had been killed at the beginning of the fighting, including prominent civilian figures. It seemed to me that the political future of Nicaragua, if it were to be resolved through elections, would have to be tackled and decided by local leaders, not

by Washington. There were a few potential people, still in Managua, who were not formally part of the resistance, but were associated in people's minds with that movement. These people held the key--they would be the ones to contest the elections.

The Europeans went through an evolution. I had close contacts with all of the diplomatic corps. The major players--the Germans, the Italians, the Spanish, the Brazilians and some other Europeans--were also anxious to find solutions. The Brazilian Ambassador, Sergio Duarte, was one of the most effective diplomats; he was a perceptive observer who became a good friend for many years, including those I subsequently spent in Brazil as Ambassador. I think that the assessment of the Sandinistas by diplomats who had been in Nicaragua for any length of time surely had evolved. With some exceptions, I think most of the major embassies had become disenchanted; they were seeing the same abuses by the Sandinistas that we had observed. Life was not improving for anyone in Nicaragua--except perhaps the Sandinista top echelon. It was becoming increasingly apparent that the Sandinista cadres were behaving very much like the old Somoza cliques. The Sandinista party was a cadre party; at its foundation, there were a hard core that continued to be subsidized by the government. The number of these hard core adherents directly or indirectly on the government's payroll--perhaps as many as 200,000--was almost large enough to ensure that elections would be a foregone conclusion. So the Sandinistas were very much a vanguard party, despite protestations to the contrary. The evils and excesses that flow from an ingrown political system were certainly evident in 1988 for foreign observers and increasingly to the Nicaraguans.

This disenchantment was felt by the diplomats almost regardless of their personal ideology. The living conditions in Nicaragua were not improving and not all of the problems could be blamed on external forces. The assistance that was being provided by many of their countries was not being used effectively, Sandinista management of the country left much to be desired, corruption was growing, vehicles and machinery were rusting from disuse. Countries that had active projects in Nicaragua, like the Germans, were becoming disillusioned and concerned; they were not willing to provide additional assistance when much of what they had already given was being wasted.

Shortly after our July 4 reception, at which I made a brief, but general pro-democracy statement, I was declared *persona non grata*. So I was in Nicaragua for 90 event packed days. I must say I was somewhat surprised by the Sandinista action. The Sandinistas had accepted me to be the U.S. Ambassador; they knew--or should have known--what they were getting. My views and positions, and those of my government, were no secret. The Sandinista decision to expel me and members of the Embassy staff, I believe, was a part of a broader crack down on the opposition: closing of La Prensa, the main opposition newspaper in Nicaragua; shutting down the last major private enterprise, a large mill; imprisonment of opposition leaders. The immediate cause for these repressive measures was an opposition demonstration in Diriamba, a small town near Managua. The Sandinistas alleged that the U.S. Embassy had orchestrated that demonstration. We had heard that the opposition would gather there to hold a demonstration. We had also been told that the police would be there in force, which suggested that there might be some clashes. At the time, there was a Congressional delegation visiting Managua. I advised them against going to Diriamba--I was concerned about their safety, but several members of Congress went nevertheless. Since they were insistent on going, I sent the Embassy security officer with them. They went in Embassy vehicles. The photographs that were published the next day in the Sandinista press

prominently featured the security officer, arm raised in front of him. The caption stated that he was orchestrating the demonstration. What he was actually doing was motioning to the Congressional delegation trying to get them back into the vehicles to get away from the confrontations. The caption under the photograph read: "US official directing opposition demonstration in Diriamba." That was manifestly untrue and an outrageous distortion. The Sandinistas must have known that this was a complete fabrication, but they seized upon it as the protest for their expulsion action.

The staff that was expelled included most of the Embassy's reporting officers. We had a small Embassy, and the Sandinistas cleaned out the Political and Economic Sections. The way the expulsions were announced was interesting. Without advance notice, I was summoned to the Foreign Ministry--I received the call at about 3 p.m. to be at the Foreign Ministry in an hour. When asked what the meeting was to be about, the caller was very evasive. We had heard that the press had been notified that an event would take place at the Foreign Ministry at 4 p.m. That information, along with other tidbits, led us to believe that I was going to be subject of the "event." So I called back and said I would be there, but that I did not intend to be part of a media circus staged by the Sandinistas. I was assured that this was not their intent.

We did some checking around and I became increasingly certain that in fact I would be the center of a "political event." When I arrived, I was ushered in to see the Foreign Minister and his deputy. They went through the Diriamba affair and other alleged offenses against Nicaraguan sovereignty. The diatribe ended with a statement that I and other Embassy officers were being declared *persona non grata*. I felt that there was no purpose served by trying to argue the case. The decision had clearly been made at the highest level. I said only that the action was not warranted and that I thought the regime was making a major mistake--but that was their problem as subsequent events demonstrated. And I left. They did hold a press conference at the Foreign Ministry and vilified the U.S. and me some more. I reported the action taken by the Sandinistas; I then talked to the staff and went to the Residence to pack up.

I then got word from Washington that a plane would be sent to pick me up. I flew out that night on a US Air Force aircraft, stopped in Miami overnight and the next day I had an appointment with President Reagan--after an hour's sleep. I met with the President, Vice President Bush and Secretary of State Shultz and we talked about what had happened. They agreed that the Sandinistas had taken an outrageous action. They were aware of my performance in Nicaragua. By sending a plane for me and by meeting with the President on the next day, they were sending a message of full support for me--which I welcomed. I think the Department has not always been fully supportive of our representatives who have been declared *persona non grata* merely for carrying out policy and doing their job; it has shown ambivalence at times in such situations. US diplomats who have been expelled have often found that the Department has distanced itself from the individual and left him or her twisting in the wind--never to be heard from again. I find that approach hard to accept; if someone is expelled for good reason, then coolness, or even disciplinary action may be in order. But if someone is expelled for discharging his or her responsibilities as directed by Washington, then the U.S. government should support that individual, as it did in my case.

The six staff members expelled with me were treated well. George Shultz and Elliott Abrams insisted that these individuals were given good onward assignments, and they were. They have all

done well in their careers. There was some discussion about retaliatory actions, ranging from breaking relations to much less punitive measures. I argued against breaking relations because I believed that, because the Sandinistas had done something foolish, the U.S. should not follow the same path. The democratic opposition, under increased pressure from the Sandinistas, needed the support which an Embassy could provide more than ever. The decision was made in Washington that we would respond in kind--expelling their Ambassador and some of their senior diplomats in Washington.

As we walked out of the room where I had met with the President, White House spokesman Marlin Fitzwater turned to me and said, "By the way, there is some press waiting to hear from you. You don't mind, do you?" He took me into the press briefing room; it was full--Sam Donaldson, Helen Thomas, and all the rest. It became a full-fledged press conference with me as the "attraction of the day." I fielded a wide range of questions, mostly focusing on what I had done and whether the expulsion was justified, as claimed by the Sandinistas. It went well, but it was a demanding experience.

Subsequently, I was asked to appear before several Congressional committees to explain what had happened in Managua; I was accompanied by Elliott Abrams. Initially, some of the questioning was quite critical, appearing to accept the assumption that I was expelled because I had done something wrong. I explained in considerable detail what I had done during my 90 days as Ambassador, including things which might have given offense to the Sandinistas. I quoted from the speech--which the Sandinistas found objectionable--I had given at the annual Embassy July 4 reception. I had invited a number of the senior Sandinistas to attend--only a token representative appeared. But most of the major opposition political leaders were there and many members of the diplomatic corps as well. My comments included strong pronouncements supporting democracy, freedom, and individual liberty. I included quotes from George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson. The Sandinistas may have considered these quotes to be inflammatory; the U.S. Congress did not. The hearings, particularly the Senate one, remains indelibly stamped in my mind. As the U.S. Ambassador in Nicaragua, I was actively representing my country. For this, I was expelled by the host government and brought before a Congressional Committee in a proceeding which seemed to me to be based on the assumption that I had done something wrong. At least that appeared to me to be the perspective of some of the Senators--but not all by any means. In the course of the hearing, I had an opportunity to explain what had really happened--including the July 4 speech, which some of the members had been provided to ask about, presumably by opponents of US policy. As I said, I was able to satisfy the Senators about the content of my speech and that my activities in Managua had been entirely transparent. I brought with me copies of the many diplomatic notes that I had sent requesting appointments with every Sandinista cabinet officer. I noted that in some cases, I had received negative replies; in most cases no answer at all.

As I laid out my case, the atmosphere in the hearing room changed perceptibly. In the end, I think the hearings turned out to be quite positive. But the experience of facing some hostile American Senators carrying negative presumptions about the work that I had done in Nicaragua was an eye-opener.

The Administration focused on whether there should be a change in our Nicaraguan policy in the aftermath of my expulsion. The issue was whether we should continue to maintain political

pressure for a democratic solution to the Nicaraguan crisis via elections or were there other more direct steps that might be taken--increased military pressure--or should the U.S. just write Nicaragua off? I think wisdom prevailed--we continued on the course we were embarked. It was evident to me that the resistance was an essential element of pressure needed to force and accept democratic elections. There were some within the U.S. government who believed that the Sandinistas would give up power only if they were defeated militarily by resistance forces. I continued to believe that military pressure from the resistance was needed, but that the unified democratic opposition parties in Managua now had been the key to bringing democracy to the country. That was the view that finally prevailed, but I don't think there was ever unanimous support for it in the U.S. government.

*Q: What happened to you after the initial whirlwind in Washington?*

MELTON: I spent the first few weeks answering questions. I appeared on "Night Line" and other television talk shows as well as radio shows. Then I had to face what to do next. I was asked by Abrams if I were interested in being a deputy assistant secretary in ARA, responsible for Mexico, the Caribbean and regional economical affairs. I told him that indeed I would be--it was a challenging portfolio. So I took that job. I did that from 1988 to 1989--six to nine months.

In 1988, we were entering an election period in the United States. Abrams was beginning to feel the heat coming out of the Iran-Contra investigation. After the election, we had a change in assistant secretaries with Bernie Aronson replacing Abrams and Baker replaced Shultz. Abrams was under increasing pressure by the special prosecutor as were other senior members of the ARA State, both in Washington and the field, who might have been involved in the Contra support operation. It was a difficult period for all of those individuals, but the work of the bureau went on. I talked to representatives of the special prosecutor several times--that was an unusual experience for a career Foreign Service officer. I would not recommend that to anyone else to have that experience, but I did learn a lot about what Ollie North and others had really been doing to support the Contras. A number of my colleagues hired lawyers. I did not. I had done nothing wrong, so why would I require counsel. There was also a question of payment. One does get reimbursement for legal expenses if no negative action is taken against you, but even though you are a government official, you are essentially on your own. The State Department's legal advisor's office defends the institution--not its members--which I found an interesting concept--even when a prosecutor's interest in what you might have done in the line of duty. In fact, whether an officer conducted himself or herself properly in the course of performing official duties is judged *ex post facto*--which in itself poses some interesting dilemmas. The question of whether someone who is being deposed by a special prosecutor should need legal counsel was very real for me. I did not hire a lawyer.

I spoke to the prosecutors about things that I knew first hand and that I did. But my task was relatively easy because all of the things I had done and knew about were a matter of record. I was asked about some of the statements in memos I had written. I also discussed the organization of the bureau and how the policy making and implementation processes worked. I was not the focus of the prosecutor's attention; I was on the fringes, but I was close enough to see the effect the process had on the lives of those who were targets. I am not saying that the process is wrong--checks and

balances are essential--but I certainly noted the toll it took on people. I later read Elliott Abrams' book; it documents well the emotional distress accompanying the process.

As far as my new job was concerned, one interesting aspect of it was that the administration had rediscovered Mexico. The focus was generated by Jim Baker who became Secretary of State in 1989. The center of our policy implementation became the binational commission which met annually. First, we had to review the record to see what the "US/Mexico binational commission" was and how it had been used in the past. It had not been active for some years and both we and Mexicans had to do some homework in order to resuscitate it. It has now become the norm; it meets at Cabinet level annually--sometimes attended by the two Presidents--to review the status of our bilateral relations. 1989 was pre-NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement); the concept was not yet politically acceptable in Mexico--it would have been viewed as another attempt by the U.S. to swallow Mexico. It is interesting to note that this is the direct opposite view of that held by the AFL/CIO which views NAFTA as a serious threat to American labor.

So in this period there was a new awareness of the importance of the relationship with Mexico across the board. Drug issues were becoming increasingly important; DEA agent Enrique Camarena would soon be murdered; Elaine Shannon had just published her book arguing that we subordinated our drug policy to large foreign policy considerations. All of that headline material gave the drug problem more relevance. We worried about corruption and the responsibility Mexican authorities had for the problem--the same range of issues that are discussed now in deciding whether to certify Mexico as a cooperative partner in the war on drugs. We had considerable hope because it was clear that Mexico was embarked on a major economic development program--liberalization and modernization. But this was only part of the picture. Overall, Mexico loomed larger on the regional and global agenda. The negative aspects of the Salinas administration was not as clear in 1989 as they later became.

We had some concern about the Mexican political system. One of the issues was whether the historically dominant party, the PRI, was becoming more open. Would the opposition parties be permitted to compete on an equal basis with the PRI? Would the election results be honored? The border industries--the Maquiladoras--and the growing cross border economy and cooperation already showed signs of influencing the Mexican political structure by loosening the hold of PRI on the levers of power. Election results were concrete evidence of this change, with the PRI being under increasing pressure; the change was palpable; the only question was whether the PRI would honor the election results. The process in the border regions was viewed as a precursor of possible change in all of Mexico, both politically and economically.

The economic liberalization program was impressive. There were concerns about its staying power, although the evidence seemed clear that it would persist. As I suggested, we had hoped that that economic development would bring political change in Mexico. We were encouraged by early progress, but the outcome was not clear. The tensions between President Salinas and some of the traditional PRI leaders suggested that the political system might well open up. The PRI oligarchy didn't want to honor election results; they didn't want transparency in government operations. As people began to see the possibility of opening the Mexican political system, they also became more interested in raising the US/Mexican relationships higher on the U.S. foreign policy agenda.

It was of course very useful that two Texans--President Bush and Secretary Baker--were in charge of the U.S. foreign policy process; they were interested and had considerable background in Mexican issues. One of President Bush's daughters-in-law is Mexican. When I went to Mexico as a member of the U.S. delegation to the inauguration of President Salinas, that son was a member of the delegation. The first meeting that newly-elected President Bush had with a foreign dignitary was with Mexican President Salinas.

The Binational Commission handled many of the very sticky problems that affect cross-border relationships--many of them in the environmental area. These included water rights and distribution, sanitation, and pollution. These issues are of great interest to the Congressional delegations from the border states as well as to the governors of the adjacent Mexican states. Bush and Baker, both being from Texas, were quite familiar with these issues and understood their importance. So when the issues arose, in anticipation of the annual meeting of the Commission, they were taken very seriously in Washington.

In the Caribbean, Haiti was already a major issue. "Baby Doc" Duvalier had been deposed and the country was under the rule of General Avril. Our efforts were directed to stimulating democratic elections so that the country would finally be rid of dictatorships. We devoted much time to this effort, but the same issues with which Americans became subsequently familiar were already present in Haiti in 1989. There was an underlying question of how much influence the U.S. really had with the corrupt military and para-military groups which had ruled Haiti for so long. The military was not interested in who ruled; it only worried about who got the spoils. It was a collection of loosely organized gangs which competed in the looting of the country. It was not disciplined enough to avoid bloodshed, even if it was in their interest to do so. It is very difficult to have any impact in a military organization in which the generals were afraid of their troops; frequently when officers made decisions, they would be immediately countermanded by a parallel group in the next room who were monitoring their actions.

So the extent of US influence was very much in question. We had no leverage with the troops, and the commanders could not deliver on any commitments. We could revoke visas, for example, but that was hardly sufficient to bring enough pressure on Haiti to make a change in their political practices. The economy was already in such trouble that additional economic sanctions had little impact. Furthermore, there was always a question of whether all the elements of the U.S. government would cooperate to implement the policies set by US leadership. That was not as easy as it sounds; you might be told one thing, when in fact the opposite was true. Or if a decision is made, it had to be followed up on to make sure it was implemented. There were US personnel of other agencies who had relationships in Haiti which were not shared with others; information was not volunteered and those that should have known about it were not always informed. We have since made some progress on these problems, but in 1989 these were real barriers.

One of the key issues of the day was whether Congress would appropriate resources to help Haiti's political transition. For example, we had to wrestle with the famous "Flour Mill" case. It was clear that the country's largest flour mill was a source of patronage and corruption. But it was also the base for providing bread for the poor. There were legitimate reasons for not providing resources for this project, but by withholding funds I think we overlooked larger US interests at play in Haiti. The objective of those blocking funds may well have been laudable--i.e. privatization--but at the

same time we had to be concerned with the general welfare of the population in addition to supporting a political transition with widespread bloodshed. These goals needed the support of the Congress; we needed PL 480 funds as well as other resources to provide this needed assistance. We found that Congress was not willing to appropriate the necessary resources in part, I believe, because we could not get sufficient attention focused on Haiti within the Executive Branch. I think the price we paid for neglect of Haiti in 1989 was a much greater expenditure in resources a few years later. The problem at the end of the 1980s was, in significant part, one of indifference. That was unfortunate because I think that a modest amount of assistance, given with some flexibility, in 1989 might well have prevented the tragedy of the mid-1990s.

Economic conditions, plus continuing repression, resulted in a large exodus of people--the "boat" people. The same thing can be said about Mexico. If there are inadequate employment opportunities in a country, people show their displeasure by leaving. In the short term, the Haitian authorities as part of a general agreement with the United States had indicated a willingness to take back their nationals who sought to enter the United States illegally. This was also to our interest. We had to ensure that those returned would not be subjected to human rights abuses; i.e. that returning refugees would be treated humanely. This called for some subjective judgments; to our credit, we have some major organizations in the U.S. dedicated to the welfare of refugees. They form pressure groups which favor liberal immigration into the US. They look for the broadest possible interpretation of the term "political refugee." Anyone who leaves his or her country is presumably eligible for that status, according to some of these groups. On the other side, the persuasive argument was made that the Haitians were economic not political refugees--that is, they were not leaving because they were being persecuted.

In the final analysis, the U.S. government undertook to monitor the Haitians who were repatriated to ensure that they would not be persecuted. If there was a pattern of abuse following repatriations, then we would have reconsidered this policy. The evidence that was collected did indeed suggest that the vast majority of Haitian refugees were essentially economic and were not subjected to persecution upon their return to their homes.

Although Cuba was not within my area of responsibility, Cuba was a significant player in Central America. We didn't have exactly a fluid dialogue with Castro, but we did have an increasingly productive discussion with the Soviets, some of it about Cuba. I mentioned earlier that we started annual meetings with the Soviets on Latin American issues. We told them that we would continue our policy of isolation towards Cuba, and emphasized that Cuba was becoming an increasing economic burden for the USSR which could probably not be sustained. We suggested that they cut their losses and reduce their support to Cuba; it was a battle that they could not win in the long run. Eventually, they reached the same conclusion as their economic straits became more and more dire. The Soviets did abandon Cuba which had considerable impact on the economy of that country and its ability to support insurrection elsewhere in the region. It forced Castro to return his people to more primitive conditions rather than opening the economy and running the risk of losing political power. I don't think anyone ever felt that the outcome would be any different; Castro was not going to give up power.

Cuba stood in contrast to the rest of Latin America. The economic situation on the continent looked optimistic. We were looking for ways to mitigate the consequences of the large debt

"overhang." We were in close touch with the U.S. banks that held most of that debt. Our regional economic office was staffed with some very innovative people; we had good relationships with Treasury and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative. We came up with some creative proposals to ease the debt problem. The banks were heavily exposed and were looking for ways to share that exposure--particularly with the U.S. Treasury. Treasury's position, which was endorsed by the government as a whole, was that a weakened US banking system was a risk to the US, to foreign trade, and other global economic goals. So all parties had an interest in finding a solution, not just the banks.

A fundamental change in the US/Latin America dialogue on this issue came when the Latins showed some willingness to move away from their closed economic systems--ironically, as was also happening in the Soviet Union. Salinas' successful efforts in Mexico were leading the way to more open economies as were the efforts undertaken in Chile. Movement towards open economies was building in Latin America which now has sealed the fate of state controlled economies. In 1989, there were signs of change, even though some parts of the U.S. government were a little slow in recognizing it. Some find it difficult to believe that things can change. There are tensions, such as trade disputes, that sometimes obscure the larger picture--the fundamental changes that are taking place in an economy--and therefore opportunities are missed to expedite the transition.

The palpable shift in Latin America toward democratic regimes was beginning to draw attention in Washington. Both economic and political maps of the region gave comfort to those who had worked for a region of democratic regimes and market economies. More countries were moving in those directions. The possibility of the return of military dictatorships and closed economies was not discussed anymore. A significant change had taken place in the 1980s. On the negative side, as we all know, if things are moving along well, US attention tends to wane. It takes controversy to attract the attention of the President and the Secretary of State.

During my brief period as deputy assistant secretary, I devoted an increasing amount of time to Haiti and our efforts to foster a transition to a democratically elected government there. It was quite disillusioning to go to Haiti to talk to various leaders including the then President General Avril. He would give us commitments which were broken almost by the time we left the meeting room--as his henchmen, representing the views of the troops housed on the grounds of the presidential palace, would force the General to change his mind. It was very unnerving because his agreement meant very little, and we could therefore not find lasting solutions. The civilian elites supporting Avril would focus on what each of them might get out of a deal; "When are you going to pay for this or that?"--e.g. a pension for Mr. X; a subsidy for enterprise. They wanted a guaranteed outcome; otherwise they would not risk any deviation from the status quo, from which they profited at the expense of the Haitian people.

While the military and para-military bands controlled the use of force, traditional elites pulled the strings behind the scenes. So in light of all of these factions and their very narrow agendas, progress was impossible. "Papa Doc" had left Haiti by this time and was ensconced in France--that was one of the triumphs of US diplomacy; he was shuffled off to France. Father Aristide, the future President, was on the scene, but was little known. He had been a dissident Catholic priest who became a political leader. He had differences with the Cardinal and the establishment church. He became an opposition leader, after being defrocked. But in the absence of an open political system,

Aristide had no way of demonstrating his political power. I did not get a chance to meet him, but some of my colleagues knew him quite well. He was not seen as a viable option at the time; he was still decidedly in the second echelon of Haiti's political strata. Furthermore, he had a reputation for being erratic which limited his support among the power brokers in Haiti's emerging democratic sectors.

**EDMUND McWILLIAMS**  
**Political Counselor/Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Managua (1989-1992)**

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

*Q: '89 when you're going to Nicaragua as DCM.*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, not really because there again we had a chargé d'affaires because there was a Sandinista-run regime so we didn't have a full ambassador there.

*Q: Okay. So we'll pick up that whole interesting thing up the next time.*

MCWILLIAMS: Okay. Very good.

*Q: Great.*

MCWILLIAMS: Thank you.

*Q: Okay. Today is the 6th of January. Is this the epiphany?*

MCWILLIAMS: This is the epiphany, this is Little Christmas.

*Q: This is Little Christmas.*

MCWILLIAMS: Or it's actually Major Christmas for the Greek- Russian Orthodox, we call it a-

*Q: Yes. Anyway, so we're going to start with the- Nicaragua. You were there, in the first place, you were from '89 to when?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well actually, I did language training until early '90.

*Q: Okay.*

MCWILLIAMS: And I think I arrived in Nicaragua around February- because the Sandinistas were still actually in charge so I think it was February of 1990.

*Q: Okay. And you were there until when?*

MCWILLIAMS: Until January of '92.

*Q: Okay. First, usual thing, what was the situation in Nicaragua when you- as you went out there?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, let me just back up slightly because I obtained the job as I said in our last discussion, I got the job essentially it was a job that no one wanted. It was the number two person in the Sandinista post, it was going nowhere and not very interesting for, especially for political officers, but because of the circumstances in which I left there was really no other good jobs available so I was fairly happy with that choice. I'd worked in difficult assignments before, basically with regimes that were antagonistic to the United States, I thought this would be an opportunity to get back to that which I knew. But then in the fall of '89 we had the elections in with Violetta Chamorro defeated the Sandinista candidate, Daniel Ortega, and that changed things dramatically of course, so I went into an embassy that was at that point just gearing up to assist in any way possible this new government which had been democratically elected which we had great hopes for as a replacement for the Sandinista regime.

*Q: Well, what had you picked up about until the election the rule of the Sandinistas? How had they operated and how effective, non-effective were they and then about the contras and all these things that were going on?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, I'm glad you asked that because it sort of impacts on what I think I'd like to say generally about that tour. But I was pretty much a prisoner of what our government had been saying about Nicaragua, indeed what was principally portrayed in the media, that is to say a regime that had been too close to the Soviets and of course to Cuba, especially to Cuba and that had been a violator of human rights, that had not been good for the Nicaraguan people. And I pretty much accepted that so that I, along with I think everyone else in Washington for the most part welcomed the surprising victory of Violetta Chamorro and saw this as a very interesting challenge, that is to work with a new government that was pro-U.S., which we would obviously seek to assist.

*Q: But when you were talking to people at the desk and all this, in the first place did you find, I mean, was there sort of a feeling of elation and boy now we can really get going?*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, pretty much, I think that was it. I should say I came to this experience with essentially no background in Central America or Latin America; all of my experience had been in Asia or in Moscow and even in Moscow it was pretty much focused on Asian issues. So this was kind of a Tabula Rasa for me, having to learn Spanish, which is an easy language but I'm not particularly good with languages. But also I didn't really have a sense of the history of the Nicaraguan struggle and I think that was one of the things that was missing as I went down there. I

had to sort of learn once I arrived and it took me a year or so to really understand what was going on.

*Q: So who was our, not our ambassador but our-*

MCWILLIAMS: When I went down first Jack Leonard, a very able guy who had endured the final months of the Sandinista regime, a very prickly relationship, and I think I was his deputy for four or five months and then because of the change in regime it was seen necessary to bring in an old hand who would be able to address the new challenges of a government with which we were seeking to work, obviously, and they brought in Ambassador Shlaudeman, who had gone into retirement but was I think out of retirement, I don't think he willingly, a very interesting fellow, and he was the ambassador through the rest of my tour.

*Q: Yes. He had served in Paraguay and Chile and then had a little respite of Venezuela at the time.*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, yes. He was a remarkable man in many ways. I always remarked that he was fluent in Spanish, could converse with anyone at any level and yet he spoke with an absolute lack of Spanish accent, it was entirely an American accent but he was fluent. And I basically, I think that's where my Spanish, such as it was, went as well.

*Q: Well let's talk about when you got there. In the first place, did you get any feel at the desk or something about, I mean, you'd come out of two of our sort of elite bureaus, dealing with the Soviets and with East Asia and Latin America's always been off to one side although Nicaragua ended up in the center of our attention it was only for one of these little periods and ARA, I won't say backwater but it was not just, it was damned close to being a backwater.*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, to be honest, I spent so little time in Washington before that tour, I think it was only, well in training about six months and most of that was focused on language, I didn't really get to know the people in ARA very well, not that it was a bad relationship but I didn't really get into the culture of it, and I don't recall anything that suggested to me a difference in bureaus. I just wasn't in Washington long enough to feel that.

*Q: Well then, what was, you got to Nicaragua to Manama, not Manama-*

MCWILLIAMS: Managua. Managua.

*Q: I was just talking to somebody who was ambassador to Bahrain that's why.*

MCWILLIAMS: Alright, that's not going to work, no.

*Q: But anyway, you got there, what was your initial impression?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well first of all it was a very, very tiny embassy. I think we maybe had eight or 10 people in the embassy minus the Marine security guard, vastly under staffed. I remember one of our first problems was the arrival of Vice President Quayle and an entourage that outnumbered the embassy by four or five times. But it was essentially very interesting time. We had direct access to

the new government and we had a very difficult but nonetheless workmanlike relationship with the outgoing Sandinista government. But I recall being particularly impressed as we developed the relationship with the new people that we had really a very direct relationship with the president and a man who was essentially her prime minister. I recall that President Chamorro threw a birthday party for Jack Leonard and it was essentially her personal family and the small embassy staff, maybe a total of 15 people, and she cooked and she brought out the birthday cake singing to Jack and then we went over for drinks and I was supposed to be the bartender but she saw I was working too slowly so she got behind the bar so she and I bartended, me and the president. A story I like to tell. But I mean, it was a very personal relationship. Of course she was a very wonderful woman, a very warm, delightful woman. But we had a very intense personal relationship for the first couple of months with the Lacayo administration but that changed.

*Q: Lacayo was?*

MCWILLIAMS: This was Antonio Lacayo who was her son-in-law and I suppose I might as well get into it, what struck me was that this was a Miami government. Essentially these were people who had fled the Sandinista control and basically were business people, some of them with something of a shady reputation that had come back in triumph-less essentially, but there was a very significant divide between this ruling elite, which had been displaced and was now back in place and the people of Nicaragua, who- the vast majority of whom of course were very poor, had very little access to any source of power. So it was a dichotomy. In a very real sense the Sandinistas were much closer to the people. The only one on the anti-Sandinista side who had very close contact with the people, this guy named Enrique Bermudas, a former Contra general, who I think genuinely sought to represent the interests of the poor, particularly his old Contra troops in the new administration, and he was brutally murdered in an episode that I think still has never been fully investigated. But he was emerging as a, to some extent a political force that challenged not only the pro-U.S.A. government but also the Sandinistas. He was sort of a middle force. He was beginning to draw support from the countryside and I think that scared people, both in the Lacayo-Chamorro administration and within the Sandinistas. In any event he was murdered.

But what I came to see over my years and I'm getting ahead of myself a little bit but, I had a growing realization that the Chamorro administration which we were supporting to the hilt was working much more for large high level business interests in Nicaragua and had very little sympathy for the poor, which was ironical in a sense because clearly Violetta Chamorro's mandate had come from the poor. They regarded her as I think she was, a very honest person, something of a martyr who had stayed in Nicaragua for the most part of the Sandinista regime and who was regarded almost in a religious way. And yet I didn't find her administration, particularly in the attitude of some of the people that worked...

*Q: This is tape four, side one with Ed McWilliams. Yes.*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, I spoke, I said that she was of the old liberal elite. She was in fact of the Granada conservative elite. There was a liberal elite that was based in Leon but there was very little effort, I think, to respond to the obvious needs of the poor in Nicaragua by her administration.

*Q: Well you say we came in there to support her to the hilt but I would assume that would include*

*pushing and shoving the administration to build up her power base, her government's power base by going out to the countryside and-*

MCWILLIAMS: No, not really. What I think we were interested in doing was essentially dealing with the economic crisis but at a macro level not a micro level. They had tremendous problems with national debt and so on. And her power base as it developed and as we sought to develop it was largely based in the small towns. They had a system of mayors who were pretty well connected and as these conservative, relatively conservative and some liberal mayors began to develop their power base we attempted to link that power base to her. But as time grew on that power base was more and more of the liberal strain and that's in Nicaraguan term and not a U.S. term, that is to say based on Leon, so there was a growing political divide between the Chamorro administration and the largely liberal based mayors who were becoming a political force as I left. The Sandinistas were sort of separate from all of that, that was the radical side. So you had in Nicaragua and I think to some extent you still have today liberals, conservatives and radicals with the Sandinistas being the radicals.

*Q: Well now what, the Sandinistas were voted out. What role were they playing? Ortega, Daniel Ortega was minister of defense wasn't he or something?*

MCWILLIAMS: Humberto, actually?

*Q: What?*

MCWILLIAMS: His brother Humberto was minister of defense.

*Q: Humberto. But I mean a very peculiar situation.*

MCWILLIAMS: Well I should say something about the election. As it became clear, the United States, much as it is doing today played a very significant role in that election by giving funding through IRI and DI and-

*Q: Well, these are, IRI?*

MCWILLIAMS: The International Public Institute, NDI and the Democrats, a lot of money went into that campaign in particular the Republicans, the IRI side funded some of the more conservative candidates so the Sandinistas' complaint, and I think with some justification, that this was an election, essentially a fair election over which Jimmy Carter observed, that nonetheless was very heavily influenced in the campaign period by the U.S. And in any event the Sandinistas were defeated in a relatively close election. But the point being that the Sandinistas retained 35 to 40 percent, very strong support among the population, indeed I think it's probably stronger now. And as a consequence the Sandinistas remain very significant political players. They were not defeated in any real sense, they remain players. And through the two years that I was there, almost two years, they repeatedly sought to exert their influence through regular political challenges in the parliament but also, I remember very distinctly, several demonstrations and one particular incident where they basically locked down Managua. I was leaving my house to go to the embassy and suddenly I encountered barriers all over the city. I literally spent an hour or two finding my way

through back streets to get to the embassy because the people had erected these barricades. I forget, frankly, what the issue was but it was obviously at the behest of the Sandinistas. And what was clear to me at that point was that the number of people still supporting the Sandinistas was very extensive, that they could bring these people out to do all of this work, you know, literally taking up the cobblestones to make a brick barrier across the road or burning tires but also that they could carry this off without any hint to the U.S. embassy or to the government that this was about to take place. It transpired literally overnight. And I was impressed with the sense of organization and discipline that they displayed in Managua. But of course that strength extended throughout the countryside to a significant extent too.

*Q: Well did we have a policy of ignoring the Sandinistas or going on and saying okay, they're a force here, we're going to deal with them as we would in any democratic country?*

MCWILLIAMS: More the former than the latter. One of the great debates in the embassy at that time was the relationship that we would have with the Indonesian (sic) military. And we had a defense attaché who rather bravely but I think in many ways in an unfortunate way sought notwithstanding our politics to maintain and even expand slightly the relationship that the defense attaché's office had with Umberto Ortega, who remained minister of defense, at least in charge of the army, we should say. And his, I think his rather narrow perspective was that military should deal with other militaries, the problem being that the Ortega brothers, both Daniel and Umberto, were I think pretty genuinely and correctly regarded as rogues. The Sandinista movement consisted of very well meaning, well motivated people who simply wanted to help the poor and then a leadership which was quite corrupt in many ways. And I think Umberto and Daniel both were and remain to some extent corrupt leaders. But nonetheless there was a structure within the Sandinistas below that leadership that accounted for the fact that so many people still valued their Sandinista ties.

*Q: Well, was there sort of a- I understand it got played up big in our press when the Sandinistas came in they took over the fancy houses and things like that. Was there a disassembling of this sort of thing or what was happening?*

MCWILLIAMS: That's interesting, it's a good question because it sort of highlights the relationship that gradually grew between the Lacayo administration under Chamorro and the Sandinistas. There was tremendous concern in Washington about how property would be returned to rightful owners, in quotes "rightful owners". These were people, basically Miami people, people from Dallas and so on who had fled Nicaragua but still held title to very significant property, also genuine U.S. citizens who had interests in Nicaragua. So there was as we began to move forward with the Chamorro-Lacayo administration an attempt on our part to bring these properties back to what we considered to be their rightful owners. There was some resistance to this and that resistance grew within the Lacayo administration because in point of fact Lacayo and the Ortega's began to strike deals. Perhaps recognizing the real power that the Sandinistas still had in Nicaragua Lacayo and the Ortegas began to reach deals on these properties. Some were returned, some were not. And of course you had the popular concern that a lot of these people would be returning to vast plantations that in fact, or ranches, that had been developed under Sandinista rule and people were living on these plantations eking out a living as small agriculturalists. So it was a very complex situation, a lot of pressure from conservative elements in the U.S. Congress to resolve this problem

but obviously very complicated situation on the ground as it was in Nicaragua.

*Q: Well land, of course, you know, is probably I guess then one of the most important things in any political situation. While you were there what was happening? I mean, if the plantations had been broken up and you know, the peasants had been allowed to put their own plots in, what was happening to them?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well this was essentially the problem. And I would say not only the peasants but a lot of those who had taken land, basically squatters, who had taken land were armed Sandinistas but also the Contras who were coming back from their years in Honduras and so on and they were making land claims. I'd mentioned earlier Enrique Bermudas and he very much reflected their concerns, that these people needed to make a living, they needed land, both the Sandinistas and the Contras, he was in some ways representing both interests, rural agricultural interests against these dominant land lords who had spent most of the Sandinista period in the United States.

*Q: Was anything, I mean, while you were there were we, this sounds like a can of worms to play with, did we jump into that can?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well I can remember once Ambassador Shlaudeman arrived and shortly after his arrival we'd assembled to brief him and we were talking about the intricacy of the politics of Nicaragua which of course he knew very well. But at the end of the briefing I remember him saying you know, there's a train wreck that you guys are missing and that is that train that's barreling down the tracks from Congress, that they're going to demand that this land go back to the original owners and we're going to be in confrontation not only with the Sandinistas who are reluctant to give it up but with the Lacayo regime, Lacayo administration which is increasingly reluctant itself to turn these properties over. So it was a political reality in our policy and very much a political complication for our policy.

*Q: Well now, your job was, became DCM?*

MCWILLIAMS: No. I went in as the second rank- well again, like an acting DCM as I was in Kabul and I was to be in Tajikistan but when Ambassador Shlaudeman moved in we had a real DCM come in, whose name is going to escape, it's a shame, but then I was just, I just became political consular and I had a five-person staff, a really great staff that worked with me on this.

*Q: Well one, did you find there was any carryover from your previous experiences to the political situation in Nicaragua?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well you know I think in one sense yes. I don't think it really manifested itself tremendously in my role there because genuinely- generally I think I was- I had a very good relationship with Ambassador Shlaudeman. I got a superior honor award out of it and all that. But I think probably well into my second year probably I began to have some sense that the best interests of the people of Nicaragua was not necessarily represented by the Lacayo administration. And I certainly had no brief for Daniel or Umberto Ortega but I recall one time, I like to do street stuff, that was sort of throughout my career I like to go out and see what the people are doing and sense what's going on in the streets, and there was scheduled to be a massive rally down in the

ruins of an old cathedral in Managua, a Sandinista rally. So I went down to cover it and it was a drenching rain, just monsoon rain for a couple of hours and the Sandinista leadership, Daniel himself was supposed to appear, hadn't appeared, hadn't appeared and yet there were thousands of people standing in a very cold rain and the enthusiasm never just never waned. Constant chanting and singing and banners flying and so on and then the Sandinista leadership, neat and dry and warm finally did arrive and got up on the stage and so on. But over the course of maybe an hour-and-a-half, two hours of waiting for this it dawned on me that these people are very, very loyal to something, that there is a very strongly felt feeling for what the Sandinistas at least claim to represent.

Now, on the other side you found a lot of affection for Donna Violetta, Violetta Chamorro. But- and it was indeed intense but I didn't find that as a political manifestation rather almost a personal attachment and love for this very, very good woman. But on the other side you had this commitment to ideals and perspective among the poor that was extremely strong. And I sensed at that point, and I think it influenced the rest of my career, that there is something that you should look for within the people that is more important than necessarily what we are doing in our offices. And it was very clear in this instance.

*Q: What about while you were there, there's a term that the Sandalistas, these are the glitterati, the young people who come out, the idealistic people from the United States, nuns, lots of nuns I guess were there. I mean, what was happening there, was this a-?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, most of the Sandalistas, I never really used that term very much, I think they probably resent it, we would have, I remember particularly in the early days of my tour down there, American citizens who had been with the Sandinistas sometimes for years in Nicaragua coming in to voice complaints about what was going on, mistreatment of some of the people that they had been working with for years, and it was a little awkward because of course these were American citizens whose complaints we had to listen to but nonetheless this was not U.S. policy. And I must admit I think in those early months we gave them fairly short shrift, recognizing that at least in that Bush administration, Bush I, that there wouldn't have been much price to pay if in fact someone were to go back and complain that we hadn't given them a good hearing. We were polite but I don't think it was much more than that.

*Q: Did we get involved at all in looking at atrocities and trying to uncover things of this nature there? You know, we're going on all the time in that whole part of the world.*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. And again, sort of working off of my old experience I was, I worked very closely with a number of people, including some Nicaraguans who were seeking to reveal the Sandinista atrocities and certainly there were Sandinista atrocities, killings and mistreatment and so on. And the early months of my assignment there very much focused on efforts to go, I recall, way out into the countryside to explore for unmarked graves and so on of Sandinista victims, that sort of thing, and taking testimony from people who could at least make assertions about very specific individuals within the Sandinista hierarchy that were responsible for abuses and so on. I did a lot of that but in the context of doing that, of course, you would stumble upon Contra atrocities as well and to my regret now I think I didn't play fair. That is to say I would report what evidence I found of Sandinista atrocities and would not reflect very deeply on the impact of the

importance of reporting the Contra atrocities.

*Q: I take it, please correct me if I'm wrong, that because the election was a real election and it wasn't a complete takeover, that there wasn't sort of revenge, that there wasn't much room for revenge time and that sort of thing.*

MCWILLIAMS: One of the great debates, and it's a good question because we faced it somewhat in Afghanistan as well and in Indonesia, is the debate as to whether or not we should be or the society should be seeking justice or whether in the interest of peace just allow those things to pass. And that was, I recall, a pretty fierce debate within Nicaraguan society. I think the only thing I walked away from that, at least reflecting back was with the notion that this is a question for the society and should not be a question over which we would seek to have any influence. I would say that's the same in, subsequently in East Timor and Indonesia but essentially it's for the society to make that decision. If the international community not knowing all of the implications of that decision, the consequences of that decision shouldn't be involved, it's a societal question.

*Q: Did you get any feel about the train wreck that was coming? I mean, when one thinks of Nicaragua one can't help but go back to the Somoza period and you had the Somozas' roommate who was a congressman and you know, you had a very strong Nicaraguan lobby in Congress.*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

*Q: And not a very thoughtful one, I mean, one just whatever Somoza wants, Somoza gets. Did you get any feel for, was there anything like that in Congress?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well I think more than that was the antipathy to everything Sandinista. You have to remember through the whole Reagan administration to a very real extent our- Nicaragua was the touchstone of our policy in the region and the determination not to give the Sandinistas any quarter and to give full tilt support, rather simplistically to the Chamorro administration was a very dominant perspective not only in Congress but also in the administration right up until the time I left. I think there was very little truck for the Sandinistas although I think at the time of my departure there was a growing realization that within the Lacayo bureaucracy there were growing indications of a détente, if you will, with the Sandinista leadership that entailed actual business ventures that involved both senior levels in the Lacayo administration and the Sandinistas.

*Q: What about American business interests? You know, one goes back to the Banana Republics and the United Fruit-type things. I mean, what was, anything of that going on?*

MCWILLIAMS: I don't remember too much about that aspect of it. Obviously as I mentioned earlier in addition to claimants on old, old property claims by Nicaraguans who'd fled to the United States there were also a lot of U.S. property claims and those we had no alternative but to insist on although as I say we met resistance over the months from the Lacayo administration. But I don't recall too much going on in the economic front. I do recall on the AID side working rather closely with a very good AID staff down there but somewhat frustratingly our assistance was largely at the macro level, trying to balance accounts and so on. And what troubled me was, particularly as I traveled and I traveled very extensively while I was out there, the incredible

poverty and the incapacity of the Lacayo administration to respond to that poverty and our own, I think, insensitivity to address very clear medical needs, educational needs and so on throughout the countryside was a frustration for me. I can recall numerous conversations with the AID people, pleading with, I recall at one point some sort of assistance to a hospital that I visited on the Caribbean coast and essentially AID and the U.S. government were not interested in the kind of assistance at the micro level that I think was needed and would have made a difference politically.

*Q: Did you have the feeling that, okay, you had this election, everybody was very delighted with the United States, I mean, but at the same time, okay, that's done, let's move on somewhere else. In other words, because at one point we were putting a hell of a lot of effort into El Salvador and-*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes.

*Q: -and those places.*

MCWILLIAMS: No, there was very strong interest in seeing to it that Lacayo's, the Lacayo administration, I should say the Chamorro administration succeeded, both in terms of visits of senior level officials and as I say in terms of assistance but I continued to feel that USAID misdirected the assistance in not getting down to the micro level sufficiently to make a difference in terms of the vast poverty of the place.

*Q: Did you think that this was, I mean, this is obviously your own analysis but was this because an attitudinal mindset of aid or was this Washington or what was it?*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes. I'm afraid I share the perspective, I think of a lot of my colleagues who work in the political area, particularly that USAID too often does not respond to the very real practical needs of a society but rather deals at the macro level and as a consequence does not- our programs, our assistance do not have the political impact that they might have had had we designed it differently.

*Q: What about the role of the CIA? I mean, this was obviously, the CIA had been in this thing up to its neck and, you know, I mean, not because of directives in Washington. I mean, I'm talking about Central American. How did you find them at that point?*

MCWILLIAMS: I think I was, I simply didn't have much contact with the CIA infrastructure that had been there presumably before. When I walked in, again our posture was pretty much aboveboard assistance to a regime that we liked. And therefore the role of the CIA at that point was reduced significantly, I think, in terms of personnel, in terms of scope of action. I don't think that they were particularly active.

I'll tell you one thing that always intrigued me. One of the early jobs that we had in the political section was in getting the old Contras to give up their weaponry, give their weapons back to us, essentially. And in particular I remember there were Red Eye missiles, these are ground to air missiles to take down aircraft, and we were particularly anxious for good reason, to get those things back in our control. And it fell to one of the offices in my political section to basically go out and make deals whereby we would give motorboats, little tractors, well digging equipment and so

on, trade, in other words it wouldn't be cash but trade for these Red Eyes. And I can recall this officer who was a brilliant officer going out into the countryside, getting his hands on one of these things, you wouldn't bring it back to the embassy, he would dig a hole, put in kerosene, lumber, burlap, whatever, throw that thing in there and cook it off as he would phrase it and just let it blow. I remember a couple of times he invited me out to witness a couple of these operations and I didn't go, unfortunately; I'd loved to have gone out, it's a great story. But it always occurred to me as strange that the CIA wasn't more involved in doing this.

*Q: Yes.*

MCWILLIAMS: But that actually fell to us. So I think in a real sense the CIA at that point was not playing a major role.

*Q: Yes, I can't remember where, if it had gotten a bloody nose on various things in Central America.*

MCWILLIAMS: Well, sure it has, as has our military, yes.

*Q: It may have wanted to back off.*

MCWILLIAMS: And I suspect that the CIA infrastructure was never really probably in Nicaragua. That is, it was operating out of Honduras or El Salvador and probably was not much of a presence ever in Nicaragua.

*Q: What about, let's talk about the Catholic Church.*

MCWILLIAMS: The Catholic Church had Archbishop Obando Bravo, I stumbled the name there, a very knowledgeable, sage, relatively young priest, in many ways very much like Bishop Bello in East Timor in the sense that throughout the Sandinista period he was clearly not an advocate for the Sandinistas but at the same time was not their adversary. He survived that relationship and Obando Bravo in our administration, during the administration that I was there, was sometimes a critic of the Lacayo administration, I think quite genuinely wed to the interests and the needs of the poor and I think the Church in general played a remarkable role thanks to a significant extent to his leadership. And of course subsequent to my departure Pope John Paul made his second visit to Nicaragua; he had come at the latter part of the Sandinista administration and was perceived to have actually chastised some of the priests who were working with the Sandinistas, even ministerial level positions. But he, I think the Church in general, while not seen, particularly under John Paul's leadership, as particularly close to the poor in Nicaragua was seen as quite close to the poor because Bishop Obando Bravo, I can't recall if he was bishop or archbishop when I was there, had a very close relationship with the people.

*Q: What about the foreign elements of the Church? Because they had gotten, if I recall, the Maryknoll name keeps popping up, but gotten very close to the-*

MCWILLIAMS: Sandinistas.

*Q: -to the Sandinistas and all. Was there a problem there or readjusting or what was that situation?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well nothing that I think came to the attention of the U.S. embassy. Of course when the Sandinistas left power a lot of those Americans and other foreigners who had supported them tended to drift away. But I don't recall having any direct contact, for example, U.S. citizens who were members of the clergy, although I'm sure that did happen, but that didn't constitute a major item for our work.

*Q: You mentioned shortly after you arrived Vice President Daniel Quayle and an entourage arrived. How did that go? I mean, Daniel Quayle does not, I mean was, he had the reputation of being sort of a joke.*

MCWILLIAMS: Well no, I think that's, I've always thought that was sort of unfair. No, I think, I recall him as being first of all a very pleasant man who and indeed his entire delegation fully understood that we were not staffed for that kind of a visit and it was as I recall and I forget the circumstances but it came very suddenly. I guess it was in connection with her inauguration. And I do recall, now that you ask, having to deal with the Sandinista administration about the upcoming visit of Dan Quayle to Nicaragua. And I must say that the Sandinistas, although extremely prickly, were professional and efficient in preparing us, helping us prepare for that visit. But I just recall us being overwhelmed by this visit. But no, I think in general terms Quayle impressed me certainly and I think the rest of the staff as being, first of all, a very pleasant fellow and not at all, according to his reputation, that is to say foolish or uninformed.

*Q: How about visitors coming? Did you have any particular problems with visitors?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well there were lots of CODELs and staff dels that would come down. None of them are particularly memorable except one. I remember Congressman Rohrabacher from California came in and he was interested in the work that had been done in my section particularly about finding unmarked graves of Sandinistas. And he and I, with a driver, went out one midnight way off into the boonies to try to actually dig up one of these graves by the moonlight. And I've always thought that one of my more unusual experiences with a congressman, digging unsuccessfully I might add, by a wall up in the boonies in Nicaragua trying to find remains.

*Q: What was his interest?*

MCWILLIAMS: He wanted to prove and come back with the proof, press conference the next morning and so on, that here is proof, here are the remains of this poor anti-Sandinista fellow who was killed by the Sandinistas. And thankfully we didn't come up with any remains.

*Q: What about, I would think that immigration, visas and all that, was that a problem there? Because you know, an awful lot of people had fled to the United States and were claiming political asylum and all of a sudden the game had changed.*

MCWILLIAMS: Well I can remember very heavy traffic of Nicaraguans between Miami and Managua. We had a very large consular section. I don't recall, I realize they were very busy. The

only thing I can recall specifically is that I often was in conflict with the head of the consular section because I would be seeking favors, frankly, any Foreign Service officer will recognize this, seeking favors for particularly important contacts, getting a visa for this cousin or that nephew and so on and getting into terrible shouting matches with the consular chief. And in particular I recall one of my major contacts, actually, was really quite a hustler in retrospect. I did a lot of favors, or at least was asked to do a lot of favors for this fellow, and in retrospect I think the consular officer was probably more right than I was in rejecting some of his requests.

*Q: Well, having been a former consular general from places where visas, particularly Korea and all where I got in shouting matches, oddly enough with the political consular, it could almost be a pattern.*

MCWILLIAMS: I think actually, reflecting back, this was sort of a unique experience for me because I'd work in, of course, in Vientiane where there was no consular issues to speak of in those terms, Bangkok where I didn't get involved with that, Moscow, of course; this was the first time where I basically had a government with which we were very close making requests to me and I sort of saw it as, naively, as my responsibility to get those requests channeled through this, to the administration in my embassy and it didn't always work. Anyway, it was a new experience for me, a very painful one but I think I learned over time.

*Q: What about the, was there a Miami-Cuban refugee connection there or not? I mean, did the Cubans, I mean, there were two Cubans, I mean, the Castro Cubans and the anti-Castro Cubans. Did either of them play any role while you were there?*

MCWILLIAMS: No. No. Of course, the Sandinista-Cuban connection was always something that concerned us deeply and in that context obviously the Miami Cubans lined up with the Miami Nicaraguans, if you will. But I don't recall Miami Cubans playing any significant role though I suspect that they were important, very important allies in the U.S. Congress for the interests of the Miami Nicaraguans.

*Q: Well, before we leave this thing were there incidents, developments or something that you think of?*

MCWILLIAMS: I think the only thing that was important for me in that assignment, which was really an out of area assignment, I had no experience going in to that area, to that region but I think again, as I tried to describe this earlier, I began to be a little bit more sensitive to criticism or critique of U.S. policy based upon the reactions to that policy of the people themselves. And again, a sensitivity to a need to look at our policy and how it was impacting not only the elites but the local population. This became much more important to me in a subsequent assignment to Indonesia and I drew on that experience in Nicaragua I think very much to shape my role in that position in Indonesia subsequently, which was important for my career.

*Q: What about, I mean you had had the Soviet experience and all, and you know, you had the Ortigas running around with Soviet-style uniforms on and all, but did you find that this wasn't a Kremlinology enclave. I mean, was this really a different-?*

MCWILLIAMS: I think the Sandinista leadership, Daniel and Umberto, drew upon Soviet support but I don't think in retrospect that they took a lot of direction from the Soviets. This I think was essentially an opportunistic approach by the Soviets to create problems for the U.S. in its own backyard but in terms of a broad threat to security in the region and so on I don't think so. I think the Soviets were essentially maintaining a client state much as we subsequently began to do once Lacayo came in, Chamorro.

*Q: Well the Ortegas had not really established what you could call a real communist regime would you say-*

MCWILLIAMS: No.

*Q: -or too diverse?*

MCWILLIAMS: It was a dictatorship I think you'd have to say and I think they repressed human rights. I think some elements of the Sandinista leadership were genuinely concerned about a populist program which would meet the very obvious needs, economic needs of the people in Nicaragua. But on the other hand, particularly when you look at the wealth that some of the leadership of the Sandinista movement accumulated you have to say it was a corrupt, despotic dictatorship. I think that the violation of human rights were, that problem was nowhere near as extensive as we contended it was in retrospect. Nonetheless it was there, certainly. They were repressive in terms of press rights and so on. But it was a regime that had staying power because essentially it did respond to a very significant need within the populace as perceived by the people. And we're going to deal with the Sandinistas again I think in the next couple of months.

*Q: Were the Somozas, were they completely gone?*

MCWILLIAMS: Yes, they were pretty much gone. The only thing interesting, a couple of politicians were rising as I left. One of them came to be president, actually, who had clear Somoza ties and that had been sort of a red line that the Sandinistas established that the Somozas and those most closely associated with them would not come back to power. This was something that Lacayo and Chamorro essentially signed off on, I think to some extent we signed off on. But in the elections in the middle '90s Somoza-connected people came to power essentially replacing Lacayo-Chamorro and ultimately they themselves began to deal with Sandinistas. It's funny, it seems that no matter what the political evolution has been in Nicaragua the poor always lose out to the rich. They're always sold out by one side or the other. Arnaldo Aleman was the man I was trying to think of who was essentially a liberal with Somoza connections who came to power who was extremely corrupt but again, he made his deals with the Sandinistas. So essentially I think that the people of Nicaragua, the poor, have never really had a good representative and that's kind of sad.

*Q: Well then in 1992, whither?*

MCWILLIAMS: Well. In the fall of early winter of '91 the collapse of the Soviet Union became apparent and I guess in like December of '91 the State Department started sending out bleats, messages saying anyone with Russian experience, Russian language skills or experience in the

Soviet Union that would be interested we're looking to staff these new embassies that will be created in all of these new states as they began to be formed. And inasmuch as my tour was due to end in a couple of months anyway I thought this a very exciting opportunity so I sent my name in, again the embassy very generously was prepared to let me go a month or two early, and initially was given Armenia but in kind of scrum for posts out there I was able to argue that I would be better suited to assignment into Central Asia given my experience in Afghanistan and Pakistan. So was in the first tier, as they say, of chief submission going out to set up embassies in these states, former states of the Soviet Union.

**STANLEY ZUCKERMAN**  
**USIA Director of Latin American Affairs**  
**Washington, DC (1989-1992)**

*Mr. Zuckerman was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York and educated at the University of Wisconsin. After service in the US Army, followed by newspaper reporting and a position with the Governor of Wisconsin, he joined the USIA Foreign Service in 1965. He subsequently served as Information, Press and Public Affairs Counselor in Congo, Belgium, Mexico, Canada and Brazil. He also had several senior level assignments in Washington at USIA and the State Department. Mr. Zuckerman was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

*Q: Did the problem in Central America, I am speaking of the heavy Reagan involvement at the time you were there. Did that impact?*

ZUCKERMAN: Yes. We had organized demonstrations in front of the embassy on many occasions. Young people in designer jeans would parade denouncing our activities in El Salvador, and Nicaragua. Central America was close to Mexico, but when I got to know Central America more when I was traveling as area director, nothing frightened Central Americans more than their proximity to Mexico.

*Q: The colossus to the north.*

ZUCKERMAN: Colossus to the north, right. It never got out of hand, never got violent. I don't remember us ever having a rock thrown at the Benjamin Franklin Library or people not coming to English language classes at the Mexican American Institute. The demonstrations were pro forma, but we took them seriously for security reasons.

*Q: I take it the papers would essentially support the Sandinistas.*

ZUCKERMAN: Yes, but the greater focus at that point was Salvador. I am trying to remember the exact sequence of these conflicts, but clearly Salvador was the focus because it was the bloodiest at the time. The official line, the official position of the Mexican government, was that we were mishandling the situation. They weren't supporting the leftist regimes, but they felt there were other means to ameliorate the situation. The real problem was hunger. The real problem was the

rigid class system, the oligarchy, which in the case of Mexico was the pot calling the kettle black. But it did not, and this was the important key point, it did not take precedence over the real issues that Mexico was concerned with in its bilateral relationship with us. Those were the economic and immigration and energy issues that were at the heart of their well being.

**HARRY W. SHLAUDEMAM**  
**Ambassador**  
**Nicaragua (1990-1991)**

*Ambassador Harry H. Shlaudeman was born in California in 1926. He served in the U.S. Marine Corps from 1944-1946. He received his bachelor's degree from Stanford University in 1952 and joined the Foreign Service in 1955. His career included positions in Colombia, Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, Chile, and Washington, DC, and ambassadorships to Venezuela, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, and Nicaragua. He was interviewed by William M. Knight in 1993.*

SHLAUDEMAM: March '84 to March '86. Then in the summer of 1986, I went to Brazil. I was there just less than 3 years, and retired. I had been back for several months when the people in ARA asked if I could give them some help with the Contras, because we were getting into the beginning of these negotiations, to end the war and allow the elections to go forward. So what I did basically was to act as an advisor in negotiations to the Nicaraguan Resistance. They didn't take much of my advice.

Q: *Who was the head of those negotiations?*

SHLAUDEMAM: This was very unclear -- never really did -- the titular head and the spokesman was Enrique Bermudez who had been the military commander of the Contras, and who, as you may recall, was murdered in Nicaragua in 1991.

Q: *On our side, who?*

SHLAUDEMAM: On our side -- we were not involved, in theory. This was really my role, to involve us to the extent possible. In any case, I had been doing that for some months, traveling down to Honduras, and to Nicaragua once, when the elections -- to everybody's surprise, Mrs. Chamorro won. We had not had an Ambassador there for a couple of years, so they were very anxious to have someone as quickly as possible, and they faced the -- quite frankly -- original choices, the names that came up -- looked like they would be problems in the confirmation. I had been so many times through the wringer that there wasn't anything more they could find out. By this time, the Committee and the staff all knew me, and we simply had no more problems. In any case, one afternoon -- I was not surprised -- in fact, I had some hints this would happen -- President Bush called me at home, asked me if I would take this job. He said, I know that you don't want to, and I know that you have retired, but if you would just go down there for a year, I would be very grateful. I said, Well, a year is a little short -- I'll go for a year and a half, but that's it. Actually, I stayed about 20 months. Then I retired again and that was all.

To go on, I came back. I really didn't know anything about Central America. When I was Assistant Secretary, I had made my first and only trip down there and spent a week going to the 5 countries, but that was it. I knew nothing. Henry didn't know anything about Central America either, but we sure learned. It was a fascinating experience, working with him on this very political exercise. The Commission was the outgrowth of a speech that Scoop Jackson made in the Senate, in which he advocated a Marshall Plan for Central America. The conservative Democrats like Jackson were anxious to find a way out, because this controversy over the Contras and our support for the military in El Salvador had become daily more bitter -- the liberals and conservatives, Republican and Democrats. Jackson advocated a Marshall Plan as something to correct all the structural problems.

*Q: Take their minds off the guns.*

SHLAUDEMANN: That's it. So we had this Commission appointed, and there were some very interesting people on it, including Henry Cisneros who is now Secretary of HUD. It's interesting, looking back on it, to see who was prominent in the final outcome and who wasn't. Henry was a dissident, of course, on support for the Contras -- he was totally against that. We had a group of so-called Congressional advisors, including Jackson -- who never attended and who died during the Commission's life. The one who was present for every business meeting, every meeting where we were producing material for the report, was Jack Kemp who played a very strong role in what came out.

*Q: Overlapping of the Executive and the Legislative.*

SHLAUDEMANN: Yes. Lane Kirkland was very important on that Commission, and Bob Strauss. They were very strong people.

*Q: We are now about '84?*

SHLAUDEMANN: This is '83. The Commission first met in August 1983, and the first thing they did was to hold hearings, closed hearings, with all of the former Presidents and former Secretaries of State, and they all came. Nixon was particularly interesting -- of course, felt that this was his field. In any case, we proceeded through a series of these sessions where we brought in people to discuss these issues. Then the Commission made two trips, one to Central America, one to Mexico and Venezuela. I made very sure that I did not go with them on the trips. I don't want to travel with Henry Kissinger.

*Q: Why?*

SHLAUDEMANN: Well, you know, he's very difficult, very demanding. These turned out to be successful trips. Whatever concerns I had about traveling with Kissinger, he and I got along very well, and the report, I still think, was a very good report. The disappointment came later because Congress did not fund the report adequately. I suppose that was to be expected. In any case, while I was doing this, I was asked if I would like to go to Guatemala, be Ambassador there, and I said Yes. Then shortly before the end of the Commission, before the submission of its final report to the

President, the President's Special Envoy for Central America, former Senator Stone, got into a controversy with the Assistant Secretary, Tony Motley, which was finally resolved by Stone leaving, and Motley asked me to take that job. Then I started my travels. In the next two years I traveled over a quarter of a million miles, largely by government plane.

*Q: I thought you were about to go to Guatemala?*

SHLAUDEMANN: But then this other job came up. I was named Ambassador-at-Large, and the President's Special Envoy for Central America. Never went to Guatemala. Of course, this was a very high-profile job. I had never before been so intimately involved with the President and the White House generally, the Secretary. The interesting and I suppose the only significant part of this job -- what we were doing was trying to promote support for our position in Central America, and trying to get, particularly the Central American countries other than Nicaragua, to support the position. Then Motley came up with this idea -- this was 1984 -- that we should negotiate with the Sandinistas, truly negotiate. There had been efforts before -- Tom Enders had gone down there when he was Assistant Secretary, but this had failed. There was, in the Administration, a group which was adamantly opposed to any negotiations with the Sandinistas. This included Jeane Kirkpatrick, Fred Iklé, Bud McFarlane, Casey of course.

But Motley had this idea that we might be able to get someplace with them. This was all quite dramatic -- he called me one day and said the Secretary was going to Duarte's inauguration as President of El Salvador at the beginning of June 1984, and I of course would be going, but he thought we could stop in Managua on the way back and have a discussion with Ortega about negotiations. He asked me to go to Mexico and arrange for the Mexicans to help set this up. So I went to see Bernardo Sepúlveda, the Minister, and sat with him in his office while he called Ortega and put this all together. We then proceeded from San Salvador to Managua and had a two-hour meeting in the airport with Ortega and his crew, and it was agreed that we would have some negotiations. So I was asked to do this.

From the beginning, the Nicaraguans -- the Sandinistas wanted the Mexicans present in the room, because they said they didn't trust us and they didn't trust what we would report of the negotiations, what we would tell the press. Of course, we rejected that. Like most negotiations, we spent the first three sessions arguing about procedure.

I should go back and make clear that, basically, the argument in the Administration was over the question of how far our demands should go. This group that opposed negotiations basically made the argument that the Sandinistas had to be forced into genuine democratization, that means elections -- that they would lose or something -- in any case, they had to be removed from office. The others, Motley in particular and Craig Johnson who was his Deputy, argued that the real issues were security issues, not democratization, and what we had to do was achieve a security agreement with the Sandinistas that would prevent Soviet and Cuban exploitation in Nicaragua, particularly in the continuing war in El Salvador.

I must say, in my own case, I was somewhat ambiguous in all this...

*Q: You mean 'ambivalent'?*

SHLAUDEMANN: Ambivalent. But I was also ambiguous. I was thinking of 'ambiguous' because there is a book called Banana Diplomacy, in which Elliott Abrams is quoted as saying that I and others permitted a certain ambiguity in the policy -- in any case, I did believe that we should negotiate some kind of interim solution. They, on their side, insisted on having the Mexicans present. The way it worked out finally was that we agreed on a Mexican venue, we agreed on having the Mexicans choose the actual place. They were not to be present in the room but they were to have a representative there, usually it was the Foreign Minister, to whom, after we had completed our sessions, we would report. Separately. That's very important: separately. I insisted, and the Mexicans were more than cooperative, that these had to be private negotiations, free of the press and that sort of thing. So they chose Manzanillo and put us down there, and they actually sent armed naval guards and kept the press away, kept everybody away.

Before I went to the first session, Motley and Iklé negotiated what was called a 'matrix', only it turned out not to be a negotiation. Iklé, in effect, imposed it on him. This matrix consisted of 4 areas of issues, and they were all tied together -- it was very complicated. I was told that I could present it orally but I was not to give a written copy.

*Q: So you were the American spokesman?*

SHLAUDEMANN: Yes, I had 4 people with me. One was a representative of the NSC staff who was there obviously to keep an eye on me, see that I didn't give away the store, give away anything. Another was an officer who is now the Director of the Office of Central American Affairs, and the third was a retired officer who had served with me. Then the Ambassador, Harry Bergold who was the Ambassador in Nicaragua, was also on my team.

In all, we had nine sessions which went through the fall. I guess the last session was in January 1985 or December 1984 -- I can't remember. In any case, there were nine sessions. Their team was headed by Victor Tinoco, who was the Deputy Foreign Minister and a leading Sandinista political leader. The negotiations spent a great deal of time talking about security issues, particularly, in their case, about military maneuvers in Central America. They regarded these maneuvers, which we had historically conducted, particularly in Honduras, going back to the last century, as threatening. This was a particular preoccupation of theirs. They generally refused to talk about issues of democratization, or internal political issues, so we didn't get very far on that.

In the eighth session, I proposed to Tinoco that we take the draft of the Contadora group's latest proposal for a Central American treaty -- which the Sandinistas had said they accepted -- that we simply take that draft and negotiate those points which we found unsatisfactory. He thought that was a great idea, or he seemed to think that was a great idea, and he took it back to Managua. In the interim, the Secretary called me one day and said, Let's put an end to this whole negotiation. And I said, "I am committed to go back one last time, and as you know, I have this thing on the table." He didn't tell me but I assumed he was reflecting the President's view.

One thing that has to be kept in mind was that 1984 was an election year, and by this time, the election was over. I think the interest in negotiations -- whatever there had been -- had pretty well dissipated. Anyway, I went back, and before I could say anything, Tinoco rejected out-of-hand my

proposal. Obviously the commandants had decided they didn't want to play that game, and so we put an end to the negotiations.

*Q: You were saved.*

SHLAUDEMANN: I was saved. Absolutely. During this period, there were great frictions within the Administration. I was present at one meeting in the Cabinet Room in the White House where literally people were shouting at one another. The emotions involved were tremendous. It's difficult to remember that Nicaragua was an absolute foreign policy focus of the Reagan Administration. Nothing was more important, except the Soviet Union itself.

One of the interesting things that happened during this time -- Henry and I went to see the Joint Chiefs one day. Henry, in his usual manner, said, Why don't you fellows simply resolve this problem and send some troops in there to clean out El Salvador and Nicaragua. General Vessey was a great character and he said, That's very interesting, but you know, none of that's going to do any good -- the problem is Cuba and to handle Cuba would take 26 divisions. Even Henry blanched at that.

The emotions in all this were extremely high. There was a fellow on the NSC staff who has subsequently published a book -- he was convinced that the Department of State was in the process of selling out the President's policy.

*Q: How could he imagine that that could be done?*

SHLAUDEMANN: Oh, once we were on our way to Panama -- I was with the Secretary -- to the Inauguration of Barletta as President of Panama, and we start getting these messages from Washington that there was an enormous to-do there, because this fellow had found out that Sandinistas would be present during this Inauguration and I was going to see Tinoco while I was there. And he had somehow gotten the idea that I was going to strike a deal with Tinoco in Panama selling out the Contras. It was crazy -- the whole business was crazy. You could see some of what later became Iran-Contra in this NSC staff, and the two people who ran it -- Bud and later this Admiral -- were people that had some ideas I didn't quite understand -- I'll put it that way. Some of it is discussed in Secretary Shultz's book and people who are interested in that can read it. He had a very difficult time. Not only in regard to Central America but also with a lot of other issues.

In any case, I went on, and then McFarlane made a trip to Central America in January of 1985 and concluded that not only the negotiations should be closed off, but Motley should be removed from office and I should be given some other assignment. So that's when Elliott Abrams came in. Though he and I had not particular problems, he wanted Phil Habib to do this job and Phil took it over from me. Phil proved to be a lot more difficult than I was. I think Elliott regretted his choice. I was offered the Embassy in Brazil and was very pleased to take it. That was, for the time being, the end of my involvement in Central America, and I was very pleased to be leaving it.

*Q: Before we go on to Brazil, here you were in the President's Representative-sort of role, and that's becoming increasingly popular. Do you have any comments on that role and that was of doing business? Are there any pluses and minuses in it?*

SHLAUDEMANN: First of all, it all depends on who the representative is. In my case, there was no problem whatsoever, because I was under no illusions that I was going to report directly to Ronald Reagan, and I was under no illusions as to who was the Secretary of State, whose responsibility this sort of thing was. However, I must say, in the case of my predecessor, I think he took seriously this notion that he was a Special -- in every sense of the word -- Representative of the President.

Q: *Who was that?*

SHLAUDEMANN: He was a former Senator from Florida, Senator Stone. I'm not blaming him -- I'm just saying that I think this is a kind of natural confusion. Personally, I'm very dubious about Ambassadors-at-Large and personal representatives, because I've lived through a lot of this. In the Dominican Republic -- I've said before -- we had this enormous confusion about who was in charge of what. I think generally you're better off if you rely on your Embassies. These special envoys -- special this and that -- these are nearly always, I think, named for domestic political reasons. The reason there was a special envoy for Central America was to deflect some of the criticism of the Reagan Administration for not trying to find a diplomatic, rather than a military, solution in Central America. That obviously was the purpose.

Q: *What was the nature of the effort?*

SHLAUDEMANN: That would be about all in Brazil. By this time I was wearing out, and my wife was particularly wearing out. So I retired in June of '89, and I had been home for about a year, when a fellow I knew in the Department called me one day and asked if I would come and see the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the ARA, and what they wanted was somebody to help the Contras with their negotiations.

What had happened was that Jim Baker and Bernie Aronson had made this agreement with the Congress, which you may be aware of, in which we had agreed to cut off military support for the Contras, in return for a negotiated solution and elections, real elections. Well, the elections were not much of a problem as it turned out in the end, because the Sandinistas bought off on elections, and bought off on all these observers -- the things that guaranteed the integrity of the elections. But the Contras, the Nicaraguan resistance, were in a very difficult situation -- what was going to happen to them was the problem. I said, Sure, I'd be happy to do that.

I went down to Honduras, I went six or seven times, went with them to New York. Mostly, they disregarded my advice, which was, I suppose, understandable. It was interesting, because I got to know them. I discovered, as I think everybody who ever got into this in any serious degree discovered, that the Contras were not really just mercenaries. They were, in effect, disaffected campesinos, because of Sandinista land policies. And what they had done is historically what they had always done in Nicaragua -- they had gone to the hills with their guns. Only in this case, we were there to support them. We used to fly out to their camps in these helicopters and talk to them, urge them to negotiate, all this. In the end, they negotiated a kind of agreement which I had nothing to do with, but this was after the election. The election was an enormous surprise to everybody, except to a few of us.

*Q: A surprise that they took place at all?*

SHLAUDEMANN: No, that Violeta Chamorro won. I was in Honduras just a couple of weeks before the election, and this fellow who had been one of the Contra commanders had gone back to Nicaragua under an amnesty. He was a very smart chap and he had been all over the country -- he told me that night, There's no way she can lose unless they steal the election. I believed him. In any case, she won and the Contras signed an agreement in which the new government pledged all kinds of things -- which of course they never did. So there we were.

About this time, I was asked if they could consider me for Chief of Mission there. I said No, I wouldn't go unless I were forced to. Like Hinton was forced to go to Panama. Some time later -- the people they had in mind, the people initially floated for this, had for one reason or another, would have had confirmation problems in the Senate. I think probably the President decided to see if I wouldn't do this, in large part, because they knew I wouldn't have any confirmation problems. I had had all the confirmation problems you could have -- these were all old history.

So, one afternoon, Bush called me and asked if I would do this. Of course, I couldn't refuse him. He said, Just go down there for a year and get this thing started.

*Q: Why would the President himself do that little chore? You had already refused previous levels -- is that it?*

SHLAUDEMANN: I think they knew I would. And of course, I had known him for a long time. I had always had a very friendly relationship with him. So he said, Just go down there for a year. And I said, Well, a year might be too little, but a year and a half -- that's the limit. He said, Okay. So I went, and it was another very frustrating assignment. I've had a lot of frustrating assignments.

The problem there was, of course, the elected government had to reach some sort of accommodation with the Sandinistas who still had all the guns, all the unions -- all the methods of coercion and power in the country were still in the hands of the Sandinistas. On the other hand, the opposition to the Sandinistas was determined on recovering all their property, destroying the Sandinista army -- all these things. So you had -- still do -- a very highly polarized country. Our interest was in achieving a democracy that would work, in resolving these very thorny property issues. Getting the police under the control of a civilian government, and so on. My view was that you had to make some accommodations. They had to make some accommodations with the Sandinistas or you couldn't make the thing work. The question was, how far should they go with concessions to the Sandinistas. I was under a lot of pressure from Washington to press them to go a lot farther in the other direction than they were willing to go. The man who was running the government, Violeta's son-in-law, was, in my opinion, very arrogant and had made a number of errors in judgment and was particularly resentful of me, of people pressing him to do things he didn't want to do.

Anyway, we had this enormous aid program, which, for a country that size, was huge, and all the problems that entailed. In any case, it was interesting. I don't know that we accomplished a great deal but we kept them going. When I left, they still had a democratic order and things were still functioning, more or less. The Sandinistas had absolutely impoverished the country. That hasn't

been corrected and won't be for a long time. It's a tragedy, the country is so poor. In any case, that was the end of my career and the end, I hope, of any involvement ever again with Central America.

I should say -- on things that are written, there is an anthology Beyond Central America -- I can't remember the name -- published by the University of Miami, as a result of a conference held at Chatham House in London. I wrote the introduction to it, but I can't even remember what I said.

*Q: One tidbit, Harry. As I inspected around South America, in lots of embassies, you'd have the problem of the Department sending out a circular and saying, Go in at the highest level and present this position... You've seen this from both sides. The people in Washington think that they're doing something, I guess, putting out a circular, but for the embassies, it's very tough, because they are always having to be jiggling the elbow of the high-ranking people. Do you have any comment on that?*

SHLAUDEMAN: Yes, I do. I quite agree with you. This is what happens. I think an Ambassador has to use his judgment. Even though the instructions say, You must go to the President and tell him he must vote for our position in the UN; that if you keep doing that, you're going to destroy your credibility, you're going to destroy your access. You just have to use judgment. I'm opposed to that. I realize why they do it, why every issue is the most important one that ever came along, but you can't do that. Also, it's insulting. These countries, no matter how weak they may be, do have Foreign Ministries and they do have Foreign Ministers who are charged with handling these problems.

*Q: How did you yourself roll with this punch? Did you move it down the hierarchy, or did you sometimes say, No, we're not going to go in.*

SHLAUDEMAN: It depended on where I was, but, for example, in Brazil -- the Brazilians regard themselves as a very important country and the President of Brazil is a very important person. So I simply handled just about everything with the Foreign Ministry. I can't remember ever not doing anything. I think we always did something. But I certainly didn't go to the highest levels on every UN vote. I think that's a great mistake.

**RONALD D. GODARD**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Managua (1991-1993)**

*Ambassador Ronal Godard was born in Oklahoma and raised in Oklahoma and Texas. He was educated at Odessa College and the University of Texas. After a tour with the Peace Corps in Ecuador, he joined the State Department in 1967 and was posted to Panama, the first of his assignments in Central and South America. These include Costa Rica, Chile, Nicaragua, Argentina and Guyana, where he served as Ambassador from 2000 to 2003. His Washington assignments also concerned Latin American Affairs. During his career the Ambassador served with the Organization of American States, was diplomat in residence at the University of Illinois in Chicago and was Political Officer in Istanbul. Ambassador Godard was*

*interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2004.*

*Q: In '91 whither?*

GODARD: In '91 I got a call offering me a job from Harry Shlaudeman, someone I admired way back. He was our ambassador in Brazil. At that time he had retired as ambassador to Brazil and been our assistant secretary for Latin America and been ambassador elsewhere. George H. W. Bush had prevailed upon him to come out of retirement and become our ambassador to Nicaragua after the victory in the election there of Violeta Chamorro. Ambassador Shlaudeman, because of my extensive experience in Central America, I guess some of my friends up there recommended me to be his DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) and I decided to do that. So my tour in Chile, while I was having a great time there, it was too good an opportunity to resist. I was sent from Chile to be Deputy Chief of Mission in Nicaragua.

*Q: You did that from '91 to when?*

GODARD: I was there two and a half years I think it was. So it was '91, '92 I guess '93 is when I went into Argentina.

*Q: When you got there in '91, what was the situation?*

GODARD: The president at the moment was Violeta Chamorro who was the widow of the man who was a friend of mine, Jose Joaquin Chamorro from my previous tour. She had not been an active politician before her husband's death. Very much a homemaker, raising the children and so forth. But became very active in politics. In fact, after the revolution, after Somoza was overthrown, she had been a member of the initial junta that was pulled together to govern the country. She had been, and they still own the paper, she'd been the chief editor of La Prensa which was the opposition newspaper. It was opposition under Somoza and it continued to be opposition under the Sandinistas. It was the anti-Sandinista voice.

Her government was headed up by her son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo, and the country was deeply divided. There was a majority that could sort of be cobbled together of non-Sandinista parties and then there was a large bloc of votes in the national assembly controlled by the FSLN. Tough to get legislation through of any kind. Very difficult to govern. We were trying to be as supportive as possible of Chamorro after difficulties with the FSLN government, and wanted to first see her be successful and for Nicaragua to continue with the democratic process, so it was a very challenging assignment. We had a large AID program there. One of the larger in the area. Reconciliation was a big issue. Out in the rural areas of the country there was still violence going on between Sandinista and non-Sandinista community groups. We promoted disarmament as much as possible. Getting people to just turn in their guns because during the previous years the Soviets had poured all kinds of guns in there and of course contras were also getting guns. Everybody seemed to have a gun. So there were a lot of ceremonies, I remember attending at least a couple where Violeta Chamorro would preside over the destruction of weapons that had been turned in and had been purchased. Very much a process of demobilization to a certain extent. Getting the two sides to stand down and try to work together for the benefit of the country. Still a divided country. Politics are still very contentious.

*Q: First place, Ambassador Shlaudeman, how did he operate? Was he the ambassador the whole time you were there?*

GODARD: Ambassador Shlaudeman was a brilliant diplomat and a brilliant analyst of political situations. He'd seen so much. He was very much an old school, go directly to the source, he went to the major players, he talked to them. Had contacts with the Sandinistas as well as with government politicians. He was very much all for my getting out and doing political reporting as well. He wanted to take advantage of the contacts that I had over the years. His commitment to the secretary had been for the short term. He didn't plan to stay that long in Nicaragua, but I think he was an excellent sort of bridge because he could talk like a Dutch uncle to Dona Violeta. I think they communicated well, and he also managed to do a good job with Antonio Lacayo, the son-in-law who was the sort of premier. Dona Violeta sort of gave him that role for running the government. The time I spent with Harry Shlaudeman I think was very instructive in learning my craft. He was one of these people who could take a yellow pad and write a cable. He never seemed to dictate particularly. He would write it out in complete sentences and complete paragraphs, all the lucid thoughts. I scratch out and go back when I'm drafting, but he was quite a piece of work.

*Q: What was sort of our analysis of Violeta Chamorro and how she governed?*

GODARD: As I said, she had no political experience prior to her husband's death. Of course we all knew she grew up in a prominent family and her husband, his whole life seemed to be politics. And she knew a lot about Nicaragua. She had a very good personal touch. She was the kind of woman, some politicians identify as father of their country, she was sort of the mother of their country. She really got around and met people. She was a very good campaigner as it turned out. A woman with no pretenses. She would entertain people and she would, here's the president of the republic and she was always checking to make sure that you had a drink, that you had enough to eat, this sort of thing. So she never lost the grace that she had cultivated as a spouse of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro. I thought a great deal of her. She was not a strong, involved political leader. She sort of left the politics to her son-in-law and to others of her advisers, but it just wasn't I think her vocation. For the time, she was the right politician for Nicaragua, for that transition. For the first period after the Sandinistas.

*Q: And after Somoza too.*

GODARD: Yeah, had a long spell of Daniel Ortega.

*Q: How did we see the political situation when you got there? The Sandinistas were still around.*

GODARD: Oh very much. The Damocles sword sort of hanging over the whole thing was that the Sandinista army was still there and as well-trained and large as any other in Central America. I guess maybe the Guatemalans had a slightly larger force. But it was still by Central American standards a pretty impressive group. And the leadership, to a man, were officers who were raised and indoctrinated in the Sandinista ideology. And it was called, Arisito Sandinista. I don't know if it's been changed yet. At one point they were trying to change it. There wasn't a Nicaraguan army, it was the Sandinista army. So there was that factor. We, at that stage, I think things had changed

now. We were very reluctant to enter into the normal kind of military to military relationship we usually cultivate in most of these countries.

*Q: What sort of connections did you have to the Ortegas?*

GODARD: I guess, like Ambassador Shlaudeman.. When he was there I really had no contact. I think he may have taken me with him once or twice to see one of the Ortegas. But I was the chargé for 18 months after Ambassador Shlaudeman left. Then I went to see them. They were important, but just one of the political parties there. I had contact with them particularly when we had visitors who would want to go. We had the congressmen or visiting members of the house or senate too, this was one of the things to do, visit the opposition party. Go see the Cardinal, Cardinal Obando y Bravo, but I saw them, had a normal relationship.

*Q: Did you feel that both the Sandinista army and also, I assume there was an equivalent to it, I don't know what you call it, peasant army or their followers, and also the contras. Were these groups hanging around waiting for shoes to drop?*

GODARD: They all were. In some of these communities, in rural areas, they were. Swords ready, and violence could break out in some of the communities. But what we did to try and remedy that, we had a project. CIAD it was called, I can't remember what the initials stand for now, but they were working out of the vineyards where the contras and the demobilized Sandinista troops, because they had had a much larger army which had been decommissioned and they were civilian staffed. And this organization worked with both sides trying to make them happy farmers again, who could work side by side. Very difficult work. They were all there. Many of them still had their guns. There were sporadic outbreaks of violence between them, but nothing really serious. The one time when violence erupted was, I can't remember exactly what the issue was, but the Sandinista groups seized a good part of the legislative leadership and held them hostage. One of them was the president of the national assembly, Alfredo César, who was a prominent politician whom I had known previously. I think I met him in Costa Rica beforehand. And negotiating that down, that was just about when I was ready to leave, and I had to stay on until that particular crisis was resolved before I could go on to my next assignment.

*Q: Did you get involved in negotiations?*

GODARD: We were promoting the negotiations. The primary actors were the minister of the presidency and the Sandinista party. In fact, they were talking to each other, and that was going on constantly, so there was no need for an intermediary role. But, because of the history of Nicaragua, the possibility of violence breaking out and being back in the bad old days when they were shooting folks, it was thought necessary I stick around and I certainly agreed, until that was over.

*Q: I heard that the Sandinistas, although they came in from out of the hills and they appeared to be sort of the working class taking over, many of the leaders quickly took over many of the villas, and started living the high life. Was there sort of a change there, how was that working out?*

GODARD: They certainly did that, and they lived the high life. All of the commandantes did have big houses and cars and whatever. Those houses became a bilateral issue, because many of the

people... those houses and other properties that had been confiscated without compensation by the government. There were claims against them by the former owners. Many of them had gone into exile in the United States, and many of them had become American citizens. Now, there's a disconnect there because they weren't American citizens when they had title of the property when they were confiscated. But anyway, they were American citizens, they were complaining to the American government about this government not returning their properties, so it became something we got involved in. Trying to work with the Nicaraguan government in restoring as many of these properties as possible to the former owners.

*Q: I take it that we were putting in rather large sums of money to keep everybody quiet.*

GODARD: The Sierra project, those projects were not that big. The other stuff, the development projects, there were some school projects, economic development projects of one kind or another, we had a big aid program there working with the chamber of commerce and stuff like this.

*Q: Nicaragua is one of those places that is natural disaster prone. Did you have a major hurricane or a major earthquake while you were there?*

GODARD: I don't think anybody escapes clean from there. There are just too many things going on. While I was there, there was a tsunami of all things. A tidal wave that swept into the southern coast and pretty well wiped out a village there. And then there was an eruption, which happens every once in a while, of Cero Negro which threw black ash over just hundreds of acres of farmland right around Leon, and we had all kinds of refugees who had to flee there. So that gave me an opportunity as acting chief of mission, a couple of times, to declare a national emergency and get some money to bring in and help out in those disasters. But fortunately I didn't have a big one. Those were both enough of a problem to deal with.

*Q: How about the Indians? Was that an issue while you were there?*

GODARD: Not really. The Mosquitoes, it's a very underdeveloped area that they're from. And the problems that the Sandinistas have with the Mosquitoes was forcing their incorporation into the rest of society and forcing them to abandon their traditional way of life. During Violeta Chamorro's day, they were sort of again free to follow their own designs. So it was not a major issue. I'm trying to remember if there were Mosquito, and that's the major indigenous group in Nicaragua, I'm trying to remember if there were members of parliament, but I don't recall any in the national setting.

*Q: Were there any problems with El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, and that?*

GODARD: There have been in the past, issues, there were some sort of flare-ups on the Gulf of Fonseca with Honduras. Little incidents of fishing boats encroaching and stuff like that. But nothing major. After I left, there were incidents. They have a contentious border with Costa Rica in the south, but during my period, border disputes were not a major issue.

*Q: Drugs?*

GODARD: No. Not particularly. I remember cases where we suspected Sandinista involvement in some drug trafficking, but that certainly wasn't a major route. There was one case as I recall.

*Q: How about the Cubans? They had a major presence there. Had they settled in or were they soberly kicked out, or what happened?*

GODARD: Still have a Cuban embassy there. The arms stopped coming in under Violeta Chamorro. There was no new weaponry arriving, but they had plenty from when the Soviets were stockpiling stuff there. In fact, that was the big issue working with the Sandinista army inventorying what they had, storing it safely so that it would not fall in the hands of the terrorist groups. And then, what they didn't need, ensuring that it was destroyed rather than disappearing into the black market. But the Cubans were there, they had exchanges going on. Cubans have always been very generous in educational grants, scholarships of one kind or another, and they picked up a lot of smart, young Nicaraguans, with college educations and that sort of thing.

*Q: This is a little bit after, but is there any reflection of the demise of the Soviet Union which had been a great supporter of that?*

GODARD: The Soviets were there while I was there, were very good contacts of mine.

*Q: They were still Soviets, at least in the beginning, '97 I think they were still Soviets.*

GODARD: They were there, and they had a lot of real estate that they had picked up during the Sandinista period. And there were huge properties, and there were claims against some of those properties as well. Part of this big issue with the confiscations. But it was sort of, and I've seen it in other countries, the Russian operation sort of divesting themselves of some of the stuff that they have, and supporting a mission in part by selling off some of the things they had accumulated. In Guyana for instance they kept several officers mission in Georgetown, Guyana, but they rented out the major portion of their compound as a hotel there. And essentially things you saw in Nicaragua. Nothing in particular menacing. Just there, sweeping up and divesting themselves to a certain extent of all they had from before.

*Q: At one time, the United States, Managua was almost the center of our foreign policy interest. Did you find a rapid falling-off of American interest there?*

GODARD: Oh yeah. To a certain extent, not as much as you would expect because the personality of Violeta Chamorro found real resonance up in the States. She was somebody that Americans could really relate to, and Americans of influence. We had a good number of congressional delegations while I was there, and they were always enchanted by Dona Violeta. She really came across very well. Simple style, but very sincere. They maintained a level of interest, that was surprising really because it translated into the financing for a sizeable aid program to help ensure the success of the transition democracy.

*Q: Did we have any military interest in the area?*

GODARD: The fact that there was a military in Nicaragua that was controlled by an ideologically

opposed group was kind of unique. Gradually we handed off to more normal military to military relationship with the army in Nicaragua. But beyond that, unless there's some threat there, or the real military concern was the Soviets and the Cubans using Nicaragua for their purposes, for teaching purposes, so that diminished our military interest. But we kept a close eye on the possibility of it becoming more important as a drug transit site. That didn't happen during the time that I was there. It was something that was going on, but it wasn't a major transit country.

*Q: During the Somoza and then the Sandinista regimes, there was a lot of concern and involvement of churches including those sisters and brothers and others. What about church involvement in the country from outside of it when you were there?*

GODARD: We talked about liberation theology a while back, and the presence of certain priests, especially Jesuits in the Sandinista movement. There was also a Maryknoll father as I recall, Padre d'Escoto was a Maryknoll father who was a foreign minister. By the time I got there, I don't remember church leaders being prominent in the FSLN itself. D'Escoto was still around, and he may have even still been on the director board, not on the directorate but a close advisor. I think that it pretty well diminished. The primary political figure on the religious side was a Cardinal, Cardinal Obando y Bravo who had been a steadfast anti-Somoza figure. He had been sort of the patron of the revolution in many ways, and then broke with the Sandinistas, then became very much an anti-Sandinista figure and somebody that the opposition to them rallied around in defending Catholic values. He was still there, and was second only to Dona Violeta, major figures there that all the folks that came to visit us in Nicaragua wanted to go see and talk to, get his views.

**THERESA A. LOAR**  
**Nicaragua Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1992-1993)**

*Ms. Loar was born and raised in New Jersey. She was educated at Louisville University, Dartmouth, Rutgers, and she also studied in France. She and her husband entered the Foreign Service in 1986. After serving in Mexico City and Seoul she was assigned to the Office of the Undersecretary for Global Affairs in Washington, where she was involved in Human Rights and Women's issues. She subsequently became Senior Coordinator for International Women's Affairs. Following her retirement from the Department of State, Ms. Loar was the co-Founder and President of the organization Vital Forces Global Partnership. Ms. Loar was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.*

*Q: Well then, when you moved over to the Nicaragua desk - Nicaragua has always been a more touchy place.*

LOAR: Yes. Well, the big issue there was the expropriation of property by the Sandinistas from the people. Senator Helms was intensely interested in Nicaragua at the time (Violeta Chamorro was the president at the time, I believe) and intensely interested in making sure that the Sandinistas were punished for anything they did; and in seeing that anybody who had their property taken

away got it back.

The Bush administration at that time was continuing the aid to Nicaragua, but Senator Helms was dead against it, and did not want any money going there; but couldn't stop it, couldn't block the aid altogether, so did everything he could to harass the State Department. Alec [Alexander] Watson, a very nice guy who had been a career ambassador and was really well respected was going up to be Assistant Secretary; and Senator Helms wouldn't give him a hearing unless the State Department did the following: turn over every document that State Department had generated on Nicaragua during a certain period of time, so that they could find out whether AID (Agency for International Development) was misusing the money or being too easy on the Nicaraguans. I'm sure they had many reasons for wanting what they were looking for. But, at the end of the day, it was a great hardship on our post, and on our ambassador, I don't remember who our ambassador was to Nicaragua at that time, just a good guy though, but I can't remember who it was.

*Q: We can fill this in later.*

LOAR: Ron [Ronald] Godard was the DCM; he was a very nice guy, and had a really good team. Chris Ervs, who is brilliant - he was in our A-100 class - was the econ officer down there, which was great, because I really did not have a heavy grounding in economics. Chris helped me an awful lot with so many economic issues on the desk.

But what really dismayed me concerning the papers Senator Helms wanted on Nicaragua was that there was nobody looking out for the Foreign Service officers in the field over any frank comment the Foreign Service officer might have made in any memo or emails directly to the DCM, or to the ambassador, or to anyone back here in the States. We asked the L (Office of the Legal Advisor) people for guidelines. "Okay, what are the materials we're supposed to turn over to Senator Helms?" And there were no guidelines. The guidelines were on an unsigned piece of paper and were kind of vague. So, in other words, how are we supposed to know what's a draft or what's internal discussion, and what's appropriate for Senator Helms? And I made that decision a number of times on my own. And, I remember thinking, "Who in this room was looking out for the Foreign Service officer" who gives his boss a frank assessment of what's going on?"

*Q: Yes.*

LOAR: And it was all about satisfying Senator Helms's desire for every piece of paper and every bit of information, and in getting that up to him so Alec Watson could get his hearings, which he deserved to have. It was ridiculous that we had to hold these things up. But I also learned at that time to have a great deal of paranoia, which served me well later on while I worked on international women's issues in the UN conferences. People would say, "Gosh, why are you so paranoid?" "Because there's a good reason to be paranoid. Because you can write a funny little email back about something, and that can go to a senator on the Hill, who will block you in the future, and will use it as evidence of your being prejudiced or biased against somebody. There were memos, internal discussions, where the ambassador said, "Well, what do you think about this? You know, before we release this next cable, how do you think the Central Bank is doing on its reform things?" And it really troubled me that there was nobody looking out for the Foreign Service officers in the field, who had good careers ahead of them. I realized you had to watch out

for yourself.

*Q: Yes. By the time you got to the Nicaragua desk, the Sandinistas had lost the elections?*

LOAR: Yes.

*Q: And how was Mrs. Chamorro doing?*

LOAR: Well, one of her son-in-laws was a very powerful figure - forgive me for not remembering the name [Antonio Lacayo Oyanguren]. She wasn't a particularly powerful figure. We would have liked her to be, and I certainly wanted to see a woman president be a strong figure. But she wasn't particularly strong, and it didn't seem to make much progress.

I think it was a very sad situation, going down to Nicaragua to see the damage. There was damage done to the main cathedral during one of the earthquakes, and a lot of money came pouring in to fix it, and it was never fixed. When I was there, Tom Monaghan, who founded Domino's Pizza, had given lots of money to build a new cathedral, which was a ridiculous, ugly looking structure; and I love cathedrals, and this one looked like somebody was in a really bad mood when they designed it, but...[laughter]

*Q: [Laughter]*

LOAR: The cathedral was going up. I guess that's a helpful thing - to have a new cathedral in the city. But there seemed to be no progress. While El Salvador was moving along, and seemed to be making progress, Nicaragua seemed not to make progress. It seemed like the country just changed hands from one part of the four or five families who ran things to another! They were all related, and all their businesses were pretty much co-owned.

I do remember one thing going back to the Costa Rica desk for a minute - coffee is a big export. I remember the minister for trade owned the largest coffee plantation. I remember thinking, "Is that possible that you guys can do that? Can you regulate yourselves?" That seemed to be the issue. That government service was a way to make sure your financial interests were enhanced and protected, which was sad and depressing.

But we had good leadership in the Latin American Bureau. Joe [Joseph] Sullivan was the DAS (Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs) at the time. He was one of the smartest people that I've ever worked with. He's ambassador now to Zimbabwe. Joe was up to be an ambassador to be sent out. With both Senator Helms's and Senator [Christopher] Dodd's staffs, there was someone from each side in an unlikely, unholy alliance; they were convinced that Joe had played some role that they thought was inappropriate in the past related to Central American policy. They were going to block him. It was such a demoralizing thing for all of us, who thought he was so smart, and wonderful, and liked him so much, and wanted to see him succeed. But it also made you realize that people could be blocked very easily for no particular reason from moving ahead in their career.

I did the Nicaragua desk for a while, and then moved from there. I could probably even have more

interesting things to say about what the relationship was, but, I moved from there to be work on the Chile desk for a few months, and then moved up to be special assistant to Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, Tim Wirth.

*Q: Well, with Nicaragua, did you have the feeling that this was a focal point of our foreign policy at one point and that after it was done everybody washed their hands of it and moved on?*

LOAR: Well, I do think AID had a good strong mission there and a good strong mission director. There was real interest in rebuilding the economy, establishing rule of law, helping to build a court system, and investing in civil society. But, there was constant pressure from the Hill, constant pressure from Senator Helms's staff not to release that money. So it was a tremendous battle. They had a huge AID mission led by Janet Ballantyne, who was terrific and now is number two over at AID, I think [Counselor to the Administrator of USAID].

But it was a long road, and it wasn't helped by the government of Nicaragua, itself. They didn't seem to be committed to reform, and still had incredibly high poverty rates, and a fair amount of arms. One of the issues was on civilian military affairs on trying to disarm the former combatants, and that seemed to be a very, very slow thing.

We also had ICITAP training (Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program). One of these was in rule of law, and others were in judicial training, and in law enforcement training. That was all going ahead at a very, very slow pace, and I thought it was kind of depressing. At the El Salvador desk, where I had a friend, they were making progress, and they are still making progress now. It had to do with the government itself.

*Q: Was there any word of wisdom, or something about why was Helms was so down on Nicaragua?*

LOAR: The word was that Helms actually had Foreign Service Nationals in our embassy in Managua faxing anything that they thought he should know about up to his staff, which I thought was stunning. But of course, that was just a rumor. No one knew that for sure.

The feeling was that Helms felt about Nicaragua just like he felt towards Cuba: the Communists had taken away things that these people owned, and they should be giving those back to them. It was not Helms thought that the U.S. didn't believe in that; our embassy team was heavily engaged in trying to return the expropriated properties; but the return of the expropriated property to both Nicaraguans and U.S. citizens became the reason for everything and the overwhelming issue. And nothing anyone could do was ever energetic enough. It was the same feeling I think that the Cuban Americans feel who've had their properties taken away. These are legitimate concerns. You know, people had sugar plantations confiscated.

It was interesting because in Mexico, I had the aide to Humberto Ortega defect to me, so I had no great respect for the Ortega brothers myself. So I knew some of the stories about Humberto Ortega. His aide had laid out the corruption and the money that was going off to other bank accounts. So it wasn't that I had any great respect for the Sandinistas or the Ortega brothers. It's just that there were other issues in their relationship, and that Senator Helms really refused to move forward on

any of the reconstruction pieces and the rebuilding of the civil society until and unless these issues were covered first. I think that was his standard. and he's never backed off of that, and really wanted to withhold the aid. I think it was a very hard thing because the Bush administration really wanted to move it.

*Q: Well then, you moved and then there was the election. Did that change things? Wirth came in with the Clinton administration.*

LOAR: Right, Tim Wirth. They set up a new undersecretary position, Undersecretary for Global Affairs. Tim Wirth had been a congressman, and then a liberal Democrat, senator from Colorado, known for his work on the environment. He set up this new (G) Global Affairs.

I think they were in operation for a whole year before I came up there, and I came up sometime in '93-'94, I think. Rose Likins had been up there as the top person, the executive assistant, and then Andy [Andrew] Sens. Andy Sens had known me from the Latin American Bureau, and I was totally surprised that I'd been considered as a candidate for those jobs, because I didn't think that was a good fit, but I was very, very flattered and ended up liking working for Tim Wirth, who I admire a great deal.

**FREDERICK A. BECKER**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Managua (1994-1998)**

*Frederick A. Becker was born in Missouri. He graduated from Washington College in St. Louis, and Berkeley and Claremont Graduate Schools. After entering the Foreign Service in 1975, his postings abroad included Bucharest, Brasilia, Quito, Panama City, and Managua. He was interviewed in 2004 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: What about say Nicaragua, what could you do?*

BECKER: First of all, we had to keep policy on track and our policy was to promote institutional recovery in Nicaragua. As I said, there were pressures on all sides to do this, to do that, to work with one group or another group. The political divisions in the United States threatened to exacerbate the political divisions within Nicaragua, depending upon how we applied our economic assistance. A lot of our aid was in the form of development assistance, attempting to build democratic institutions such as an independent judiciary and legislature and government capacity to deliver benefits to a destitute and war-weary populace. Shortly after I came on board, there was a major falling out between AID and the Organization of American States, which operated its own development and conflict resolution unit for Nicaragua. The unit was named CIAV -- the Spanish acronym for International Committee for Assistance and Verification, I believe. It had been created in the late '80s, initially to observe elections in Nicaragua, and later to promote peaceful reconciliation between the country's warring factions. CIAV was embraced by U.S. conservatives, especially Senator Helms, as a tool for funneling U.S. aid to the anti-Sandinistas, the ex-contras, in

the post-conflict period so as to promote the “right” kind of people and forces in postwar Nicaragua. CIAV was funded out of the AID budget, and actually morphed into a fairly effective force for reconciliation and reconstruction in Nicaragua. At its largest, CIAV consisted of about 15 expatriates, mainly Argentines, Uruguayans and Chileans, and some 100 Nicaraguans. We at State found ourselves caught in the middle between CIAV, an arm of an international organization supported by influential U.S. conservatives, and AID, which was very uncomfortable with the brand of development that this organization was promoting and the degree of policy and operational independence it exerted from the funding agency. AID decided to bring an independent CIAV to heel in the only way it knew how – cut off funding and terminate the program. It reminded me of AID’s discomfort through the years with funding AIFLD, the AFL-CIO’s union organizing arm in Latin America.

With the disconnect between AID and the OAS over CIAV worsening in Washington, I was asked to put together a mission to visit Nicaragua and survey CIAV’s accomplishments and needs. The mission included my AID counterpart, the deputy director in charge of Central American programs, and a senior adviser working for USOAS, the U.S. Mission to the OAS. That senior advisor happened to be a political appointee assigned to our OAS mission, Roger Noriega, who is now WHA assistant secretary. Roger had been a Republican staffer for House Foreign Affairs Committee and a strong supporter of the Nicaraguan *contras* before his appointment to the State Department by the Bush I administration. I met Roger on the eve of our departure for Nicaragua. Since he had worked with the *contras* during much of the 1980s, he knew a lot of the players down there. My objective for the review of the CIAV program was to reconcile the deep political divide between AID and OAS, which threatened to undermine almost a billion dollars of assistance then flowing to Nicaragua. My bosses told me to knock some sense into my two colleagues, if I could, secure a compromise and get the program back on track. The CIAV program wasn’t a billion dollars, but it was a very visible element of our commitment to Nicaragua’s reconstruction. If it were dissolved, one could anticipate the entire AID program in Central America falling into disarray and disrepute.

*Q: What type of things were they doing?*

BECKER: Their mission was officially “repatriation, resettlement and rehabilitation,” with particular attention to the former *contras*. They were also engaged in demobilizing armed groups and organizing community housing and other self-help projects, trying to reconstruct villages destroyed by the war through cooperative self-help efforts. In many instances, this required getting Sandinistas and *contras* in the same community to work together. Interestingly enough, many of those same individuals are working today in Colombia on community development and disarmament projects. The OAS-CIAV team had become adept at getting in and gaining credibility with disparate groups, even though their overall political orientation and *raison d’etre* leaned toward the conservative side of the spectrum. They had some very innovative programs, which didn’t sit well with some of the bureaucrats in AID, which didn’t like seeing its development funds being used in ways it hadn’t specifically approved. For instance, AID didn’t like community housing projects generally, but preferred to work through market mechanisms. They were also concerned about the pro-*contra* political tinge of some disarmament and reinsertion programs, which provoked some Democrats on the Hill to try to cut off what they saw as a partisan support program. Conversely, the congressional conservatives who backed CIAV

were uncomfortable with the degree to which the organization worked with Sandinista community groups.

When I finally got to Nicaragua with my team, I found out that CIAV was much less partisan in practice than it appeared, and that there was some real progress taking place at the grass roots. This was one of the few programs that were making a real impact in the countryside, which was still beset by low-level violence between former combatants of various stripes. Indeed, many former combatants had turned away from politics and into banditry. Our mission succeeded in bringing OAS and AID a little bit closer together, at least to the extent that AID reaffirmed its funding of the program and, on the basis of our mission, was better able to justify its support for CIAV on the Hill. I ended up making some fast friends in Nicaragua and gained a much greater appreciation for what was going on in that country. My hands-on exposure to Nicaragua while working in Central American Affairs laid the groundwork for my assignment to our embassy in Managua in 1994.

*Q: Did you get a feel, how had the Contra leadership developed? I mean this is always a bit iffy. I've never quite understood. You knew where the Sandinistas were coming from, but what were you getting from the Contras at this stage?*

BECKER: Well, in the early '90s the Chamorro government was committed to national reconciliation and reconstruction to overcome the wartime divisions in the country. However, they didn't have sufficient power to impose any particular solution on the Sandinistas, who remained a powerful force. The government also had to work with large numbers of returned exiles who represented very conservative elements and in some cases were allies of the *contras*. Moderate political figures as well were trying to return to Nicaragua after a decade of exile. Most of the returnees had been dispossessed by the Sandinistas, and were intent on recovering their property if not their former political and social status. It was a delicate political atmosphere for the Chamorro government, which I'm not sure was totally appreciated in the United States. Indeed, one of the major issues we confronted was how to deal with the question of compensation or return of property that had been seized by the Sandinistas during the '80s. The confiscated properties had been handed out, often without formal title transfer, to Sandinista supporters. Settling old scores was an issue with which the democratic government, a government we wanted very much to succeed, was saddled. There were probably thousands of parcels of seized property, resulting in well over 1,000 claims by American citizens for their return or, alternatively, for just compensation in accordance with international law. This problem was exacerbated pressures from conservative elements on the Hill to allow any Nicaraguan who became a U.S. citizen after his property had been confiscated to be accorded the same rights as a U.S. citizen at the time of confiscation. Of course, we had a growing body of Nicaraguans who were taking up U.S. citizenship, in part to get the backing of the U.S. government for the return of their property. Many of them wanted the return of property and they refused compensation, which they saw would be devalued by Nicaragua's unstable currency and uncertain political future.

Although I had no direct contact with or observation of the *contra* movement at the time of its origins or during the civil war, my overall impression, gained from observing them at a distance during the '80s and more directly in the post-war context, was that the movement's leadership had been pulled together from a hodge podge of largely anti-democratic forces that had influence during the Somoza dictatorship that preceded the Sandinista revolution of '79. Many were

associated with the Nicaraguan National Guard, which had lost any legitimacy it might have had by becoming Somoza's personal army. Poor, landless, largely illiterate peasants formed the bulk of the *contra* military force. Most had been ousted from their lands, which had been given to Sandinista political supporters, had been conscripted into the Sandinista army or had been forced to join Sandinista political organizations. I had always thought we had very little justification for supporting the contra leadership in Honduras or in Miami to effect regime change in Nicaragua. Under the Reagan administration's policy, they were merely a means to an end – overthrow of the Sandinistas at any cost. For the *contra* leaders, alliance with the U.S. was also a means to an end – restoration of their political power in Nicaragua. Democracy was not a consideration for either partner.

*Q: Were we concerned that the National Guard types the right wing might assert their authority and replace the Sandinistas and we'd end up with a nasty government whichever way or what was happening?*

BECKER: I don't think this was a policy consideration by the '90s. One must recall that the overthrow of Somoza and his supporters was achieved through a national revolt, which the Sandinistas hijacked after '79. There had been hope in this period that the Sandinistas would accept a less than dominant role in a post-Somoza political coalition, but they held most of the weapons and were prepared to use force, not only against Somoza's supporters and the land-owning oligarchy but also against the Sandinistas' democratic allies. There was little doubt that the old regime types, who were thoroughly discredited, could reassert themselves in the '90s. There are certainly some parallels between Nicaragua's experiences in the '90s and what we might expect in a post-Castro Cuba. There were severe tensions between those who had returned from Miami after a decade of exile and those who had stayed in Nicaragua and co-existed with the Sandinistas. There was always suspicion in some quarters that those who had survived under the Sandinistas were somehow more corrupt, more opportunistic and less politically reliable than those who left the country.

*Q: This is exile versus those who stay, this is true in every country that has this. Well, in the time you were there how did you see this play out in Nicaragua?*

BECKER: I saw conditions play out with remarkably positive results, albeit much more hesitantly and incrementally than anybody hoped. Our billion dollars in U.S. aid laid a pretty good foundation, but certainly didn't turn the tide. The Sandinistas were and remained a formidable political force. There were a lot of Nicaraguans, however you measured it, 20-30% of the population, who were genuine beneficiaries of Sandinista policies in one way or another, and would continue to support Sandinista politicians out of gratitude or conviction. Our assistance to institutions helped to establish viable economic reforms in which the state-heavy, state-controlled economy was returned in large part to private hands. Interestingly enough, some of those hands were in fact Sandinistas, who became overnight entrepreneurs. Harvard University had founded a satellite institution in the Managua suburbs in the '70s, called INCAE, which offered Nicaragua's first masters program in business administration. The Sandinistas basically forced INCAE to relocate -- to Costa Rica. INCAE reopened its Nicaragua campus in the early '90s, and among its early graduates were several former Sandinista *commandantes*. The joke was that after completing the ruin of Nicaragua's economy in the '80s, they were finally learning some useful economic and

entrepreneurial skills to apply in the democratic '90s.

What happened in postwar, democratic Nicaragua was that the political pull toward the center divided and isolated both the extreme right and left wings of the spectrum. Centrist and conservative parties, grouped around the Chamorro government, attracted all but small elements of the unreconciled right wing, while the far-left Sandinistas left split once they had been thrust into the opposition. The hard core of the Sandinista movement remained quite loyal to the unreconstructed policies of Daniel Ortega, but other Sandinista leaders and institutions chose to find a place in the new democratic order. Early on, the police were formally separated from the army. Under Daniel's brother Humberto, the army retained a strong Sandinista orientation, but the police developed a much more pragmatic and professional ethic regarding their proper role in society. Although I was handling Central American issues during the period in question, I focused disproportionate attention on Nicaragua, because the problems of that country seemed to demand an extraordinary degree of hand-holding and management from the U.S. Most of the other countries under my direction were absorbing much less U.S. aid and seemed to be managing their problems with less tumult. Nicaragua was always the region's lightning rod, both in terms of U.S. domestic politics and in terms of managing their own problems.

*Q: Did you feel Helms' staff, I know one of his was quite prominent at one time.*

BECKER: Debra DeMoss was the most visible Helms staffer.

*Q: Yes. Was this, did you feel that that this staff was essentially hostile to what we were trying to do or how did you feel about that?*

BECKER: The Central American portfolio at State was subjected to a great deal of micromanagement and bickering from both sides of the political aisle. Staffers for Democratic Senator Dodd were just as hostile as the Helms staff to what the United States was trying to do in the region. Each side had its own favorite sons and *betes noires* in Central America. I concluded that if we are truly hated and reviled on both extremes, then we must be doing something right. We had very good professionals leading the State Department and in AID at the time. Brian Atwood was the AID administrator. He had formerly headed the National Democratic Institute, and I think he had a very good sense of what countries like Nicaragua needed for development. We had a very professional Foreign Service leadership at State as well, including WHA Assistant Secretary Alex Watson. We were very supportive of the Chamorro government's efforts to steer clear of extremist politics. We knew that the Helms staff did not like Chamorro. They saw her as a weak reed too willing to compromise than to deal firmly with the Sandinistas, a political symbol rather than a strong leader. In the run-up to the '89 elections in Nicaragua, the Helms staff had favored a no-nonsense, ideologically anti-Sandinista candidate, Enrique Bolaños, to challenge Daniel Ortega for the presidency, but Chamorro won the nomination and later the election. Right-wing hostility toward her continued well into the '90s. On the liberal side, some Democratic Hill staffers saw our reconstruction aid funneled toward groups that were too closely identified with the *contra* cause. Yet we managed to steer a moderate path, supporting Chamorro's centrist administration. We could confidently claim by 1993-94 that political institutions were beginning to strengthen, independent judicial bodies were developing, market mechanisms and economic performance were improving, political violence had subsided, and little by little investor confidence in

Nicaragua was beginning to return, even though the land tenure question was still far from resolution.

*Q: Was that getting anywhere when you were doing this?*

BECKER: One of the most significant concessions to conservative critics of U.S. policy, perhaps to try to moderate Senator Helms' opposition to the confirmation of some senior Clinton Administration nominees, was State's decision to stray from established international law and precedent in advocating on behalf of the *confiscados* in Nicaragua, those who sought return of or compensation for properties seized by the Sandinistas. Under pressure from Helms and other conservatives, we went beyond our narrow, well-defined obligation to support the claims of those who had been U.S. citizens at the time of such confiscations to include Nicaraguan claimants who subsequently took on U.S. citizenship. As quickly as we were able to resolve claims filed by U.S. citizens, new claims by freshly minted U.S. citizens would arise. Faced with an overwhelming workload, State satisfied many of the demands and concerns of the political right by establishing an office, unique in the Foreign Service, at our embassy in Managua that did nothing but handle U.S. citizen property claims. It was staffed by one FSO and several Nicaraguan employees. We used all the creativity we could muster to find ways of dealing with this large and political influential constituency. We didn't want to push the Chamorro government to the wall by insisting that it resolve the issue in a particular manner. After all, the Sandinistas had created the problem, but the Chamorro government that we backed had inherited the obligation to solve it. I do believe we were able to mollify some of the worst, some of the most extreme the demands by this dispossessed group by providing a sympathetic ear, a loud voice, and a helping hand at the embassy.

*Q: I would think that you would have a problem with officers or with dealing with them including yourself. I've had to in various positions as a chief of consular section had to deal with what I use Teddy Roosevelt's term hyphenated American. These are people who are Americans, but their heart and soul are really in the other country and they're using the United States as a weapon to get theirs. It must have been hard, these are not nice people for the most part.*

BECKER: It was exceedingly hard, much more so than for most American citizens, who for the most part had relatively little interest in returning to Nicaragua and picking up their lives and properties. However, many of the recently naturalized Americans maintained strong roots in Nicaragua and would not settle for government bonds that promised to pay out five years to 15 years down the road. They wanted their property back. It's interesting that eventually members of the Somoza family became U.S. citizens and sought to follow the same route. The Somozas as an extended family laid claim to something like 40% of Nicaraguan property, superseding the claims of all the other *confiscados* combined. Indeed, Somoza had carried out his own confiscation policy against his political enemies, albeit on a smaller scale. Were the family to receive either land back or compensation for what they had lost, the amount would have literally broken the back of the Chamorro government and the democratic process, and set the Nicaraguan economy back well before the '70s. However, the new, expansive State Department interpretation of international claims law was not applied to the Somozas. We refused to take up any Somoza family claims, even though they asserted that they had rights equal to other U.S. citizen *confiscados*. They even tried to exercise political clout on the Hill, but even the most unreconstructed conservatives there were

reluctant to take up the claims of the former Nicaraguan dictator.

*Q: Was that congressman still around the roommate of Somoza at West Point or something like that or was he?*

BECKER: He was still around. I'm trying to remember his name, but obviously Somoza had well-placed links to various political actors.

*Q: He's not dead, but still.*

BECKER: You're talking about sons, married daughters, in-laws, cousins as well as the senior political group around him. The Nicaraguans were always wrestling with who constituted a "Somocista," because the Sandinistas had never made a definitive list of those individuals who were "guilty by association" with the Somoza family, for whom there would be no access to judicial recourse after their political and economic rights were lifted. Since there was no definitive list, those who were perhaps on the margins of the Somoza power structure sometimes presented themselves to us as being much farther from the center than they may have been. The same could be said for the Sandinistas, those who made the policies and those who were simply followers and beneficiaries of those policies. We ran into some problems when we were trying to lease residential property for the American embassy staff. We had to conduct exhaustive title searches, not only on the owner of record, but also on who had owned this property previously. We ran into some potentially embarrassing situations, in which we had to either break leases or decline to lease a desirable property because it had been illegally confiscated at some time in the past.

*Q: Who was our ambassador there?*

BECKER: When I arrived in the Office of Central American Affairs, we did not have an ambassador to Nicaragua. It was virtually impossible to confirm a nominee because of the divisions in Congress which I described earlier. We had a *chargé d'affaires* for an extended period of time.

*Q: Who was that?*

BECKER: Ron Godard, who later became an ambassador and is now head of the OAS General Assembly coordination unit with which I'm currently involved. He gave way in 1993 to John Maisto, now our permanent representative to the OAS. I had worked with John when he was DCM in Panama during the '80s, and he recruited me from Central American Affairs to come to Panama as his political counselor in '94. Because I had a labor affairs background, I had been presented with an option to go to Brussels as labor counselor. I took one hard look at the situation in Brussels, as I was familiar with it from my days in EUR/RPE, and took the chance of jumping into the Nicaraguan cauldron full-time. It was a decision I never regretted, even though I gave up my only real chance for a Western European assignment.

*Q: Well, one is fun and the other is really a professional challenge.*

BECKER: That's true. Besides, the weather in Nicaragua was generally better than the weather in

Brussels.

*Q: How about, what was happening in El Salvador?*

BECKER: El Salvador was going through an ostensibly similar process of reconciliation and reconstruction with some major distinctions. First, we had supported the elected government with substantial assistance during their civil war. Our aid prevented both political and economic collapse. That support continued. Secondly, there was a formal peace process in El Salvador that resulted in a signed agreement between the FMLN, the communist insurgent movement, and the government. The agreement laid out conditions for the reconstruction and provided for a certain amount of power sharing. It also called for a truth commission that would look into human rights excesses on all sides, particularly excesses by government forces during the '80s against noncombatant citizens. There was a process, and it included a degree of introspection and housecleaning in El Salvador that never took place in Nicaragua. The peace process was very *ad hoc* in Nicaragua and involved little more than providing for internationally monitored elections that brought Chamorro to power. There was a winner and a loser, but it did not change the configuration of power in Nicaraguan society. There continued to be a tug-of-war between entrenched Sandinista interests and the interests of the newly formed and very unstable elected government. The Chamorro government's victory had been made possible by a supportive coalition of 14 democratic political parties in '89 and '90. Once victory was in the bag, these parties found that their only point of solidarity was to win the election over the Sandinistas. These parties then went their separate ways and proceeded to fight as much among themselves as they did with the Sandinistas. Chamorro was unable to keep this fractured coalition together to build the new Nicaragua, and so had to make some very difficult decisions on the future of her country without a solid political base of support. In that sense, the Nicaraguan situation was fraught with much more uncertainty. The potential for weak governance and disintegration was much greater than in the Salvadoran situation.

We had much more confidence that the Salvadorans were in charge of their fate and were laying a solid groundwork for reconstruction than the Nicaraguans. That said, the return of Nicaraguan exiles to their country was a more positive development, because they brought back to Nicaragua money in some cases, but more often expertise and a commitment to democratic life and practices than the returnees to El Salvador. The exiles from El Salvador were not of the moneyed class; they were by and large poor and uneducated. Some Salvadorans brought back elements of gang culture and behavior from the U.S. cities where they had settled, and there was an explosion of gang violence and lawlessness in El Salvador that surprisingly we did not see in Nicaragua. Nicaragua was relatively peaceful and relatively safe. There were a few areas of the countryside which were still unstable, where former combatants on both sides had turned to banditry and political revenge taking, but by and large Nicaragua was a relative sea of calm compared with El Salvador, and compared with the conflict that was still ongoing in Guatemala between government forces and indigenous insurgents.

*Q: What was happening in Guatemala?*

BECKER: Guatemala, as you know, had lived with a 30 plus year insurgency that government forces, with all their determination and technical advantage, could not eliminate. The government

never had any compunction about using brute force and fear against indigenous populations in an effort to break the back of the insurgency, which claimed inspiration from both Marxism and nativism. Government forces perpetrated uncounted massacres of whole villages, and vocal critics of government policies faced imprisonment or assassination. The insurgents were never powerful enough to topple the government, but the government was never able to win sufficient support from the indigenous community to defeat the insurgents. Both sides basically became exhausted from their long-term struggle and a peace process fostered by the Organization of American States was cobbled together. Although the U.S. role in the overthrow of Guatemala's democratic government in 1954 helped pave the way for the 30-year war, we subsequently distanced ourselves politically from successive Guatemalan governments. We had a policy of withholding assistance from the military and police. We fostered human rights standards that the government was never able to meet, but were never able to get the government to seriously consider a peace track. Guatemala seemed to have sharper class, economic and ethnic divisions that seemed to defy any real unified solution to the country's problem. By most measures, it was the naturally richest country in Central America. A physically beautiful country, with great tourist potential, it has never really been able to solve its domestic problems or offer its people a promising future. Even after the peace process was launched in the mid-'90s, no strong reformist movement emerged to bring elements of the opposition into the government or even into the political mainstream. Political violence in the countryside turned basically to banditry and continued instability. The forces for public order, the army and police, have not taken any serious steps to reform and modernize themselves, and few government leaders have pressured them to do so. Evangelical religious groups have made great inroads among Guatemala's indigenous population, fueling conflict with the Catholic Church and deepening existing divisions. Perhaps 25% or 30% of the population of Guatemala is not Catholic. That figure seems to be growing.

*Q: Honduras?*

BECKER: Honduras was viewed by almost everybody in the office as a sort of backwater country. We tinkered with solutions to Honduras' economic problems, but the country seemed impervious to most outside influences. I seldom had to focus attention on Honduran issues. There just did not seem to be a great deal of policy interest, and Honduras didn't present us with any problems that required immediate fixes. There was no large group of Honduran exiles in the United States, and thus little pressure from that front. The Hill continued to raise the issue of alleged Honduran government complicity in the civil war in Nicaragua, especially the use of Honduran territory to support U.S. and *contra* military operations against the Sandinistas. We are now hearing once again the allegations that Ambassador Negroponte was aware of and abetted Honduran death squad activities during his tenure there in the early '80s. Those stories of course made the rounds in Nicaragua as well. Maybe the one issue that engaged everybody's interest in the early '90s was the trilateral dispute among Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador over fishing and maritime rights in the Gulf of Fonseca, which touches on all three countries. The issue impeded the prospects of any serious economic integration in Central America. An International Court of Justice award about 1990 of territory disputed by El Salvador and Honduras ceded large tracts of land, relatively large for those countries, to Honduras with populations that had always lived under the Salvadoran flag. This award resolved legal issues flowing from the so-called "Soccer War" in 1969, but the political bad taste that had festered for 30 years remained.

*Q: How about the last, Panama?*

BECKER: Panama was always on its own track. As I said, responsibility for Panama had gravitated into and out of the Office of Central American Affairs. We were of course very much interested in a smooth treaty transition during the '80s and '90s. We were helping Panama to reconstruct its democratic system and public forces after Operation Just Cause, which dismantled the Noriega dictatorship and the Panama Defense Forces. It was the one country where we had a substantial investment footprint. Panama seemed to be on a fairly positive track in the mid-'90s. There were no real political crises, and the country was moving ahead economically. We still had the lingering issue of Panamanian claims from the U.S. invasion, that the number of Panamanian casualties and disappearances approached 100,000 rather than the 3,000 that had been solidly documented. There were always ripples in Panama about the still visible U.S. military presence, including whether the U.S. really intended to abide by our treaty obligations and leave the country in 1999. But that's a story for another day.

*Q: How much did you feel from the White House paid attention to what was going on? Were you way off the radar?*

BECKER: After the peace accords in El Salvador and the democratic institutions in Nicaragua were under way, helped along by huge infusion of reconstruction assistance in '91 and '92, one can say that even the dearest country object of our affection is entitled to about 15 minutes of fame and a billion dollars of aid -- and then we move on to the next crisis. The next crisis was Haiti. Aristide was toppled by the military in the early '90s after he had won popular election as president. When he was reinstated to power with U.S. and OAS backing, around 1994 I believe, we felt we had to make a major statement in support of Haiti's future stability and economic viability. You may recall that there were only two foreign policy issues that the Clinton presidential campaign ran on in '92. One was support for NAFTA and the other was concern for Haiti. Both had major domestic implications for the United States. The concern for Haiti was probably less for the country itself, which has always had a pitiful existence, but for the fact there were an awful lot of boat people landing on the shores of South Florida. We really felt the need to stabilize Haiti at home so as to block this flow of terribly impoverished Haitians to our shores. Indeed, we had ordered our Coast Guard to actually turn back a lot of the Haitian boats on the high seas.

In order to make a credible economic and political statement in Haiti, we went through a wrenching exercise of reprogramming large amounts of economic and technical assistance, most of which was pulled from reconstruction programs in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Honduras -- the countries where we had made major statements of interest in 1990 and '91. By '93, '94 and '95, we found many of our Central American programs short of cash and short of high-level attention. Some were abbreviated and some were literally wiped off the map, as the Western Hemisphere bureau shifted very dramatically to Haiti. The reprogramming did not proceed quietly, however. Key members of Congress who had gone to the wall to approve reconstruction aid for Central America a few years earlier bitterly opposed the shift of attention to Haiti. The Republicans, in particular, distrusted Aristide and refused to approve fresh funding for Haiti. The Clinton administration, which had declared Haiti a top priority, was left with little choice but to undertake an unpopular and ultimately counterproductive reprogramming.

*Q: Well, then in '94 you left there and went to Nicaragua?*

BECKER: Yes. I might add one other program that was well worth mentioning during this period. While deputy director of Central American affairs, I got involved in a major program that we were trying to get off the ground to humanitarian removal of land mines that were a product and a legacy of the civil wars in the region. Most of them were of Soviet manufacture or were home-made land mines, although we had a role in mining harbors on Nicaragua's western coast. The land mines that were left in Nicaragua along the borders and in the conflict areas were of great danger to any kind of economic reconstruction. Unfortunately, the maps and records of where the land mines were laid were pretty poor. In some cases the authorities didn't want to share what information they did have. We felt that integral to the reconstruction of the country was removal of these land mines. I became very much involved in an effort to put together a land mine removal program. The UN had one in other parts of the world and we worked with other countries bilaterally, basically training their military forces to remove land mines. The principal focus in Central America was Nicaragua, where most of the land mines were. But we had no bilateral relations with the Nicaraguan military, a legacy of the Sandinista era. We put together a program through the Organization of American States, most specifically the Inter-American Defense Board (IADB), to train Nicaraguan soldiers to remove land mines in their own country. The IADB recruited primarily South American trainers, whom we ran through training courses at Fort Benning, Georgia and in other sites in the United States. Basically, we created a number of filters that allowed us to put together, I think, a fairly effective, high-impact, high visibility land mine removal program that eventually was expanded to Honduras.

The Salvadorans took another route. They decided to contract a private company to remove their land mines. We're talking here about a multiyear program because you don't remove land mines overnight. The OAS-IADB programs are still in existence today. They're still removing land mines and making the cleared areas safe for agricultural reclamation and for basic movements of human beings. I wanted to highlight that program as an important and innovative humanitarian effort. Eventually the mine removal program was incorporated under a Department-led interagency committee that set worldwide priorities and approved funds for land mine removal, assisted by legislation sponsored yearly by Senator Leahy from Vermont.

*Q: Well, then in '94 you were off, is that right?*

BECKER: In the fall of '94 I arrived in Nicaragua. It almost seemed as if I had been working Nicaragua for much of the previous two years. I was very familiar with the country. I knew a lot of the political leaders by then, thanks to Roger Noriega and his contacts. I was well received by a host of Nicaraguans whom he knew. I'll always be grateful to Roger for taking the time to open doors that would have taken me months and months to do on my own.

*Q: You were there from '94 to?*

BECKER: To '98.

*Q: Being on the ground when you got there, what did you see? Noriega, was the ambassador when you arrived?*

BECKER: No, no, John Maisto was the ambassador.

*Q: Oh, John Maisto.*

BECKER: John Maisto was the ambassador when I arrived in '94. He had arrived in '93.

*Q: This is tape nine, side one with Rick Becker. Well, so now we're back in Nicaragua, what, I mean we've already covered sort of what you were doing. How did you find the political atmosphere when you got on the ground dealing with this?*

BECKER: When I started dealing with it on a daily basis, it became very clear to me that the political, social and economic fissures in Nicaragua were much more intractable than they appeared from the outside. The ability to make progress on any major front was a real challenge for the U.S. mission. We had a fairly large embassy, with a large AID component. We also had a very large Peace Corps contingent for Central America. Keep in mind that although we had a small defense attaché office headed by an army colonel, we did not have reciprocal military relations or any military assistance programs. Nor did we have any cooperative law enforcement programs, which would have involved the Nicaraguan police. These were all to come at some future point in time. So, it was not a full service embassy. We focused much more on developmental issues and on providing whatever material and moral support we could to the Chamorro government. By the time I arrived, the Chamorro government had already been in power for four years. The 14 political parties that had supported Chamorro in '89 and '90 had largely dispersed to the winds. They were all pursuing their own individual agendas. Some of them were openly cooperating with Sandinistas on the other side of the political divide. By the same token, the Sandinistas were divided politically. Those who accepted continuation of Daniel Ortega's leadership, a hard line towards the United States, a critical stance on a Nicaragua founded on the free market and pluralistic democracy, and those who wanted to work within the new rules of the game. There were *commandantes* on both sides of this divide. The government was steadily losing popular support, because expectations at the beginning were very high and, by virtue of the fact that they were a successor government after years of authoritarian rule, they had made some hard decisions that moved key political elements into opposition.

Two weeks after I arrived in country, President Chamorro had a very public dispute and falling out with the Ortega brothers on Army Day, in early September. She publicly announced that Humberto Ortega, the head of the Nicaraguan army since 1979, would be retired early in 1995. She was going to promulgate new regulations that would limit the term of the army chief to five years. The new clock had begun to tick the day Chamorro took office, in January 1990. The announcement was made in a full-scale public venue, with the Sandinista high command and troops in review, with the entire diplomatic corps and political class present, and with the media recording the event on national TV and radio. Violeta Chamorro is about 5' 10", a slim, statuesque woman who always dressed in white, a practice she adopted when she was campaigning for the presidency. She wasn't going to dress in widow's weeds, although she parlayed the immense popularity of her journalist husband who had been assassinated by Somoza's henchmen in 1978. Her husband became a national martyr, a symbol of the revolution against Somoza. She too was regarded as a national hero. When she stood up to her full height, she towered over the two Ortega

brothers. By their body language and by their words on Army Day, they physically threatened her with dire consequences. I know some of the diplomats on the stage had to step in to shield the president from the two irate Sandinista leaders. She had the last word: "I am the president of the republic, and my word is law."

This was the beginning of a major transition in Nicaragua and in the Nicaraguan military. It also pointed to the fact that during the previous four years there had been an extremely tenuous, compromise-filled relationship between the democratic forces and the Sandinistas. Civility between the two camps was paper thin at best. Conditions were deteriorating in some respects, even though economically the country was growing and there was increased confidence that the government would survive until the end of Chamorro's term in 1996. There was no constitutional provision for reelection, so governmental processes were already showing signs of stalling, as ministers and other senior officials began to chart their own agendas for the future. Chamorro herself was showing signs of being tired of her position as president. She was not cut out to be the hard-charging president of a fractious republic. I have a theory about transitional democratic governments of this type. Their leaders need to recognize that they in fact perform an invaluable role in a country's political development. They are given the opportunity to set the country on a new track, hopefully on a better track, after a sustained period of authoritarian rule, but they should never allow themselves to think that somehow their continuation in power is essential to the country's well being. Yet Chamorro's nephew, Antonio Lacayo, was minister of government – a sort of prime minister. His mother-in-law the president had delegated to him a great deal of power and authority to direct the day-to-day operations of government, but he wielded this authority in a somewhat cynical, self-serving and tough minded fashion. Lacayo began making noises about running for president on his mother's coattails. By then the government was very unpopular. Some hard decisions had been made that had put the country back on track and established some semblance of stability and normality. The Chamorro government's political capital was very low and its based of support quite thin. According to my theory, it was time for the groundbreakers to move on and pass the baton to a democratic government that was committed to consolidating those gains in a less personalistic and more structured fashion.

The embassy started making plans to oversee what would be the first succession of one democratically elected Nicaraguan government to another in that country's history. This was a major undertaking and it required very clear, forthright embassy leadership. Again, we were not exactly on Washington's scope, except as the target of occasional sniping by congressional liberals and conservatives. We needed to secure the funds and political support from Washington that would be necessary to help the Nicaraguans solidify those institutions that would have to carry out a smooth and legitimate political transition from one democratic president to another. At all costs, Nicaragua needed to avoid a deterioration of the political climate, with a resurgence of past patterns of violence, from which only the Sandinistas could benefit.

*Q: What was the regime?*

BECKER: One of the great weaknesses of the 1989 elections was that large numbers of Nicaraguans had never participated, did not participate in that political exercise. Many Nicaraguans were still fighting. Others were still in exile. Large numbers of Nicaraguans were still in the United States, Guatemala, Colombia and other countries, awaiting assurances that they

could come home in safety. The political complexion of Nicaragua changed significantly in just the six years that Chamorro was in office. Early in the Sandinista period, the regime had declared all citizens ages 16 and over eligible to vote. They thought they could capture the youth vote. By 1996 most young Nicaraguans – and the country had a young population anyway -- had never voted before. Older Nicaraguans had not had the opportunity to vote under Somoza, and many of them were out of the country or on the battlefield when the Sandinistas held their sham election in 1984 and when Ortega and Chamorro contested the presidency in 1989. We calculated that some 40% of the potential electorate in 1995 had never cast a vote in a democratic or even an undemocratic election in their lives. The embassy, and eventually the U.S. government, thus mobilized a major effort to help Nicaragua carry out a very physically challenging election in a politically divisive environment, in which the Sandinistas were clearly going to run Daniel Ortega again and the democratic forces were in disarray. Chamorro could not run for reelection, and her son-in-law had very little political support even if he had control of the governmental institutions.

The first task was to ensure that all Nicaraguans were registered to vote and that the voting mechanisms and rules were open and transparent to all. The Nicaraguan Supreme Electoral Council was actually a fourth branch of government, alongside the executive, legislative and judicial branches. The council represented a wide array of political opinions, but its head was a Sandinista, one of the so-called moderate or reformist Sandinistas. The Nicaraguans, with our help, had to construct an electoral system from the ground up. The Sandinista system developed for the '89 elections just wouldn't do, even though it had produced a democratic outcome. There was unprecedented collaboration between Nicaraguan and U.S. officials in '95, although there was also a degree of ambivalence regarding our role. To some our assistance was welcomed as a guarantor of fairness and competence, but to others of course United States involvement in the process was repugnant. We did make a major effort to get European countries involved in this effort as well. The European Union countries and the Nordic countries became our active partners in providing electoral support.

*Q: OSCE was.*

BECKER: Well, the OSCE did not operate outside of Europe.

*Q: They wouldn't operate.*

BECKER: Nicaragua had long been a major recipient for European aid programs. Some had been supportive of the Sandinistas throughout the '80s. Some had tried to maintain a degree of neutrality. We were of course always looked at with a certain amount of suspicion because of our anti-Sandinista policies during the '80s, but we developed a good partnership with the Europeans on the electoral front. This was in part an outgrowth of a World Bank-Inter-American Development Bank consultative process on post-conflict assistance to Central America. Every year, in either Paris or Brussels, the donor countries and international financial institutions would meet with senior Nicaraguan government officials to review its national development plan. The donors would pledge assistance to this, that or another project or area of development need. It was an attempt at donor coordination on a massive scale. From this mechanism a master plan for supporting the Nicaraguan elections was extrapolated. Some countries contributed to the physical registration process, others to training election officials and party activists, still others to voter

education, others to electoral observation, while others contributed hardware to print ballots or tally votes. It was a major undertaking. Some of the most fulfilling experiences during my tour were traveling to the hinterlands, way out in the countryside beyond the paved roads, and helping to deliver electoral materials. The embassy was on permanent electoral watch. We sent out teams to observe and report on how the electoral mechanism reached out to the largely illiterate Nicaraguans. These elections enabled them many of them for the first time to participate in the political process.

In the latter stages of the campaign the Nicaraguan army, still under Sandinista leadership, was mobilized to deliver electoral materials to voting sites. Of course, there was the question of security to keep these electoral sites free from partisan violence or banditry. In some parts of the country, the only way people could get to the polls was to travel two days by canoe or foot. In the end, the electoral turnout was 83% -- a tribute to the success of the election mobilization effort and the determination of the Nicaraguan people.

*Q: How did it come out?*

BECKER: The actual ballot -- and I wish I had collected one -- was formidable, probably two and a half feet wide. It contained the color photos of 24 presidential candidates, together with their presumably recognizable party symbols. The threshold for running a candidate was very low. The voter was supposed to sift through these candidates and symbols and make an intelligent choice for president and for a party list from which legislative seats were apportioned. In point of fact, no more than three or four candidates were considered viable, and in the end only two really mattered. One was Daniel Ortega, heading up the official Sandinista party. There were other Sandinista, or let's say formerly Sandinista, groups that also ran candidates on reformist or breakaway platforms. The *Somocistas* tried to raise the old National Liberal Party banner that they used during the '60s and '70s, but weren't able to get more than 1,000 votes. The biggest party was the Constitutionalist Liberal Party, headed by the very dynamic mayor of Managua, Arnoldo Aleman. Aleman was as physically big as the image he projected. He was probably the one political figure in Nicaragua who could match Ortega on a stump. He had a real feel for the people. He was a very popular, very visible mayor. I met him first at a reception in Washington while I was still working on Central American affairs. He blew into the room with his supporters and basically laid waste to the gathering by his force of character, a very impressive individual. Unfortunately, even at the time of his election, we were starting to get rumors out of Miami that he was linked to some less than reputable individuals and that some of his negotiations as mayor of Managua were not quite kosher. However, nobody could really put a finger on it at that time. Recognizing that he had a fairly freewheeling and questionable political reputation in some quarters, Aleman had chosen as his running mate a man much admired in Nicaragua for his ethical, forthright political reputation, a sort of "Mr. Clean." Enrique Bolaños is currently the president of the country, but was Aleman's running mate in '95. Bolaños had been Jesse Helms' preferred standard bearer for the democratic forces in 1989 over Violeta Chamorro, but he had been eased aside as too conservative, too tied to the *contra* cause. Helms never let anybody forget that Bolaños had been his choice.

The Aleman-Bolaños ticket won the election decisively over a rehashed and hastily refurbished Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas in the first round, avoiding a runoff. Ortega tried to make nice with the United States during the campaign, perhaps recognizing that of all of these sins he had

committed during the 1980s, probably the worst in the eyes of Nicaraguans was to show open hostility to the United States. Of all the countries that I have ever served in, the Nicaraguan admiration of the United States was just incredible. This included large chunks of the Sandinista electorate. They were saddened and disappointed and angered when the falling out between their government and the United States occurred. There was always a lingering blame on Ortega for taking his political differences with the U.S. too far. There was also some resentment against the United States for having contributed to the breach, but in fact Nicaraguans would have voted overwhelmingly for any candidate that we said we supported. True to our best instincts, however, we refused to support any single candidate in '95. We stood four-square for the process, in which we were putting big bucks. In those days I believe we had sufficient faith that the Nicaraguans, if they could be brought to the polls, would make the right choices, would continue to reject the Sandinistas in favor of the democratic option. We refused to allow ourselves to become an issue in Nicaragua's domestic political debate.

*Q: Did you find yourself having or the ambassador no longer to state this very clearly?*

BECKER: Yes. We orchestrated this element very carefully. We spent a lot of money and attention and political capital to put in place a credible electoral mechanism and registration process, and we helped to create the means by which a huge percentage of the Nicaraguan public could come to the polls in safety and with clear choices. It was therefore incumbent upon us to maintain the integrity of that process in our political rhetoric as well. As part of our electoral support package, AID brought in five reputable U.S. non-governmental organizations to help the Nicaraguans organize their elections. These NGOs were responsible for guiding the Nicaraguans through the maze of voter registration and education, mobilizing the electorate, creating a transparent electoral process, and building election mechanics. There were the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI), both under the National Endowment for Democracy. There was the Carter Center, which had a great deal of experience in election monitoring, and Jimmy Carter's personal oversight of the '89 elections may have ensured a peaceful, democratic outcome. There was the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), which also had a long and effective history in managing the mechanics of elections. Then there was the Center for Democracy, which had cut its teeth on elections in Eastern Europe. I was familiar with a couple of these organizations from my period as Romanian desk officer, when we were trying to organize some of those elections. In addition to carrying out their own program of support, each of the NGOs set aside a portion of the funds to establish and train the first-ever Nicaraguan electoral observation corps.

So while the international poll watching contingent numbered in the low hundreds at its peak, by election day, the Nicaraguans themselves were able to mobilize a corps of something like 6,000-8,000 avowedly non-partisan observers in a highly partisan environment. This group set themselves the goal of ensuring the integrity of the electoral process at the polls. It was an impressive display of coordination and cooperation among U.S. NGOs, which wanted to leave some legacy behind rather than just a quick in-and-out. The OAS also came in and provided electoral observation that was largely funded by the United States. The American Federation of Teachers, which long had a program of civic education in Nicaraguan schools, used the elections as a laboratory for school-age kids to get first hand knowledge of the electoral process in their own country. One spin-off organization that we helped to foster during this period addressed the new

face and future development of civil-military relations, a think-tank that flowed from our electoral support effort. Indeed, it was a national effort on many levels, which I was amazed and then highly gratified to see that we were supporting.

*Q: What happened afterwards with the election? What happened?*

BECKER: The U.S. administration was so nervous about run-up to the election that they asked John Maisto to stay on as ambassador through the final vote, even though he had been due to leave the summer before the elections. Within the embassy we had had a lot of continuity and effort. As political counselor I had put together an internal working group to plot our electoral strategy. AID, USIA and State Department elements were included. That collaboration in itself was unique in my experience, that these three agencies would work so closely together to design and carry out every element of the U.S. support for the electoral process. It insured that AID programs were well grounded in political reality, and it gave our State political officers the experience of working with and having responsibility for insuring the success of programs, not simply for the usual observation. As a professional development tool, the working group was invaluable. That summer, and I always thought this was part of John Maisto's grand plan, his DCM transferred out and he promoted me from the political counselor job to be the next DCM in Managua. However, I still had to sell this to the incoming ambassador, who was waiting in the wings.

*Q: Who was that?*

BECKER: Lino Gutierrez, currently our ambassador to Argentina. Lino had been selected during the regular process to succeed John. But because John was asked by the administration to stay on, Lino basically had to cool his heels until this electoral effort was finished. After I interviewed with and got the green light from the incoming ambassador that I would be his choice to be DCM, I moved over in the summer of '96. It was a natural transition in one sense, because I was familiar with everything and everybody and I could hit the ground running, to use a too often employed term. But in this case it really was the truth. On the other hand, there's always the temptation to second-guess your successor as the political counselor, to be a super political counselor in the front office. In addition, the fact that I was suddenly supervising personnel at post who were previously my peers required some adjustments on both sides. Friendships become harder to sustain when you are writing someone's performance evaluation. To shed the old hat while trying on the new one is a difficult job, but most of us worked through that transition without missing a beat.

Another advantage to my situation was that the AID director had arrived when I did in '94 and his tenure coincided with mine. There was never a break in AID leadership while I was at post. We were able to establish a cohesive team chemistry early on that carried us through the elections and beyond. It is vitally important for State and AID officers to work smoothly together, in Washington and in the field, and it cannot be taken for granted at the outset given their different bureaucratic cultures.

*Q: How did the new administration work out with Nicaragua?*

BECKER: I indicated that one of the drawbacks facing President Aleman was the fact that he was dogged by rumors of corruption and allegations that some of his key advisors were involved in

questionable, self-aggrandizing activities. The other drawback in a period of consolidation was that he turned out to be just as partisan and confrontational as president as he had been as a candidate and party leader. The friction between Aleman and the Sandinistas emerged very quickly, and the political fault lines that had persisted through the period of Sandinista rule only deepened and sharpened. There was real concern that the new government would proceed with a sense of mandate, based on its 10-plus percentage point victory, and without due regard for the continuing ability of the Sandinistas to be as obstructionist as they possibly could. A lot of these fissures were papered over or partially filled in during the Chamorro years because of her emphasis on reconciliation. Reconciliation was not the highest priority for the Aleman administration. Indeed, Aleman was sometimes almost as hard as his minor coalition partners in the democratic camp as he was on the Sandinistas themselves. His free-wheeling populist style sometimes got in the way of sensible and rational policy making.

*Q: Well, was this something, we were committed to this, were we able to try to consult to anything or were we in a sense out of the game and being an observer?*

BECKER: We were fully committed to working with the new government, to advising the new government to ensure its success. There were some very good people in the new government. Indeed, the victory of Aleman tended to reaffirm to the international community that Nicaragua was on the right path. Nicaraguans weren't going to take a big step backwards by bringing Sandinistas again into the government. Keep in mind that the second generation of post-communist governments in Eastern Europe was in many cases a turn to former, reconstituted communist leaders due to disillusionment with the first, transitional democratic governments. There was fear that Nicaragua would face that kind of retrogression. So the international community, and certainly in the investor community, gave a collective sigh of relief that Nicaraguans had chosen to continue on the democratic and free market path. We saw investment increase. We saw a great deal of economic activity -- shopping malls, upscale housing projects, tourism, consumer goods, agro-industry and small scale manufacturing aimed at the export market. There was new investment in the apparel industry, similar to what was taking place elsewhere in Central America. Nicaragua became an assembly point for finished apparel entering the U.S. market. For the Nicaraguans, these economic opportunities had not existed beforehand.

While some protectionist labor groups in the United States argued that much of the new job creation was a new form of wage slavery, and that American jobs were being exported overseas, in fact the creation of new manufacturing jobs represented progress for an increasing number of Nicaraguans. There was a boom in construction, mainly commercial centers and some middle-class housing. In retrospect, some of this seemed linked to the return from exile of prosperous Nicaraguans, who were basically taking care of their own needs, but there was some filtering downward to working people. Agriculture still languished, however. Markets that had been vibrant during the '60s and '70s, when the country had been the region's breadbasket and had exported beef, tobacco, cotton, coffee and other primary products, had been lost during the civil war, some irretrievably. Nicaraguans were still trying to find their way in terms of meeting the competitive demands of modern agriculture. Much of this early economic recovery was supply-side and filtered-down prosperity, but overall we kept seeing signs that more and more Nicaraguans at all levels were becoming a part of the new economy.

At the same time, we saw the beginnings of Nicaragua's integration into international criminal networks. It was in this period, after 1995, that the embassy was able to convince U.S. policy makers and law enforcement agencies, as well as the Nicaraguans, that it was time to enter into law enforcement cooperative arrangements to combat international criminal activity. The former Sandinista police, under reform-minded leaders, had already demonstrated growing professionalism by confronting party-inspired labor and political violence in the streets. We brought the DEA into Nicaragua to put together drug interdiction agreements with the Nicaraguan police, and had some fairly effective first-stage counter-drug programs. Nicaragua, like most of Central America, was on the major drug transit route from Colombia and Peru to Mexico and the United States. A lot of drugs we found were passing through Nicaragua using maritime routes off the Caribbean and Pacific coasts well as overland towards the north. Of course, we still were holding the Nicaraguan army at arm's distance because of its Sandinista tendencies, so our interdiction cooperation efforts lacked some effectiveness.

*Q: You were saying you hadn't served in the WHA bureau for some years.*

BECKER: Yes. One of the things I was concerned about at that time was my own career path. I was a fairly long-in-the-tooth O1 officer. I was concerned that I would be selected out, since my time in class was approaching. Although I was offered the opportunity to be a DCM in an at-grade position at another overseas post, I was frustrated that I had not been promoted in place in Nicaragua, particularly with what I thought was a very substantial record of accomplishment as both political counselor and DCM and a lot of support from the two ambassadors I worked for. Given the rules of the career game, I felt I needed to go back to Washington if in fact the system was about to give me the boot. I accepted the job as deputy director of the regional Office of Policy Planning, Coordination and Press in the WHA bureau. This was the office that handled the political coordination issues of a regional or a hemispheric nature for the entire Western Hemisphere.

*End of Reader*