SIERRA LEONE

COUNTRY READER
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WILLIAM CLARK JR.
Vice Consul
Freetown (1959-1961)

Ambassador William Clark, Jr. was born in California in 1930. He graduated from San Jose State College with a B.A. degree in 1955. He served in the U.S. Navy intermittently from 1949 to 1953. In 1957, he joined the State Department, serving in Sierra Leone, Japan, South Korea, Egypt, India, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Thomas Stern on January 11, 1994.

Q: *Let me start with the usual question. tell us a little about your background and education and how you came to the foreign affairs community.*

CLARK: As I said earlier, before new officers were sent overseas, they were required in those days to take another six weeks at FSI to become as familiar as possible with consular affairs. I attended that part of the course. I had, some months before departure, been told that I had been assigned to Sierra Leone. My first reaction was :"Where?". My second reaction was to point out that the US government didn't have an establishment there. I was told that there would be a post in Freetown, the capital of Sierra Leone. The U.S. government had decided to open a post in Freetown because all of Africa was moving in the direction of independence and it was assumed that Sierra Leone, sooner or later, would join in with the group of independent nations. When my assignment was made and even when we arrived, Sierra Leone was still a British colony and therefore our post was a Consulate. Sierra Leone became independent just before I left in 1961. Though a Consulate, Freetown was an independent reporting post. Our dispatches went directly to Washington. We did not report to London.

Actually, I had requested an assignment to Africa, but it was "North Africa" that interested me. The Department said that Sierra Leone was as close as it could get to North Africa. Of course, my first choice was a German-language speaking post on the grounds that I might as well use what I had worked so hard to learn. I wanted to improve my German language skill, which I have never been able to. Nor have I ever been assigned to a post where German was at all useful. My second choice was North Africa because I had become interested in the Middle East and the Arab world. My third choice was Portugal, which I always put on my wish list because I had become convinced that no one ever got assigned to Portugal. That turned out to be also true, at least for me. So I learned very early about the assignment process. Of the three choices I gave the

Department, it picked Africa from the my request for "North Africa". As I said, I never used my German or never got to Portugal.

My friendly personnel counselor was my idea of what a career officer should look like. He had a little gray brush moustache; he wore a three piece suit; he sat very upright behind his desk. After I heard of my assignment, he summoned me for a counseling session. He gave me a canned speech on how Personnel had been following my career with great interest. He said he knew that I had been studying German and that he was sure that I would be assigned to a German speaking post. I let the gentleman go through his prattle without interruption. Then I said: "That is very interesting, but I have been told that I have been assigned to Freetown, Sierra Leone. I understand that Sierra Leone is a British colony and I don't think that German is used there". The counselor sat up ever more erect and said: "You mean you knew this all the time and you let me go through my presentation?". I admitted that was so. He then dismissed me curtly. It was the last time that I ever saw a career counselor!.

After having looked at a map of Africa and having located Freetown, I had to announce to my bride that the Department had made a decision about our immediate future. She took it like a good soldier. Then I met Herbert "Tom" Reiner, the senior officer who had been assigned to Freetown as well. It was at the beginning just a two-man post. I was enthusiastic about the assignment and looked forward to opening a new post. I also read Graham Greene's *"The Heart of the Matter"* which set my mind somewhat more at ease because it showed that one could survive despite the somewhat primitive conditions. There was a little more information, but Greene's book was the most extensive description I could find of Freetown.

Reiner had done the basic survey work. So he was somewhat familiar with Freetown. He had been the administrative officer at our Embassy in Monrovia. After making the survey, the Department decided to appoint him as Counsel. On our way to Sierra Leone, we stopped in Monrovia for two months, making preparations for opening of the new post. In Monrovia, I learned another valuable lesson. The hotel in which we were staying cost more than our per diem.

As could be expected, we didn't have an office in Sierra Leone, much less living quarters. Tom had recommended that we not move to Freetown until at least some office space had been rented. That was alright. I helped out a little with the consular work in Monrovia. I also had time to read parts of the Foreign Service Manual which had been sent to Monrovia, but had arrived in such condition that I had to re-assemble it all. Because I was to be assigned to a new post, not only did I receive the basic consular course at FSI, but I was also given a one day crash course on the duties and responsibilities of a Class-C cashier. Fortunately, once Freetown was opened, we were "fiscally serviced" by Monrovia. in those days, a post could survive with authorization to draw up to $ 2,000.

When we arrived in Freetown in 1959, we found three rooms in the second best hotel in town. The best hotel, *The City Hotel*, wasn't much, so you can imagine what *The Riviera* was like. The first floor was occupied by a Lebanese merchant. The second floor was a bar-restaurant and a couple of rooms. There were more rooms on the third floor. The hotel was used for a variety of purposes: eating and business--of all sorts. We leased part of the building, but had not refurbished it. Judith and I had one room, Tom had a second one and the room in between us

became the office. We had some furniture and some was on its way still. Later, we moved the offices to a building right across from the Colonial Secretariat, which was very convenient.

What little supervision we received came from Washington. Our efficiency and reviewing reports were written by a Washington office in the Bureau of African Affairs. Occasionally, we would contact London for assistance, but that was very rare.

Our responsibility was primarily to initiate and maintain contact with the local leadership. We did some consular work, but not much. After Tom and I had been there for a few months, USIA opened an office. That placed an administrative work-load on us because we had to contract for and prepare for the opening of that office. Later on, we had to do the same thing when the assistance agency decided to open an office in Freetown. I don't remember us ever being asked about the assignment of USIA or assistance personnel, but I am sure that Tom would have supported such expansion. Tom had some minor difficulties with these new personnel; I also was concerned a little because I was the General Services officer and a lot of the work fell on me. The Consulate had a jeep and a Ford Fairlane. USIA sent a Plymouth for its representative. In those days, Plymouths had huge tailfins which made the car seem humongous particularly on Sierra Leone roads. When the assistance man came, he had a Chevy Impala, which was a bigger and better model than our other cars. This about the time when the Department was in one of its "budgetary reductions" phases. So it sent us a Nash as the official car, which was much smaller, of course, than the "official" cars of the other agencies.

As you can see, I did a lot of administrative work while in Freetown. Fortunately Tom Reiner was an old administrative hand and I learned a lot from him. When I first arrived, I was also the communicator and learned how to use a "one time" pad. In addition, I had the opportunity to do some contact work, primarily with the military, consisting of 1 2,500 men army. The men were commanded by British officers, seconded to Sierra Leone for that purpose. They were usually raised in rank a couple of notches for this duty. A number of the British officers in Freetown had been formerly part of the British Indian Army and had to be reassigned after Indian independence. They never stopped talking about "the good old days".

I did some economic reporting, focusing on investment opportunities. A trade mission came out and I wrote their report. We kept looking for American business opportunities in this rather small corner of Africa. We found some, which looked big to us, but were probably small in the eyes of an American entrepreneur.

The post grew in the two years I was there, not only with other agencies, but with additional Foreign Service people. First came an economic officer, who was brand new to the Service and had been employed for this particular task after having worked for an oil company in India. We taught him about economic reporting. Then came a communications clerk, followed by an administrative officer. The addition of those two people essentially made us administratively independent from Monrovia. Then a junior officer was assigned to Freetown and a secretary. So when Sierra Leone became independent, there were seven Americans in the Consulate. The US presence was already multi-agency and the elevation of the Consulate to an Embassy went very smoothly. I had the pleasure of welcoming A. Carnahan who was our first Ambassador in Sierra Leone in mid-1961, just before I departed for my next assignment.

You have to remember that the late ‘50s and early ‘60s was the time of the African "boom" in the US government. People were volunteering to go to Africa to become acquainted with a rapidly emerging part of the world. We were right in establishing and later expanding our presence in Sierra Leone. Africa did appear to be coming into its own and important to the United States. Even when Sierra Leone became independent, our presence was relatively modest and I think justified. It was a country which was close to Guinea and Sekou Toure, who had invited Chinese and Russians to his country as "advisors". That gave Sierra Leone a security importance.

Furthermore, Liberia was on the south and that country became somewhat unstable after Taubman's death and the military coup. It was useful to the US to have representation in Sierra Leone, a stable, even if later a somewhat corrupt, democracy.

Sierra Leone was a nice, little country. The British had done a fair job during the colonial period. Freetown was a city of about 80,000 out of about 2 million in the country. The country was not rich, but certainly not poor by African standards. It is a lot poorer today than it was then. The farmers were mostly subsistence farmers. It had diamonds, bauxite, piassava--the big bristles in heavy-duty street sweepers.

At one point, Sierra Leone threatened to cut off all supplies of piassava which might have meant a lot of dirty streets in the U.S. They never carried out their threat.

The hotel were we stayed first was not much, as I noted earlier. But we contracted for housing soon after our arrival. The Consul got a decent house. We rented a house that had been built by a doctor. There were some Lebanese and local entrepreneurs who were building housing on speculation. While not the greatest, these houses were comfortable. Our house was a two bedroom with an inside garage. The bedroom was air-conditioned. That raised one small disagreement with the Consul. He didn't believe in screens. Of course, his house was fully air-conditioned so that the issue of screens didn't arise. For the rest of us, the bugs flew in and the bugs flew out. I thought we could do better and argued for the purchase of screens. Later, the US government built some housing on Hill Station which was the area occupied by the British. I argued against it, but after I left, we were given some land by the government; so we built some apartments there. Eventually, we over-built and then had to rent some of the apartments.

We got our food from the local economy--for example, the Patterson-Bizet Department store-. The Swiss had a cold storage operation which sold fish and meats. We considered ourselves well taken care of because some of our colleagues, for example in Conakry, would drive to Freetown to purchase some of their food supplies. That drive was not easy--about 200 miles over some well worn roads. They would drive down to buy flour and potatoes. So living in Freetown, particularly when compared to other places, was comfortable.

We maintained contact with the British. It was a curious situation. I could invite to our house British people who had not met each other even though they lived in the same town. There were essentially three British groups: business, civil servants and military. The latter two mixed to some degree, but the business community did not mingle with the government people. We brought them together and we also mixed in Sierra Leoneans as well. So the American homes

became a sort of meeting ground for the different groups in Sierra Leone. The bar at the hotel was also a meeting ground.

The British ran Sierra Leone with a very light hand. The West Coast was different from the East Coast. It did not have any good farming land, which kept large landowners away. So when the decision to make Sierra Leone independent, there wasn't any resistance from large land owners. Those Britishers who didn't want to stay just packed up and went home; they had no earthly goods that they couldn't take with them. That is a major reason why the transition to independence went so smoothly. In addition, as I said, the British gave the Sierra Leoneans considerable leeway in the management of their affairs which built a base of civil servants able to manage the country once it gained independence. Most of the British business community stayed; it continued to manage the diamond concessions which, although owned by Sierra leone, was run out by London's diamond industry, which itself was under the control of De Beers of South Africa.

The British permitted the development of local political parties. Sierra Leone was filled with people who had originally lost one tribal war or another. When I say "indigenous", that means about 108 tribes, most of whom originally had come from some other part of Africa. The two largest tribes were the Timnie and the Mende. The traders were essentially Muslims who had migrated from Guinea, but had businesses all along the Western coast. The country was deficient in farming land, as I have mentioned; it was covered in part by rain forests--we had 200 inches of rain per annum. So the farmers had to move very couple of years to grow such crops as piassava because the land was leeched by the growth.

In addition there was a community of Creoles who were primarily returned slaves, either having fled the Americas or who had been on slave ships which the British Navy had intercepted and brought back to Africa by releasing them in Sierra Leone. There were some who had participated in the Cameroon rebellion in the Caribbean and been brought back and left in Sierra Leone. The word "Creole" was applied to a mixed population who spoke an English dialect of their own. That *patois* gave me fits; before leaving Washington, I was convinced that my English would suffice. Unfortunately, the dialect consisted of large words you wouldn't expect and small words you couldn't find. I could not understand it, even after hearing it for two years. The common greeting was *"How the boddy?"* and the answer was *"Tanga the boddy fine"*. It was fun to greet some Creoles that way in the morning, but I decided quickly not to become a teacher to some of my colleagues. Some of our employees did not speak English very well. The clerks spoke pretty good English. The drivers and maintenance did not. The Sierra Leoneans who spoke good English would not have worked for the wages we were paying.

The Creoles were based primarily in Freetown. The other people had a more country-wide base. They were split between conservatives and socialist. Sierra Leone had essentially a two party system, although other small parties did exist. Each party had its own newspaper, most of which were small. *The Daily Mail* was the largest newspaper. All of this political activity created a solid base to build on after independence.

Sierra Leone had the first University on the West Coast of Africa, known then as Fourah University and now as the University of Sierra Leone. It became the basic training school for

African civil servants for all British colonies on the coast. So a lot of Sierra Leoneans were working in Lagos, Ghana and other colonies. The Sierra Leoneans were in general a well educated group. A lot of the well do to professionals in Sierra Leone sent their kids to schools in the U.K. Many of those, upon returning to Sierra Leone, went to work as civil servants. Their social status was somewhat between British and indigenous people. They were paid better than people not trained in the U.K. and were granted "home leave" which meant that the British government paid their transportation to the U.K., although they were Sierra Leoneans. So in Freetown, there were three status levels.

We also had in Sierra Leone a heavy missionary presence. They came mostly from the US, Ireland and Germany. The Americans were Protestants; the Irish were, of course, Catholics. The American missionary movement had sort of divided Africa among its various sects. In Sierra Leone, one found some fundamentalist missionaries. If you stayed with them, you had to sign a statement first that you didn't have any tobacco or strong spirits--either with you or within you. So I always stayed with the Catholics.

Q: *You have already mentioned that the transition to independence went smoothly. How else do you remember the emergence of independence?*

CLARK: As I mentioned, the political system had been fairly well developed under the British colonial rule. Even before independence, Sierra Leone had an elected Parliament. The Creoles were never a real force; there weren't enough of them to have any power. They divided themselves between two parties. The conservative party was run by Doctor Sir Albert Margai--who had been knighted--, who was the first non-Creole Sierra Leonean trained in Western medicine. He had achieved that primarily with missionary support.

Margai's opposition was a quasi-socialist party headed by Siaka Stevens. He was a friend of Sekou Toure and saw himself as a revolutionary which was so fashionable at the time. That point of view earned him a jail sentence, meted out by Margai and friends, just before independence. He stayed in jail until after independence and until the Margai government had established itself. Siaka Stevens later become known as one of the more corrupt politicians in Sierra Leone. He took over the government and was its head for many years although his performance did not turn out very well.

The judiciary was already well established and independent before the British withdrawal. That was just another indicator of the pretty good job the British had done in Sierra Leone to prepare it for independence. The justice system was of course heavily influenced by the British tradition. Even in most sweltering summer heat, the judges and barristers would wear robes and wigs. Some of the judges had been brought to Sierra Leone by the British colonial service from other parts of the Empire. For example, in Sierra Leone, I met the first Tamil that I have ever encountered. He had lived in Ceylon, but saw no prospects for the Singhalese to ease their repressions of his people and therefore he joined the colonial service and ended up in Freetown as a judge.

When we first arrived in Freetown, the French and the Liberians were the only other governments that had representation there. But the US was unique in that it was the only country

that had a career Vice-Consul--me-- as part of its representation. The French had an older officer, Pierre Coffe, as a Vice Consul, but had never accredited him to Sierra Leone. He was one of only 12 Africans that had been recruited by the French Foreign Service. He was a native of the Ivory Coast and had been assigned to Freetown primarily to watch the Guineans and to monitor what their leader Toure might be planning. I got to know Pierre; he had a very nice French wife. One day he came to see me to tell me that he was about to leave the French and go to work for his native government's foreign service. He told me that he had been given the choice of two assignments: ambassador to Rome or ambassador to Monrovia. When I asked him which he would chose, he surprised me and said that he would go to Monrovia. He said that he was new to the ambassadorial game and therefore would undoubtedly make some mistakes. He preferred to make them in Monrovia than in Rome. He spent seven years in Monrovia because Taubman, the President of Liberia, liked him so much he wouldn't let the Ivory Coast transfer him. After Taubman's assassination, Pierre was assigned to Tokyo as ambassador where our paths crossed again. There, he became the Dean of the Corps for years and years. It is a small world!

The transition to independence provided me some insights that I found useful later on. I was impressed by the manner in which the British handled the change over, which was done at midnight. We were all in the stadium; the British flag was flying. At midnight, the lights were turned off for a few seconds. When they came on again, the Sierra Leone flag was flying where the British one had been. No fanfare, no military honors, no departing troops. No trauma, no histrionics. Effectively understated!

I don't think that the British had made a conscious decision to nurture their colony until it was ready to fly on its own. Sierra Leone had always been relatively prosperous and lacked any major independence movements, unlike some of neighboring countries. It did have a university in Sierra Leone which was unique for that part of the world. So the civil service had a base for recruitment, although it was run by the British. Later, of course, it became primarily a Sierra Leonean staffed civil service, but it never had the independence fervor that infested the services of other African colonies and countries. The stability of Sierra Leone was also assisted by the diversity of the groups that lived there. There were many small tribes and groups which made it every difficult to coalesce enough people behind any one major drive. It would have been very difficult to pull off a rebellion, for example.

On the other hand, even if the British had not made a conscious decision to lead Sierra Leone to independence, they could read the hand writing on the wall from all that was happening around other parts of Africa. The British probably made a conscious decision not to stop the movement to independence. We went through Conakry on the way to Freetown. It was just after the Guineans had voted "NO" to the De Gaulle's "French" options. They were the only ones of the former French colonies to have voted that way. The British undoubtedly learned from that. Also Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was pressing very hard independence and Sierra Leone just followed in his footsteps. The British let it happened; they did not try to stop the march towards independence. That made for a successful transition, unlike what happened in some of the neighbor in countries.

Independence came late in April 1961 and I left in June, just a few weeks later. Because of that, I was the only one in the Embassy who was not going to serve with the new Ambassador, A.S.J.

Carnahan. I stayed at the Chancery while the rest of the staff went to the docks to meet the launch on which the Ambassador was arriving. That is the way people had to come into Freetown because the airport was twelve miles on the other side of the arbor. One would have had to drive 120 miles from the airport to get to Freetown if you went overland. So people took launches which ran back and forth across the harbor. Originally, when we opened the post, I was asked whether we wanted to have our own launch. I decided that I had enough problems and gently refused the offer. The Embassy later got one and I have heard a story about that, which I have never checked for accuracy. As I understand it, the administrative officer recruited two of the Embassy's maintenance men to become seamen. On the maiden voyage, which had the ambassador on board, one of the new seamen was stationed on the boat and one on the landing dock. At the appropriate moment, the one on the boat threw the line to the man on the dock as he had been taught. The dock man tied it securely to the pier as he had been instructed. Unfortunately, the man on the boat had not been told that had had to tie his end to the boat. Therefore, the launch ran right under the pier and the maiden voyage was a "smash" success.

In any case, in my days, the Embassy did not have its own launch. The staff went to meet the new ambassador at the dock. I stayed at the Chancery to answer phone calls. One came in from the US for Mr. Carnahan. It was to let him know that his brother had taken seriously ill. So I met the Ambassador with that news and asked him to call home. I left the next morning and never saw the Ambassador except for that one meeting in the hallway to pass on the bad news.

HALVOR C. EKERN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Freetown (1961-1963)

Halvor C. Ekern was born in Montana in 1917. He served in the U.S. Army from 1941-1947. Mr. Ekern entered the Foreign Service in 1947. His career included positions in Austria, Iceland, Sierra Leone, Germany, and Washington, DC. Mr. Ekern was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: *You moved from there going directly to Sierra Leone. It looked like somebody thought you had been in deep freeze too long. How did that assignment come about?*

EKERN: You have to be prepared in the Foreign Service for anything and anywhere. If you don't like it you are in the wrong job. We made the transition all right. Sierra Leone had just gained its independence and our Ambassador had arrived shortly before me. He was a former Congressman from Missouri who didn't know too much about the place.

Q: *His name was Carnahan?*

EKERN: Yes. Carnahan. My wife and I tried to be as helpful as possible. I was the DCM there. I helped him identify our goals to see what we could do there. It was kind of an obviously hopeless case. Right after I left the opposition took over and a one-party state was formed.

Q: *Sierra Leone is a very small place anyway. What was the political situation? Was it all tribal?*

EKERN: Yes, basically, tribal. The Prime Minister was from the dominant tribe and the opposition was from the other. The leadership came from those they called Creoles who were not tribal people. Actually they were the descendants of...back when Britain abolished slavery, they released the slaves but also cleaned out the prisons, particularly all the prostitutes and sent them down to Sierra Leone, which is why you have the light skinned element there which is better educated and populate the area around the coast.

The British in my view had done a masterful job as administrators. I have the highest regards for the British Colonial Service. They had their finest people in there. They lifted them out of the bush into what they could of modern structure. Gave them an infrastructure of roads, justice, and courts, etc. But when they withdrew there was kind of a collapse there. It is still that way.

Q: *Well, what was the British role there compared, say, to the United States?*

EKERN: Initially there was some resentment about the US moving in with a big AID program, etc. as they were phasing out. But we worked this out with the British Embassy. You see the British left behind an Army Commander, Provincial and District Commissioners, and advisers in many offices. They didn't just walk off and leave them. They did their best to make the turnover as smooth as possible.

But on the other hand the United States was not prepared to totally defer to the British, but the relationship at the top was at least smooth.

Q: *What were American interests in Sierra Leone?*

EKERN: Not really much. That is this was seen as part of the liberation of Africa from colonialism.

Q: *This, of course, is in 1961 era when the Congo was blowing up and all these countries were gaining independence. A time of the discovery of Africa by the Americans.*

WALTER C. CARRINGTON
Peace Corps Director, Sierra Leone
Freetown (1961-1963)

Ambassador Walter C. Carrington was born in New York in 1930. He received a bachelor's degree from Harvard in 1952 followed by a LLB in 1955. He served in the Peace Corps in Tunisia and as director of the Peace Corps in both Sierra Leone and Senegal. In addition he fulfilled an ambassadorship to Senegal. Ambassador Carrington was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 9, 1988.

Q: I was going to say, this was very early in the rebirth of Africa on the international scene.

CARRINGTON: That's right, yes. And not long after the war, long before independence, and that sort of got me started and whetted my appetite. When I came back, I went on to law school but kept an interest in international affairs, and then a few years later took a group over to Nigeria for the Experiment in International Living. And then in '61 when the Peace Corps began, I got involved with the Peace corps very early and was part of the original group of seven overseas directors that Sargent Shriver appointed. And my assignment was to go out and negotiate with the government of Sierra Leone to have the Peace Corps come there. And after the successful negotiations, I became the first Peace Corps Director in Sierra Leone and served there from 1961 to 1963.

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Q: When you went to Sierra Leone, what were your prime tasks there with the Peace Corps?

CARRINGTON: Well, after we had negotiated the agreement and agreed that the Peace Corps would come in, we decided that we would start with an education program, and so we brought a lot of teachers in to teach in the secondary schools throughout the country. In fact, it was the advent of the Peace Corps that allowed the government to really expand the education system from just a few schools in the capital city and in a couple of the other cities really into the hinterlands where up until that time most of the school were mission schools. So the government was able to really beef up their schools, so that the original project was to bring over teachers.

We then in a joint project with CARE brought over a group of rural development workers and people who were working on road construction and that kind of thing, and then we had nurses. And the program got to be quite varied. In fact, when I left we had in Sierra Leone the largest Peace Corps program on a per capita basis in the world.

Q: Would you describe the government of Sierra Leone when you were there and dealing with it?

CARRINGTON: Yes. The Peace Corps arrived there about six months after independence. The country became independent in April of '61.

Q: From the British?

CARRINGTON: From the British. And I went out there I guess in August to begin the negotiations. Our first group of volunteers arrived, in fact, on New Year's Day of '62. And the government was headed by Sir Milton Margai, who was a leading physician in the country and whose Sierra Leone People's Party had won the elections leading up to independence, and his party mostly represented the Mende tribe, which was one of the largest tribes in the country. And at the time it appeared as if Sierra Leone was going to be a real vigorous parliamentary democracy.

In fact, I remember being there for the first elections. And I was struck by the vitality of some of the political rallies, and listening to some of these political debates where they talked in Creole,

some would call it a kind of pidgin English, but a language that was rich with imagery. And I had just never heard invective against a political opponent that was so flourishing in imagery as there. And it was a very vigorous political system. There were problems because after the election there were charges that a lot of the polling had been unfair and there had been places where government ministers had been elected with overwhelming votes and then there were some court case I remember coming out of this. And a couple of the leading ministers had to defend themselves in court against charges of irregularities. But the country had a very vigorous independent judiciary and a very vigorous political system.

When I left there in '63 the founding president, Sir Milton Margai, was still in power, and the country seemed to be going along well. He died shortly after that. His brother became president, and when his brother Albert Margai stood for re-election, he lost the election but had kind of an internal coup and by manipulating the chiefs--there is a system whereby part of the legislature is made up of appointed chiefs. And he rigged it in such a way that he stayed in power, which lead eventually to a coup d'etat in the country and really the end of hopes that Sierra Leone would have become, as Senegal did become, a real functioning, two-party democratic system.

Q: How did you find yourself received--and I am thinking not just yourself, but the Peace Corps program--at our Embassy, because this was something new grafted onto them and looked with, in some cases, a certain amount of suspicion by the Foreign Service.

CARRINGTON: Well, there was no question about that. I had more problems I think especially with AID than I had with the Sierra Leone government.

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Q: You were doing what by that time?

CARRINGTON: I was then in Boston practicing law, and I was a Commissioner on our state Commission Against Discrimination. It was a three member commission. So I was doing that and practicing law. And I got a call from someone in the Peace Corps asking if I would do some part time recruiting. So I spent my weekends traveling around the country recruiting people for the Peace Corps. In those days recruiting for the Peace Corps really meant not much more than just getting information out because you didn't really have to persuade people. There were a lot of people waiting to sort of join. It was a question of telling them how to do it. And so I did that.

And through that I met Sarge Shriver, and Shriver convinced me to come with the Peace Corps. I at that time was about--in fact, I had already formed a committee. I was running for the City Council in Cambridge, Mass. And Shriver convinced me that there were much more exciting things to do with the Peace Corps and that after the Peace Corps I could always go back to Massachusetts and I could have the support of the Kennedys and all of that for higher office.

So anyway I decided I would go with the Peace Corps and spent my time in Washington--in fact, I wasn't in Washington all that long, getting acquainted with the Peace Corps but mainly trying to set up a lot of logistical things that had to be done. In those early days we were kind of flying by the seat of our pants, and I remember, in spite of all the work I did trying to educate people

about Sierra Leone, because there were very few people in the Peace Corps who had any overseas experience, and very few if any who knew anything about Africa. I had been to Africa twice when I went there, so I was kind of an expert.

But I remember being up in Sierra Leone the first few months we were out there, and we got a shipment of books in Spanish because somebody in one of the support offices of the Peace Corps thought that Sierra Leone was Spanish. I had to point out to them not only was it not Spanish speaking but the word Sierra Leone was not Spanish, it was Portuguese. But it was an English speaking country. But there were little hitches like that, but we overcame them.

The other thing I did when I was in the states was to get involved in the training program for the first group that was coming over to Sierra Leone, and they were trained at Columbia Teachers College. And I remember spending a good bit of time with them and helping in their orientation.

Q: You were there during the high point with the great burst of enthusiasm for the Peace Corps. How effective were your volunteers out in the field?

CARRINGTON: I think they were very effective. One of the things you often got volunteers saying was that they felt that they had gotten more out of the experience than they were able to give.

Q: I've heard this.

CARRINGTON: But I think that in many cases that they didn't have a kind of perspective to see really how important they were. As I said earlier, I think there's just no question that in Sierra Leone and a number of other countries the ability of the countries to expand their secondary educational system was tremendously aided by having the Peace Corps volunteers. If they had not had them, I think that the movement to spread education on a secondary level beyond the capital, beyond the coast, would have been a much slower process. Also, I think the Peace Corps had a great influence as sort of role models because in so many countries there was a stigma against working out in the hinterlands. And here you had these young Americans coming out there and going out and working in some of the most remote corners and doing it with great enthusiasm and working for pay that was the same that was given to Sierra Leone teachers. So unlike other expatriates and who had come out there and who would live in air conditioned isolation, who would receive a salary that was topped off by their governments, the Peace Corps volunteers were living like the people with whom they were working. And I think this helped.

I think in some of the other projects we had, the community development projects, we were able to be effective. I'm not sure that the Peace Corps contribution was as long lasting as some of the others, because whereas in the schools the government had already made an investment in the institution that even when the volunteers left those institutions would continue. In a lot of rural development projects, once the volunteers left and if there weren't more volunteers coming in, often the government would not be putting the same kinds of resources into those programs, so that that became a problem with the continuing costs of some of the activities. But I think on the whole that the Peace Corps volunteers were extremely effective at least in Africa, and I think they made a difference.

I at one point was asked to do what we called a completion of service conference which is done for every group just before they leave the country where you sort of sit down and debrief them and you go through what happened and so forth and get their ideas for improvements. And I went down to Latin America to do one in Venezuela and one in what was then British Honduras, now Belize. And it was as if it was two different Peace Corps. There you had volunteers who were very disaffected, who felt that they really hadn't been very important because they weren't part of a government structure. In Africa the volunteers knew that they were working for the Africa governments. In Latin America in many places, the volunteers were practically parachuted into the barrios and sort of told to find a job. Whereas, the volunteers in Africa had well defined jobs and knew what they were doing. So I think the Peace Corps was quite successful in Africa.

Q: You were a Director in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone from about '61 to '63?

CARRINGTON: Yes, from '61 to '63 and then I came back to the United States in the summer of '63 and was here from about three months during the period of great trauma and change in the United States. I got here just before the march on Washington. In fact, I got a chance to participate in that.

LARRY C.WILLIAMSON
Consular Officer, General Services Officer
Freetown (1961-1963)

Mr. Williamson was born and raised in Arkansas. After graduating from the University of California and serving a tour of duty with the US Marine Corps, he entered the Foreign Service in 1958. His foreign assignments took him to a number of African posts, including Sierra Leone, Northern Rhodesia, Tanzania, Kenya and Gabon, where he served as Ambassador, and in England. He had a number of assignments in Washington, several dealing with African Affairs. He also served in the Department's Executive Secretariat and as Assistant to the Counselor.

WILLIAMSON: I was the same way. I got Sierra Leone. By that time my wife was pregnant for the second time, and I went in and said, "Look, you guys. You got to give a little comfort here. Send me someplace that's at least got a decent doctor." Well! Henderson himself took an interest in my case. If you've ever seen Innocent in Action, it's another elemental force. "My dear chap, don't worry about any of this stuff." He said, "They've got an excellent doctor there. Her name is so-and-so, and I'll give you a letter to her. She'll be just fine!" Of course, by the time we got there, the doctor had taken a look, and didn't want to have anything to do with this bush place and got the hell out and went to Manchester or someplace like that. Anyway, that was it. I was going to go to Sierra Leone. The African bureau was not very happy about that. But I got several calls saying, "We're glad you're going there and, by the way, do you know who Tom Reiner is?" I said, "No." They said, "He's going to be your boss." I reckoned they'd talk to us about it.

Q: Who was this Tom?

WILLIAMSON: Tom Reiner. He was an old bachelor, wily old bird. He'd been in the OSS, been all over Africa, knew his way around, and had just the damnedest attitude towards things you ever saw in your life. We got along very well. But he did some strange things. I ran across Tom much later when I was in the Director General's office as his Deputy, and I got a call from... I don't remember who called. He said, "Who the hell is Tom Reiner?" I said, "Well, I think he's CG (consul general) in Jo'burg." "Have you seen this telegram?" Of course, I hadn't. It was in the usual admin channel. Reiner had gotten pissed off. He got very excited and mad about the inspectors inspecting his posts. He fired off a telegram, didn't send it by way of the embassy in Pretoria, just sent it straight back saying, "I'd like to have my budget increased by X amount to compensate me for the time the inspectors used my vehicles." He dropped a copy of it to the Secretary of State and to everybody else. Here was a wild man whom I admired, I liked him. I'd been harassed by inspectors myself, but I thought that probably was not the way to go. I can tell you, nobody else thought it was the way to go about it. They yanked poor Tom out, but he was getting along.

Q: When you said before you went out there they said, "Let me tell you about Reiner." What did they tell you?

WILLIAMSON: They told me he was a very well prepared, well trained, and seasoned officer. He currently was a consular officer by cone, and he's been an admin officer in Monrovia. He got this job and he promptly moved into the ambassador's residence and picked up an African mistress and moved her in there with him, and that he was very rough on his staff. His staff in those days included Bill Clark who went on to be ambassador to India and all kind of good things.

Q: _____ soul.

WILLIAMSON: Bill's a very good man and couldn't wait to get out of there. Tom finally chased his wife off. He didn't think much of the wives of the post and let them know it. Since my wife had two babies, she didn't let that bother her in the slightest, but there were a couple of wives around including some AID (Agency for International Development) wives who had hopes of a different style of life, but a.) to have those kinds of hopes in Sierra Leone in those days was a little iffy, and b.) with Tom Reiner it just didn't work. So there was a great deal of heartburn all the time he was there. He finally got replaced by a political appointee.

Q: You were in Sierra Leone from when to when?

WILLIAMSON: I must have gone there in '61 just before independence, and I stayed there till the summer of '63. I was then given a telegram saying, "Congratulations, you're just cut out to be a West Africa type, and we're going to send you to Ghana where you'll have the consular section." I looked in the book and the consular section was just one guy! I said, "What the hell kind of stuff is this - another God forsaken hole for two and a half years practically. My wife is getting sick and tired of places where it rains all the time and nothing works and there's no food

or anything – that's what Ghana's known for... Don't tell me that, I've been there." Then they called and said, "We're going to give you a great opportunity." I said, "You'll let me go to Warsaw." They said, "No, you have to stay at least one more tour in the Africa bureau, but you're going down to open up Lusaka." I thought he said Osaka, so I said, "I don't speak Japanese." He said, "What the hell has that got to do with it?" So I went down to Lusaka.

Q: What about Sierra Leone? You were then in what, '61?

WILLIAMSON: '61.

Q: What was Sierra Leone like?

WILLIAMSON: As a friend of mine who was Ivorian said, "It's a little 19th century. It might be a little 18th century." It had been a big slave port through which the British Anti-Slavery Society had sent a bunch of newly-freed African slaves. They got down there, and after just terrible, terrible casualties, they fought off the local tribes. They succumbed by the hundreds to disease, and they founded this little town—Freetown—and later on when the British and the French got to really slugging it out over who owns Africa and what parts, the British came in and conquered a bit of the mainland. Sierra Leone had 120 inches of rain a year, and it all fell in three months. It had no water catchment system. During the dry season, you were completely dependent upon cisterns on the roofs of the houses. There were lots of stories of people going up to look in their cistern and finding a dead buzzard or other live stock in it. The electricity worked in one-third of the town every two or three days. There were no European stores to speak of, so European food was in short supply. We all sent off to Peter Justesen in Copenhagen. You would buy six months worth of supplies, canned food and everything else. It was dangerous. Malaria was very rampant; I got it. So did my son who had just been born, but he came through okay. It was "bush." That's all there was to it, and everybody knew that.

Q: What were American interests other than Loy Henderson saying we're going to have them in all of these places?

WILLIAMSON: We had a small missionary community there. The U.S. Navy in those days would flex its muscle and say, "That's the third largest harbor in the world, and we have to have constant access to it," as if we were going to have an invasion force of Marines going down to Nigeria or something. But really hardly any interests; hardly any at all. There was a rutile factory, a rutile mine, diamonds, but they were usually in the hands of the British and South Africans, an iron ore mountain, Maranga or Marangoo or something like that, which an American firm had an interest in, but nothing else.

Q: What was the government like?

WILLIAMSON: When I was there it was the first post-independence government, and it was ruled by an old man named Margai who was a really top-notch fellow. He was the first guy from the non-Creole, from the non-Freetown group—to be raised into power. He made his name as a doctor. He did it by going to the ladies' initiation societies and talking the ladies into having him or a midwife come in and give lessons to the little girls about what makes babies and what you

do about them and how to take care of yourself and take care of your baby. He endeared himself to the ladies of Sierra Leone all of whom turned out and voted for him. He got into tribal problems. He was a Mende and he was a Christian. The Temnes in the north were Muslim, and there were more of them than of the other tribes. It went on like that all of the time. He was a very pro-Western, very laid back sort of guy and easy to work with. The British were still there in great force. The British army, the theater of the old regiment was staffed at the top by either British officers themselves or by recent Sandhurst graduates from Sierra Leone. There was no Navy, no Air Force. The police was still in the hands of the British police advisers.

Q: Were the Soviets messing around there?

WILLIAMSON: No, they were in Guinea, and that was one of those comedies. A Guinean version of statehood was considered a great risk to western interests in Africa. As it turned out, Sekou Toure was a great risk to the Soviets and their investments there because they put in all kinds of stuff. It was bad. It was just bad. For example, three snowplows showed on the dock at Conakry. There were really no problems to speak of. It was a small, very poor, unlikely to go anyplace kind of country, of interest to the Brits because of their modest, commercial development investment there and because of the diamonds.

Q: What were you doing?

WILLIAMSON: I was it. I was the consular section; I was the econ section; I was half of the political section. Anything else that needed to be done, I did, too. I was a GSO (General Services Officer) for a while until we got a real Admin officer to show up. It was a great experience. I knew all about things.

Q: With Reiner, what did he do, and how did he use you?

WILLIAMSON: He called me in and he said, "This is what you have to do." He said, "You're employed. Read the..." The local staff, by the way, had just been hired in the last six or nine months. They didn't know things, either. I had an old naval stenographer as my consular aid. He was pretty good. I didn't even know how to put a visa into a passport. He had to come over and show me, and all that sort of stuff. Once Tom decided I could do things, he left me pretty well alone. I was also liaison to the military which involved catering to the occasional ship and going to a lot of good parties.

Q: How about the British? Were they basic support?

WILLIAMSON: Oh, yes. We had very close relations with the Brits. Two of my best friends in Sierra Leone were British FSOs (Foreign Service Officers). A lot of British UN and Refugee kind of people. We had a great time with the Brits and good relations. Very good relations.

Q: While you were there, this was...can I use the term "the armpit of Africa?"

WILLIAMSON: Yes. Neck and neck with Monrovia.

Q: Did you feel Africanist at the time?

WILLIAMSON: I did feel, as a matter of fact, because as it turned out I was the only expert we had on Sierra Leone. When people wanted to come out and see the mine or talk about diamonds-- which happened very rarely-- I was there. I knew all about it because there was not much to learn. I started reading books about Africa, particularly about West Africa. I got to know a fair number of Africans, a fairly wide number of Africans, actually, more there than anywhere else. I went up country with them a lot, stayed in their residences. Traveled a lot. Traveled all over most of Sierra Leone before it was all through. At the time Reiner left, we got a good DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission). He was a retired colonel! He and his wife had worked with Tommy Thompson on the Austrian Peace Treaty. He was ready for this one! By that time I'd been there for six months and could swagger a bit. He let me go do my stuff. That's a great thing about African posts—besides the fact that I really loved being in Africa—was that after you proved that you knew things, people were perfectly prepared to leave you go. I discovered that very few political officers could balance their damn checkbook. Therefore, if I was going to talk about economics, they'd go right along with me. "Sure. Yea, yea." If I want to go up country in the jeep, fine, go. "I've got an appointment with somebody. We're going to be for two days with the high commissioner," kind of thing.

Q: How about the tribal situation? Did you have much contact?

WILLIAMSON: Yes, quite a bit. The ruling party was the Sierra Leone People's Party, and that was really mostly in the hands of the Christian Mende tribe and, like most tribal politics, it was feast or famine. "This is ours, and you guys aren't going to get anything." I got to know a lot of the Mende population, and I got to know a lot of the so-called Creoles which are the Freetown people. I did not get to know too many Temnes till later on in the game when the Temnes got restless, but it was easy to get a hold of them. They wanted to talk to Americans. They wanted to counter-balance the Brits. There was always the hope that I would start an AID program for them. I had good contacts there. It was only later on in Africa when we were no longer seen as a counter-balance to the ex-colonial power that we started having problems with being Americans in contact with African politicians. Right through my tour in Lusaka and, actually right through my tour in Dar es Salaam, that was the problem.

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Q: You were there during the independence. How did that go?

WILLIAMSON: The British threw a hell of an independence ceremony, let me tell you. I'll wrap up both of them: Sierra Leone, HMS (Her Majesty's Ship) Lion shows up.

Q: It was a...

WILLIAMSON: A big freighter. It was a cruiser basically. The Marines come off, the Marine band plays, there are all kinds of troops stomping and drilling out there, all kinds of dignitaries. Four months later, when the first guy after the election is sworn in, who comes down but the queen and Prince Philip. Everybody's invited to a garden party just like in London, and

everybody went. My wife said she'd never wash her hand again! It went on like that. The Sierra Leoneans loved the whole thing. The Sierra Leone government army was not good for very much except mutinying every so often, but they could troop and stomp. They really could do the whole drill. They had a really good band.

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In Sierra Leone they had Thurgood Marshall and the sister of the senator from Oregon and several other people like that. Thurgood Marshall was the president's personal representative.

Q: The Supreme Court justice.

WILLIAMSON: Yes. This is before then. He was not a Supreme Court justice yet. He knew a lot of people. The group who came to the Zambian thing was a little different. John Mosler, the guy who owned the Mosler safe business who we enriched no doubt, was our delegation head. They were very big in one of the mining operations. And his wife came down. I later discovered she was called the Dragon Lady by everybody who knew her: exceedingly demanding. The Oppenheimers were there. We didn't see much of this stuff. We showed up at the trooping and stomping in the stadium, but I was busy worrying where the hell the embassy cars were, what's our next step, and who's going to be up in the morning to take these people to this or that. An official visit will just tear an embassy up worse than anything. A big official visit plus all the guys who think they're important coming along, can really wipe you out. The CIA people imported three guys from, I guess, South Africa just to do GSO work. They were something less than pleased. I guess you might imagine I was something less than pleased. The thing was peaceful. The trouble or violence starts usually sometime long after independence, and these guys start realizing this is now a partisan government they are working with, for or against, and the old thing of, "If we don't like them, let's go beat them." They do that. In Sierra Leone the first time we ever had any trouble whatsoever was just before the big elections after independence. The head of the opposition party found himself in jail for no particular reason, and somebody threw a Molotov cocktail at the back of our embassy. It didn't do much damage. It was very ineptly put together, but it spread oil and grease all over the place and burned for awhile, proving once again that our safety plan was not very well conceived. The fire wardens never showed up, and our two night watchmen ran off in the dark and didn't come back until the next morning. In fact, we wouldn't have known that the embassy was burning if somebody at the bar next door hadn't picked up the phone and called the girlfriend of the consul general and said, "You know your place is on fire?" He said, "No." So Tom got me out.

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The first development plan from Sierra Leone went as follows: There was a Sierra Leonean who had lived for years in New York and who was down in Sierra Leone on detail from the UN. He and his wife were very nice and we got along with them very well. His job was to put together a development plan because you had to have a development plan in those days. He put this thing together, and then he shopped it: shopped it to myself, the Brits and the Canadians who were there. Who else did he shop it to? A couple of international bank advisors!

The Sierra Leone development plan was finalized in my dining room over about a three day period at some little expense to my beer stock. This was all the economic brains in the whole country, and there were only two Sierra Leoneans with us. This guy went back and presented it to his minister and said, "That's very impressive!" There is was. It wasn't impressive at all. There were no statistics. The colonial government had not bothered, didn't have the wherewithal actually to bother. Almost the same thing happened in Zambia. Everybody got a shot at the economic information that was there. The big companies kept rather a closer watch on what was going on than we thought initially because they could see their future in this. They would come and feed us information and work it out with us. Nobody ever minded in those days because it wasn't considered sabotage. It was just trying to find out what the hell was going on in the economy. You knew what the Sierra Leoneans had imported last year. You knew what they exported, but it meant that you had about 70% of the reported statistics were something that was called "the balancing factor," and that's all there was. This was the difference between what was brought in and what was sent out, and we didn't know where it came from, we didn't know where it went, we didn't know how it was paid for. This was what the balance of payments looked like. It didn't make a difference what the hell it was because there wasn't anything you could do about it. A good portion of that in Sierra Leone was smuggled diamonds which went out through Monrovia. Information was not hard to get, but the question was the validity of it.

WILLIAM G. BRADFORD
Deputy Chief of Missions
Freetown (1966-1968)

Ambassador William G. Bradford was born in Illinois in 1925. He joined the U.S. Army in World War II and then attended the University of Indiana for two years. He joined the Foreign Service in 1952. Ambassador Bradford's Foreign Service career included positions in Italy, Vietnam, Zaire, Sierra Leone, Washington, DC, and an ambassadorship to Chad. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: *From Leopoldville, we're moving to your next assignment, again in Africa. You went to Freetown in Sierra Leone as deputy chief of mission from 1966 to 1968. How did this assignment come about?*

BRADFORD: That I can't even answer. That came out of Washington. They said, "You've done well in administration. We'd like you to be the DCM in Sierra Leone," which for me was a step forward and was fine. I enjoyed it and liked it.

Q: *What was our role and interests in Sierra Leone?*

BRADFORD: I would have to go back to President Kennedy, who decided we would have an embassy in every African country. We had almost no real interest in Sierra Leone. It's a lovely little place with great people, although they did manage, while we were there, to put on a rather Gilbert and Sullivan type of coup. They had a democratic system when I arrived. They had an

election. The opposition apparently won, or tied, in the election. The question really hinged on certain traditional chiefs who also joined in the process of going to Parliament. This paralyzed the government, at which point the general in charge of the Army took over everything and said, "We can't have this kind of paralysis." He don't like the opposition, he didn't try and reimpose the other government, but he took over. He lasted three days, at which point the officer corps took over from the general. The officer corps lasted considerably longer, about ten months, at which time they were overthrown by the non-commissioned officers who tried running the government for about three days, and they were overthrown by a mutiny of the privates. At this point, the privates proved to be the smartest of all. They ran the government for one day and said, "We can't run this government," and they called back the opposition. So we had, in all of this, a series of seven different coups, in which nobody got hurt. The Sierra Leoneans are all related to each other, and it's very bad form to hurt anybody. So you don't shoot anybody.

Q: *It didn't happen as in Liberia, where the tension was so terrible.*

BRADFORD: No. That existed in Sierra Leone, but had never quite reached that proportion. At no point were they really against what was called the Creoles, the slaves.

Q: *You had two ambassadors while you were there.*

BRADFORD: I had two ambassadors, and I was fortunate in both, but even more fortunate that there was well over a year gap between the two. So I was actually in charge for most of my tour there.

Q: *What did you do?*

BRADFORD: We did the traditional things of the Foreign Service, but we did them in a country where they weren't terribly important. We reported on the political situation, on all the coups and counter-coups and rumors of what was going on. We reported on the economic situation of the country, which, except for the diamond industry which kept it going, was uniformly bad. But there was enough money in diamonds to keep things going. We were very close to the diamond people and knew what was going on in the diamond fields. We did the traditional consular functions, issued visas to people who wanted to go, and took care of Americans. I don't think we ever issued a passport; I don't think that ever came up while I was there. It's a very small place. We had a cultural affairs program in which we worked particularly with the students. The administrative section ran the operation. We had an aid program, and above all, we had a Peace Corps program, which was very active and very large, with almost 300 volunteers. This was an ideal country for Peace Corps operation. Even with all these changes in government, they were in no danger. It was English speaking, so you had no language problems. We had volunteers all over the country doing all kinds of things.

Q: *How effective did you find the Peace Corps, looking back on it?*

BRADFORD: I have always thought that it was tremendously effective, but the greatest effect of all was on the volunteers themselves. As far as the programs they conducted, it's going to take another ten or 20 years to look back and say, "Were they successful?" Physically, no, they

weren't successful. I know they started growing Sierra Leone upland rice and did a beautiful job, it looked great. The minute the volunteers left, it disappeared. There was no lasting impact. The fact that upland rice was grown and these people saw it grown may, indeed, have an effect for the future. I'm not sure. But to the volunteer himself, they gained tremendously. Their knowledge of the world and their understanding of it was something wonderful.

Q: *This is very true. Did you have any black Americans coming back to Sierra Leone, looking for their roots and trying to settle?*

BRADFORD: No, this was before "Roots" occurred. No, we didn't have any.

WILLARD DE PREE
Counselor of Embassy
Freetown (1968-1970)

Ambassador Willard De Pree was born in Michigan in 1928. After two years at Hope College, he completed his undergraduate career at Harvard. His career in the foreign service included posts in Cairo, Cyprus, Ghana, Sierra Leone and ambassadorships to Mozambique and Bangladesh. Ambassador De Pree was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 16, 1994.

Q: *This is where you reach a certain point and take off.*

DE PREE: Yes, what level of technology, training, infrastructure or trade was required. I can remember attending a meeting in the Department, on Sierra Leone, a country I subsequently served in, where we debated in all seriousness, what inputs of aid were needed to bring Sierra Leone to the point of self-sustaining growth. So, indeed, aid was a significant factor in our work. And, of course, in Ghana one of the key policy issues was whether the US would guarantee funding for the Volta River project.

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Q: *With these aid projects, how did we at that time view the problem of corruption? Was it there?*

DE PREE: It was there. In retrospect, looking back on my experience in Sierra Leone and Bangladesh, it was there but it wasn't as blatant or as pervasive. Some of the money no doubt found its way to Nkrumah, not so much for his own personal gain, as to promote his political wishes throughout Africa. Some of his ministers, however, were living far beyond their governmental salaries. That was beginning to irritate the Ghanaians. You could see the unhappiness setting in. Civil servants, police and military, began privately to express their concern. The army was unhappy with the creation of Nkrumah's presidential guard, which was viewed as a rival to the professional army. Senior police officials were unhappy at the way corruption was beginning to find its way into their service. And as you know, eventually some of

the police and some the military, General Ankrah and Chief of Police Harley and his deputy Deku got together and plotted the coup.

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Q: *You left just before the coming into power of a duly elected government in Ghana in 1968. What was your next assignment and how did that come about?*

DE PREE: A few months before leaving Ghana I was informed that I was being sent as principal officer to Benghazi, Libya. Quite frankly I was looking forward to it. I had been four years in West Africa and was ready for a change. But shortly before we were due to leave a cable came in telling me that my orders had been broken and I was going to Sierra Leone as counselor of embassy, as number two at the embassy. And that was it. I thought Sierra Leone was going to be more of the same. It was still in West Africa just up the coast, a former British colony...in that sense we were pleased because we loved the Ghanaians. But when we got to Sierra Leone, in the Fall of 1968, we found it quite different from Ghana.

Q: *You were there from 1968-70.*

DE PREE: Yes.

Q: *How was it different?*

DE PREE: It was different in the sense that independence in Ghana had really brought about significant change. Things were different; the Ghanaians sensed that. They really had had a revolution. This was not true in Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone power had been transferred from the UK to Sierra Leoneans. Siaka Stevens was in power, was Prime Minister, but many people felt they hadn't had their revolution, that they really hadn't broken their ties with the UK as had the Ghanaians. Freetown had been settled by slaves that the British picked up off the high seas and returned to Freetown. This tribally-mixed Creole community as it was called was comparable to the African-American community in Liberia. The Creoles were very Victorian in their outlook. Most of them had trained in the UK and were much more concerned with form than substance. Creole-rule was akin to colonial rule but with a black face. The up country tribal peoples had little say in government. This was not the case in Ghana.

I had a fellow working for me in the embassy, the commercial Foreign Service National, a Creole who had a card which gave not only his name, but an exam that he had sat in the UK, with the notation that he had failed the exam. I couldn't figure out why one would pass out a card noting that the person had failed an exam. Well, to the Sierra Leonean, it was important that he had reached the point where he was qualified to sit the exam. That elevated him above most of his Sierra Leonean colleagues, who never sat an exam. Again, form over substance.

Q: *It sounds very much like Liberia?*

DE PREE: It was very much like Liberia.

Q: *Same origins and everything.*

DE PREE: So my wife and I discovered that one ex-British colony could be quite different from another. From this I concluded that one must be careful when generalizing about black Africa. The differences between one country and another can be enormous.

Q: *It is so hard. We tend to lump these together as we do in South America.*

DE PREE: Yes.

Q: *Sierra Leone is basically a river bank isn't it?*

DE PREE: It is located along the Sierra Leone River. It had everything going for it at independence. It had the best university in West Africa, Fourah Bay College. It had an able civil service, trained by the British. The police and military were professional. It was exporting rice. It had ample foreign exchange earnings through export of diamonds and iron ore. Its government was pro-Western. We had influence. We had an AID program. They looked to the West for support. It had good roads and an excellent port. It had a multiparty political system, a free market economy. It seemed to have everything going for it. But yet it was going down hill. I returned...I will jump ahead 25 years...a year ago to Sierra Leone to inspect the embassy. The country had gone to pot. A number of coups had taken place. The government was run by young army officers, some of whom were on drugs, some engaged in diamond smuggling. The infrastructure had deteriorated. Roads outside of Freetown were in horrible shape. The university faculty had drifted away. Corruption in the bureaucracy was rampant. Insurgents were active in a third of the country. The army was ineffective and undisciplined. The place was in shambles.

Here was a country that in the early 60's, when I was in INR, was picked as a country with a bright future. I recall attending a meeting in the Department, where we discussed what inputs from outside would be necessary to bring this country to self-sustaining growth. We were serious about it. Yet it went progressively down hill. It wasn't obvious while I was in Freetown that it was going to reach the depths it has, but there was a great deal of tribal trouble and corruption was growing. I can recall talking to the head of the army, Brigadier Bangura, who was distressed that the army was being asked to send troops to try to control poaching and smuggling in the diamond mining area. He resisted, knowing that his poorly-paid troops would be paid big sums - more often than they could earn in a year - if they would cooperate with the poachers, often just agreeing to look the other way. He was sure that corruption was going to penetrate the military. It did.

I was assigned to Sierra Leone because I had just completed four years in Ghana and Washington was looking for someone with West African experience. The Ambassador at the time was Bob Miner, a peach of a fellow, but with no African experience.

Q: *Where was he from?*

DE PREE: His background was Yugoslavia, Turkey and Greece. He was a Roberts College graduate. I think he knew Turkish and some Greek. During World War II he had been in

Yugoslavia, which was one of his areas of expertise. But because he had been involved with Tito and the Partisans during World War II, McCarthy and that crowd were suspicious of him and the Department didn't have the courage to take them on. So the Department initially sent Bob Miner as ambassador to Trinidad, then to Sierra Leone.

Bob Miner didn't have his heart in the assignment. His wife was ill. He was disappointed that the Department hadn't gone to bat for him to get him the assignment that he should have had. Bob Miner gave me pretty much a free hand to meet whomever I wished in the government and to oversee the embassy's reporting.

Q: *Sierra Leone is basically an enclave, isn't it?*

DE PREE: No. You may be thinking of Gambia, which is an enclave. Sierra Leone is up the coast form the Ivory Coast and Liberia, on the bulge of West Africa.

Q: *Sierra Leone is bordered by...?*

DE PREE: By Guinea and Liberia.

Q: *Was Guinea causing problems at that point?*

DE PREE: Not for Sierra Leone. It was causing problems for us, I guess. Dave Newsom was Assistant Secretary when I was in Sierra Leone. He was to visit Guinea after his stop in Freetown and decided he would like to go by land. So we drove up to the border where I put Dave into a dug-out canoe, and he was paddled across the river. There wasn't much land contact between Guinea and Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone, of course, was Anglophone while Guinea Francophone.

Q: *Did we have any AID program in Sierra Leone?*

DE PREE: We had an AID program and it gave us some problems. We were supporting the agricultural college at Njala. The University of Illinois had a contract with AID to provide faculty. There was a very high administrative cost factored into the contract. The University of Illinois insisted on sending out people to do administrative bookkeeping work which the Sierra Leoneans thought they were qualified to do at far less cost. In fact they were, but the University of Illinois felt otherwise. The Government of Sierra Leone was unhappy with the contract and wanted to amend it to reduce the administrative costs and delayed its renewal of the contract. With the end of the fiscal year approaching we were in danger of losing funding for the project. Finally, the Minister of Agriculture said that the government would sign, but "under duress." I said, "Nothing doing. This is an AID program and I am not going to report back to my government that you are only willing to sign under duress. Either you want it or you don't want it." The Sierra Leone government signed. But in retrospect I think we should have amended the contract as the Government of Sierra Leone had wanted.

Q: *Did you have the Peace Corps?*

DE PREE: The Peace Corps was strong. A very, very good Peace Corps contingent.

Q: *What was your impression at this particular time, talking about the second half of the '60s, of the Peace Corps? This is still the high Peace Corps time. What was your impression of the influence and effect of the Peace Corps in this particular part of Africa?*

DE PREE: I thought it was outstanding. They had a very large contingent. Probably larger than they needed. They often had two people in the same village where one might have been enough. But they were doing an outstanding job of getting to know the people in the village. Many of them were teaching or in agricultural development projects. They wanted to make a difference and were working hard at it. They were living in the villages and the villagers appreciated this. Here was somebody who cared, paying attention to their needs and their interests. The Peace Corps made a very positive impression for the United States. And, of course, in the end, the US benefited. We are beginning to get many of these volunteers into the Foreign Service.

Q: *When I was doing recruiting I was skeptical at first about the Peace Corps thinking they were just a bunch of do-gooders, but I was very impressed by them.*

DE PREE: I guess one should ask if the Peace Corps made any lasting difference. The Peace Corps itself has asked this question, returning to some of the villages where volunteers had worked for ten or more years. They concluded that the more lasting or more significant impact may have been on the Peace Corps volunteers rather than on village development.

Q: *Were there any major issues that you had to deal with while you were there?*

DE PREE: No. Sierra Leone wasn't on Washington's screen for the most part. There was the problem with the university contract. I think the cost of the contract was excessive. The Peace Corps took care of themselves for the most part. There was American investment in a rutile mine...

Q: *Rutile is what?*

DE PREE: It is titanium oxide which is used in paint. It had some application in space vehicles. An American-owned mine had its problems. It was a Rube Goldberg type operation. The company's dredger, which was its key piece of equipment, was constantly needing repairs and the company had to keep putting more money into its investment. The company never showed a profit while I was in Sierra Leone. There was also considerable American interest in Sierra Leone diamonds, but the diamond companies could and did take care of themselves.

Bob Miner, I thought, had the right perspective on Sierra Leone's importance to the US On one occasion, when Siaka Stevens was going to the United States on a private visit, at the invitation of one of the US diamond firms, he asked if he might get in to see the President. Ambassador Miner drafted a cable, advising the White House that it need not go out of its way to receive him. Fine if they could do it, but it wasn't important to our interests. Maurice Tempelsman, who bought diamonds in Sierra Leone and maintained a small office in Freetown, however, thought it important that Stevens see the President and asked Herbert Humphrey to help arrange a meeting. A meeting did take place, somewhat to the chagrin of Bob Miner. It wasn't necessary.

THOMAS N. HULL III
Peace Corps Volunteer
Sierra Leone (1968-1970)

Ambassador Hull was born in New York and raised in Massachusetts. He was educated at Dickenson College and Columbia University. After service in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, Mr. Hull joined the United States Information Service Foreign Service, serving both in Washington, DC and abroad. His foreign posts include Kinshasa, Brazzaville, Pretoria, Ouagadougou, Mogadishu, Prague, Lagos and Addis Ababa, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. In 2004 he was named United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone, where he served until 2007. Ambassador Hull was interviewed by Daniel F. Whitman in 2010.

HULL: But from there I joined the Peace Corps which was especially formative in a number of ways. Of course I met my good wife in the Peace Corps because she was a fellow volunteer.

Q: The year?

HULL: Well she came a year after I was there. I joined the Peace Corps in 1968, and she joined in 1969. I was fortunate in a sense that I had a temporary medical deferment from the military, and therefore was no in danger of being drafted, so I had a lot of options when I left college. I could go into business.

Q: I have to ask, did you graduate in '68?

HULL: Yeah.

Q: So did I.

HULL: Good year, like vintage wine. But I wasn't in danger of being drafted. I learned that because I had a draft physical when I was in college. I was forced to have a leave of absence from my college years for a semester since I was on some social and disciplinary probation from the college.

Q: We can go into that or not. Put a footnote later if you want.

HULL: So I knew I was safe from that so I applied to graduate schools, business and the Peace Corps. I was offered a job with a major life insurance company. I said, "So I really want to do that as a living?" Then I could go get a masters degree in American history and was accepted at a major university. I really don't want to do that right now, how about some adventure. I was really surprised that the Peace Corps invited me to join and subsequently….

Q: Surprised?

HULL: Well I didn't have any international background. I was an undistinguished student and so forth. But anyway I had the good fortune that they said here is a live one who we can send to Sierra Leone. Of course like anybody being sent to Sierra Leone in those days nobody knew where in the world it was. You grabbed the Encyclopedia Britannica in those days. First the map and then the Encyclopedia Britannica where the first sentence said, "Sierra Leone which is also known as the white man's grave."

Q: Because of the malaria, right?

HULL: Because of the malaria in the colonial era had killed, that means missionaries, colonial administrators did not last very long. Everybody who has ever served in the Peace Corps has had that same experience of having to explain to their parents why they were going to the white man's grave. Before we could Google a country we went to the Encyclopedia Britannica.

Q: That didn't daunt you.

HULL: It didn't daunt me; I thought it was a great adventure. I wasn't motivated very much by idealism. I thought it would be great if I could teach some people, but I was primarily interested in the adventure of going to Africa. That is where a lot of other people came burdened with all the encumberments. When you joined the Peace Corps you were given something like 100 pounds of stuff to take. I was amazed that other people brought lacrosse sticks and golf clubs and what have you to Africa. Anyway, but that was a very important experience. We gathered together in Philadelphia for staging before being sent to Sierra Leone where we were the first group to be trained in country. Up until then they had been trained in the Caribbean and the United States. It also came about three months after a coup d'état there in which a person, who ostensibly won an election a year before had not been recognized as the winner, had been put into power but they were very paranoid about foreign mercenaries, what have you. We gathered in Philadelphia. It happened to be the Fourth of July so we all went over and saw Vice President Hubert Humphrey give a speech at Constitution Hall, and then that night they put us on an airplane from Philadelphia, a 707 that flew non stop to Sierra Leone. We didn't know the plane had that kind of range, especially when it was packed full of Peace Corps volunteers because this was one of the larger Peace Corps contingents in the world in Sierra Leone. You could scarcely go thirty or forty miles without running into another Peace Corps volunteer. It was a very dense concentration.

Q: Was this a charter plane?

HULL: Chartered plane. It was World Airways. It did not re-fuel. We were landing in July which was the middle of the rainy seasons when they had these horrific monsoon storms. As we approached our plane was being tossed around and so forth. We thought we were going to die. Then we landed and our plane was surrounded by the Sierra Leonean military with lots of guns. We were told we could not get off the airplane. We thought it was nice that they sent out the army to welcome us, but then they came on board with their guns going up and down the aisles checking to make sure we were not armed. What had happened was that they did not get permission for us to come into the country as a Peace Corps group until after the plane was in the

air. The ambassador at the time, Robert Miner, persuaded President Shaka Stevens that these were just Peace Corps teachers and not mercenaries, and that they should be allowed to come in. He had agreed. However Sierra Leone being inefficient and the airport being across the harbor by ferry, word had not reached the harbor that this plane should be allowed to land. As we found out much later we were denied permission to land but we were out of fuel so we landed anyway. We didn't have enough fuel to go on to another airport anywhere.

Q: I guess the adventure was well begun.

HULL: Yeah, so the adventure was well begun. So we spent four or five hours on the plane it seemed like, and they finally let us off once everything got clarified and we started a very interesting time. But at the time a lot of Peace Corps volunteers were leaving the country because of the turn over at the time. A number of them were arrested because they had diaries. These paranoid police and soldiers thought that these were really spies collecting information about Sierra Leone. So it was a very delicate. The First few months were a very delicate period as the new Shaka Stevens regime settled into power.

Q: Any second thoughts when you got into this unexpected…

HULL: No, not from me. I was naïve enough. We were all very enthusiastic about what we were going to do in this new adventure. But without going into a lot of detail in the course of this I made very good friends with a fellow named Roger Cohen who was a communicator at the American embassy. He was my age and from my part of Massachusetts. Because of a little snafu in my training I ended up having to spend a week or two extra in Freetown and stayed with him in an American embassy apartment. Drove around in his American Embassy convertible. Enjoyed his air conditioner, washer, dryer. We became good friends. So I actually spent a lot of time whenever I was in Freetown in the course of years with people from the embassy, became friends with the ambassador. He had Jill and me to Christmas dinner for example. He wrote me a glowing recommendation to graduate school which I think was very instrumental in helping me get into graduate school. But I also made lots of friends in the embassy. The DCM later became an ambassador. So did also the political officer who gave me some self-help funds to build a school. So anyway, I got a lot of insight on how embassies operated and enjoyed the people in the embassy and thought this would indeed be an interesting career, and not nearly as onerous as being in the Peace Corps where we lived in a very rudimentary village level.

Q: Hold on for just a moment. You got funds to build a school?

HULL: Well, what happened in this particular instance is USAID had given the steel structure for a school and the village had erected the steel structure, but they couldn't afford any cement to build the walls. And the school was run by the Catholic Church which ran a lot of the schools. I was teaching in a Catholic primary school and so they came up with a proposal. I took it to the embassy and sold it to them, and we got the cement and finished the school. It was great. It gave me insight on how some of these things work.

Q: Just a note on the village. Were you far from the capital?

HULL: Well I was within a day's drive going on local transportation which was basically riding on the backs of pickup trucks, that sort of thing, but not far away. I think one of my favorite memories was once my friend, Roger, decided that he wanted to go up country and see somebody, and he decided to take me back to my village which was pretty remote. My first year I was the only Peace Corps volunteer who had ever served there, No running water, no electricity, just a very basic life. But once when I was down in Freetown for a Peace Corps conference or something, Roger decided he would drive me back in his Peugeot convertible over the dirt roads to the village. He had this big golden retriever. As you know Africans are kind of sketchy about dogs anyways, very fearful. For good reason because of rabies and other things. Roger had this exotic dog for Africa which was a golden retriever, and so we drove up to my village with a two-seater, Roger and me with the dog behind us. Being on dirt roads we put up the top to the convertible. Whenever I came back to the village the people immediately emerged to see what the foreigner had brought with him because if I had gone to Freetown I would have picked up food supplies and what have you. So I got out and Roger got out, and then this big golden retriever. You never saw people disperse as quickly as the people in this village did. Another odd thing that we had about 30 or 40 miles up the road from me was an agricultural experimental station where there was a USAID employee from one of the universities in Virginia. He had brought a red Corvette Sting Ray to Sierra Leone. My village was odd in that the main road was paved. That was because my landlord was the minister of education and he had arranged for enough money to pave the road through town. So people were pleased with that road, not only for the transportation but because they cold lay out their rice to dry in the sun, their freshly washed clothes to dry in the sun and so forth. But the insensitive American from Virginia, when he got to the edge of town in his Sting Ray and saw pavement, he just floored it. So I can always remember him driving over the rice, driving over the clothes, and being left as the symbol of America in town to explain why my compatriot was driving over all their stuff.

Q: Your reading of <u>The Ugly American</u> came back that day.

HULL: Yes, absolutely. But another up country visit I recall, there was a town nearby. The town where Jill lived and taught. She taught in a women's teacher training college. I would have to go down to that village to get my mail because there was no mail delivery to my village. I got a lot of mail because of my parents. The <u>Boston Globe</u> had a deal whereby they would send the <u>Boston Globe</u>, every weekday and Sunday edition, overseas for one dollar for an entire year to Peace Corps Volunteers. They would come by sea, and so when the ship came in, 30 days of newspapers would arrive at the post office for me to read. I would have to bring a back pack and haul these things. But I would go down to this town of Port Loko where the mail would come in. There were about five or six Peace Corps Volunteers in various schools in this town, so I would stay with some Peace Corps friends who are still friends to this day.

On one occasion the American Ambassador decided to come up and visit us all and have lunch with us at one of the Peace Corps Volunteers' houses. There were interesting characters in town. One of them was a person who was suffering from leprosy, most of his nose had been eaten away. He was known among insensitive Peace Corps Volunteers as "Old Faceless". He would have this scarf that he held over his face, and then he would pull it off and if you gave him some money, he would cover up his raw face again. I can remember we all said we hope "Old Faceless" doesn't show up when we are having lunch. Sure enough there he was. He knocked on

the door. We sort of explained to the ambassador who this was. The ambassador very graciously got up from the lunch table, went out, greeted this man, gave him some money and everything else. I said, boy, if I am ever an ambassador that is the sort of person I want to be. Wow, that is not the ugly American, that is the way Americans should be. So that made a lasting impression. There were of course many others.

Q: You said he was interesting. Were there other reasons other than his condition and his remarkable figure?

HULL: Memorable certainly. There were a lot of interesting characters in town, sort of odd people but I was struck, and that was sort of my exposure too to the American Foreign Service. Ambassador Miner like so many American ambassadors in that period had so little African experience. He had been ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago so that sort of counted as African experience, but in the 60's there were very few Americans with any experience in Africa. Then we had a lot of ambassadors who simply came to Africa and learned on the job.

Q: Sierra Leone only had their independence less than ten years before.

HULL: Absolutely, and there were ambassadors who perhaps accompanied an assistant secretary of state on a trip and therefore were deemed to be experts on Africa when in fact they had done little more than make a trip.

Q: Richard Nixon in '57 I think as vice president went to advise his boss President Eisenhower what to do about these imminent independences. Nixon convinced the executive branch of government to create an Africa bureau knowing nothing. This is an example of what you had, the executive branch of the government to create an Africa bureau. But knowing nothing. This is an example of what you had.

HULL: Exactly. You read memoirs and things of people who served in Africa. It is interesting what little knowledge we had of the continent which was not surprising. It was where the great white hunters went and missionaries and not many other people. Very little commerce except maybe Liberia where we had rubber plantations.

Q: Europeans knew their way around.

HULL: Right, but Americans not so much. So I was happy to gain some expertise in Africa because I was interested in Africa even before I joined the Peace Corps, but I knew very little about it. But to make a very long story short, I was extremely grateful for the extreme generosity of people who lived in my village. I was really taken aback, as everybody is who serves in Africa, about how generous people can be who have so little. In fact if you go to the back page of the current issue of the Foreign Service Journal, you will find a piece by Bob Griffin who went to some refugee camps in Ethiopia or in Djibouti, refugees from the Ogaden which led the fighting in Ethiopia. It is talking about how they gave him this watermelon they ground, you know how generous people can be. I think that is true throughout Africa. So I always felt that I wanted to give back in some way to these people who had been so generous to me. So it is one of the reasons I eventually maneuvered to go back there as ambassador when I might have gone to

any other place. But we will come to that story later on.

Q: You said it was adventure, rather than idealism, but I see a creeping idealism.

HULL: But there is still a lot of adventure, and certainly a lot of gratitude. It really did open my eyes. It is true culture shock for people coming straight from the United States going to live in an African village. I can remember a guy who was doing really well in Peace Corps training until he was sent out. Part of the training was to live with a local family in the village you were going to be assigned to. This guy from Oklahoma was doing just terrifically until he went to this village and had to eat with his hands. He could not visualize people without eating utensils. He said he would rather go to Vietnam than that. So there is often for people a breaking point when you have to live at that level. In the foreign service you don't live at that level. You live among the elite of a country usually.

Q: Although if you are a good diplomat there are these brief moments when you do go to the villages.

HULL: Oh of course, but to live there day in and day out at the grass roots in Africa, for me it was also something I felt that was very valuable as a Peace Corps and as a diplomat was the fact that I had lived at the grass roots level in Africa. So as I dealt with the elites in countries I was always cognizant of the fact that there is a vast number of people in Africa living at a subsistence level or below who we were not necessarily interacting with except through our USAID or Peace Corps programs. You know a surprising number of diplomats are former Peace Corps volunteers in Africa and I think that really strengthens our abilities. I often see a difference with those who don't have that grass roots experience especially in the very poor countries. Not necessarily in South Africa for example or a situation like that, but in some of these destitute countries. Sometimes you can't avoid it. People are living at impoverished levels all around you, but I think it is very hard to understand that daily struggle to survive unless you have been immersed in it.

Q: So years later if you do have the privilege of air conditioning…

HULL: You understand how it is to live without air conditioning, how to live getting your water from the river and everything.

Q: So President Kennedy was really on to something when he created this.

HULL: Oh absolutely. I must say again to make a long story short, we just succeeded in November getting the Peace Corps to agree to return to Sierra Leone after 15 years away. But that is another story we can get to, because a former colleague of yours and mine is now head of the Peace Corps, Aaron Williams. Interestingly his chief of staff is Stacy Rhodes who replaced Aaron in Pretoria as head of USAID. Now I know we can have separate discussions on that.

Q: No, Aaron was quite a remarkable figure, but for the reader's sake we are talking about an experience the ambassador and I shared in the late 90's in Pretoria, but that leaps ahead in our chronology.

HULL: Right, that is a digression, we are digressing, but I worked as a primary school teacher, had terrific students, and to this day I stay in correspondence with some of those students. Some have unfortunately died, but again later on in life going back as ambassador, that was a tremendous asset having people who lived at the grass roots whom I cold talk to and get unvarnished insight on how people were looking at the country and not necessarily through the eyes of people with vested interest in government or economic positions.

Q: We won't dwell on whether this was idealistic or not, but it sure was very smart.

HULL: Well it was sure very useful and if it was smart, it was accidentally smart. One does not have the foresight to know one will come back as ambassador, but even when I was in the Peace Corps talking to Ambassador Miner I thought it would be interesting to come back as ambassador, to the country you served in as Peace Corps.

So anyway the Peace Corps experience was terrific. We had interesting people. The guy at the head of our program was a guy by the name of Joe Kennedy who was number two in Africare when it started up and stayed at the head of Africare. I believe he is still no the board of Africare. My regional director was a guy by the name of Alan Alemian who went to work with Joe Kennedy at the beginning in Africare and stayed for many years. He later came to my swearing in as ambassador.

Q: So what was the relation back then?

HULL: He was country director back then as part of the Peace Corps staff. Joe Kennedy was the director of the Peace Corps program in Sierra Leone. Another interesting crossing paths in life was Walter Carrington who was my ambassador in Nigeria and my predecessor in my current professorial position. But he was the very first Peace Corps director in Sierra Leone in 1961. Sierra Leone was one of the seven original Peace Corps countries, and Walter Carrington was a young African American, a Harvard law School graduate who was on the anti discrimination commission of the State of Massachusetts. The Kennedys saw him as a comer and had some political designs for him. Bobby Kennedy at the behest of John Kennedy offered him the Peace Corps directorship, and he went out and started up the program. He and I are in contact as are a number of his original Peace Corps volunteers from 1961. It is interesting that all these people stay in contact.

Q: Bobby Kennedy was attorney General, so what was..

HULL: This was at the campaign period but Bobby Kennedy had many other political responsibilities.

Q: He was never official.

HULL: No, but Sargent Shriver was and he was also part of the family. Carrington had worked for Kennedy on the campaign, and they wanted to reward him with something.

Q: So he had a close association with the family.

HULL: Yes.

Q: Very interesting, and Carrington later was ambassador to Nigeria among other things.

HULL: Well an interesting part of his career, he was named ambassador to Senegal by President Carter. He was confirmed by the Senate and sworn in, and went to Senegal as ambassador, but the election had taken place. Reagan was elected, so although he got to Senegal he never actually presented his credentials, he was recalled.

Q: Oh my God.

HULL: So he calls himself of course, Ambassador to Senegal which in our eyes he was, he was confirmed.

Q: For a few days, yeah.

HULL: He was confirmed by the U.S. Senate, sworn in, but never got to present his credentials.

Q: That would have been 1981.

So anything to add Ambassador Hull about your Peace Corps experience? Anything of a personal nature happen during this period.

HULL: Well I always felt that the best souvenir that I brought back from the Peace Corps was my wife, Jill. We got married shortly after returning from the Peace Corps, in fact within a month.

Q: Well wait. She started a year later than you did.

HULL: Right, so she curtailed and only did one year in the Peace Corps and I did two.

DONALD PETTERSON
Deputy Chief of Mission
Freetown (1970-1972)

Ambassador Donald Petterson was born in California in 1930. Petterson served in the US Navy for four years before graduating from the University of California Santa Barbara. Petterson joined the Foreign Service in 1960 and has served overseas in Mexico, Tanzania, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa and as ambassador to Somalia, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Sudan. In Washington, DC Petterson served on the Policy Planning Staff and as a deputy assistant secretary in the African Bureau. Ambassador Petterson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy and Lambert Heyniger in 1996.

Q: Sure. Would you have been the chief of the political section?

PETTERSON: I can't recall for sure, but I think so. It was not a big section. At any rate, I didn't get the job. So I asked for and got an assignment to Freetown, Sierra Leone, as the DCM. It turned out, I believe, to be a lot better assignment for me, from a career standpoint.

Q: Yes. Are you still a class four officer?

PETTERSON: I was still a class four officer, so I was junior for that job, but the ambassador had no problem with grade, even though the incumbent was an O-2.

Q: [Laughter] Well, I think you really got a plum because DCM jobs are very much in demand all over the world. This would be an opportunity for you to acquire some supervisory and management skills?

PETTERSON: Sure. I didn't realize how important that was and how useful it could be for a career. As it turned out, I got the job. We left Washington for Freetown in July 1970. The two girls went to the International School, and John attended the Cotton Tree pre-school, which was located in the embassy building. Susan was eight, Julianne seven, and John five. We lived in a large apartment of a four-story building which was perched on a rock cliff of a high ridge about 500 feet above the flatland down below on the edge of the sea. We had a great view of the beaches and the ocean. It was a very, very nice place to live, but Julie and I were in mortal fear every time the kids came out on the balcony, and we never let them out there alone. One of the advantages of being in this place, with its sheer fall down to rocks below, was that the famous "tiefmen" of Sierra Leone wouldn't be able to get into our apartment. The "tiefmen" were thieves. Sierra Leone, like Liberia, was noted for having very astute, very able thieves who were called-

Q: Thiefmen?

PETTERSON: Tiefmen.

Q: [Laughter]

PETTERSON: So we didn't have to worry about the tiefmen. We worried about our kids occasionally, but not about the tiefmen.

I replaced Bill De Pree, who was an O-2 and who later became a close friend. The ambassador was Robert Miner. Bob Miner was an exceptionally able officer, an expert in Greek and Turkish affairs, a man who should have been ambassador to Greece or Turkey. But he tended to be outspoken. Because of that he didn't go as high in the service as he should have. He got an ambassadorship-

Q: Still, being an ambassador is not bad!

PETTERSON: That's right, but Sierra Leone was not Turkey. [Laughter] Actually, he had been ambassador to Trinidad and Tobago before coming to Sierra Leone. He had a very relaxed attitude about how the embassy should run and gave his DCM wide authority. He didn't see that what was occurring in Sierra Leone was vital to U.S. national interests, and this was reflected somewhat in the way he reported on what was happening there.

Q: Incidentally, let me interrupt again here just to ask you, I believe there is a course, a short course for DCMs?

PETTERSON: It did not exist then.

Q: All right. So you went out there without very much briefing about how to do your job?

PETTERSON: No. I briefed myself, of course, on important aspects of Sierra Leone. I always did as much as I could to inform myself before I went to a post. I steeped myself in whatever material I could get on the country, its politics, economics, history, current events, everything. So I knew a lot about Sierra Leone when I got there, but I didn't know beans about managing an embassy. I had to learn on the job. That's the way the Service did it, and in some cases, it turned out to be a disaster. I hope it didn't in my case. But you're right that I had no training, as such, for being a DCM.

So back we were in tropical Africa, in this little country, Sierra Leone, which was bordered by Guinea and Liberia. Sierra Leone had considerable mineral wealth. There were iron mines and a rutile mine. Diamond mining was the big money maker, however. Sierra Leone was formerly a British colony. It had been founded in 1787 with guidance from British anti-slavery elements, abolitionists. Most of the settlers in Sierra Leone were captives who had been brought there after being released from slave ships captured by the British navy. One group of settlers were former slaves from America who had been living in Nova Scotia. They had sided with the British during the American Revolution in exchange for their freedom. After the American victory, they had ended up in Nova Scotia, where they had a tough life. Freed slaves from West Indies, Jamaica, in particular, were also part of the nucleus of the new colony.

Sierra Leone became independent in 1961. In the 1967 national elections, the All People's Congress, which was led by a labor leader named Siaka Stevens, gained a parliamentary majority, but was prevented from taking power by a military coup. I won't go into detail, but tribalism was involved, with Stevens and his party being supported by the Temne tribe and the Limba tribe. The opposition, the Sierra Leone People's Party, was supported mainly by the Mende, another large tribe. The officers pulled off a coup, but enlisted men who favored Stevens and who were disgruntled for other reasons overthrew the officers and turned the government over to Stevens, who became the prime minister and who would be the strong man of Sierra Leone for years afterward, for 18 years to be precise.

Q: This is about the same time as Biafra, or maybe a year later?

PETTERSON: Yes, 1967, same time.

Q: Do you think that the events or people in Sierra Leone were influenced by what was going on in Nigeria?

PETTERSON: Hard to say. Nothing has been written to that effect. I think that in Sierra Leone it was mainly the local conditions, the political unrest, the tribalism, and disgruntlement within the military that led to 1967 coup. At any rate, Stevens's corrupt misrule of that country laid the foundation for the political strife and violence that still exists in Sierra Leone, and which has taken the country to the brink of total ruin.

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About two months after I started work, the ambassador and Mrs. Miner went on leave. She was in poor health, and they stayed away longer than might otherwise have been the case.

Thus it was that I was in charge of the embassy when a political crisis occurred. Some cabinet members who were fed up with Stevens's dictatorial ways and the rampant corruption in the government, resigned and formed a new opposition party. An internationally respected Sierra Leonean, a UN official named John Karifa Smart, led it. Stevens, who was in London, hurried home and declared a state of emergency. This was in September. In October he banned the new party and put its leaders in prison. Pro- Stevens and anti-Stevens groups clashed in outbreaks of violence at political rallies. Stevens got wind that some dissatisfaction with him had surfaced in the army.

On October 11 he summoned me to his residence. He told me that embassy officer Mark Colby, who was our CIA station chief, had met the previous morning with a dissident army officer. He asked me to have Colby leave the country. I protested. I asked him, how Colby could have known that Stevens considered this particular army officer disloyal. I told him that the liaison between Colby and army officers and others was declared and that he and his government had approved this. So there was no reason for Colby not to see an army officer. I got Stevens to agree to meet with Colby and me. That evening we went to his residence. Colby explained the situation, and noted that he really hadn't met with the officer in question, a man named Sesay. That morning he had gone to the barracks, but he didn't find him, and left. So there was no meeting. Stevens listened, didn't declare himself, but said he would have to discuss it with his cabinet. The next day he informed me that Colby had to go. He said it would be done quietly, kept confidential, but the expulsion order was revealed in the Freetown press. There was a spate of anti-American stories in the press and one editorial declaring that I should be expelled too. I had a clipping of this. It said: "There is another element in the United States Embassy who should be sent off immediately. We have it as a matter of fact that there was revolution with bloody effects in the last two countries he was assigned. A man of this type must not spend a day

longer in this country."

Q: [Laughter] Zanzibar is coming back to haunt you again.

PETTERSON: Yes, and Nigeria too. Julie and I wondered whether we should start packing. The anti-American campaign, which was now in full swing, became intense. The next day a mob of Steven's party faithful demonstrated in front of the embassy. They pulled down the American flag from its flagpole and tore it up. That same day, six soldiers were arrested and charged with involvement in an alleged coup attempt. We received a threat by telephone that I was going to be kidnaped. At noontime on my way home for lunch the next day, several men chased my car and threw bottles at it. When I went to Stevens and told him about all this, he expressed regret for the demonstration and other occurrences and gave me assurances for the safety of Americans. He also told me that he'd put no stock whatsoever in the editorial that had called for my expulsion. In time, the press vilification came to a halt, and so too did the political crisis.

But an undercurrent of political unrest and uneasiness in the army persisted. Stevens distrusted the army commander, Brigadier General John Bangura. In late November Ambassador Miner returned, and in January 1971 Stevens released most of his political opponents from jail. But he was worried. In March he went to Conakry, Guinea. There his friend, President Sékou Touré, loaned him a contingent of Guinean troops who accompanied him back to Freetown. This infuriated most army officers and certainly Bangura.

On March 23 Bangura launched what proved to be a very poorly conceived coup attempt. An effort was made to kill Stevens at his residence, but it failed. The coup attempt petered out when officers loyal to Stevens resisted and arrested Bangura. In June, Bangura and two other army officers were executed. These were the first executions out of all these political crises in Sierra Leone, and it changed the whole tenor of subsequent political events. There had been a kind of a comic opera quality to the 1967 coups, but now it was a very serious business indeed, and later there were other executions. Stevens now had a clear road to achieve his goal of making Sierra Leone into a republic and becoming its executive president. This was done in April 1971.

After the March coup attempt, the U.S. was once again accused of interference in Sierra Leone's internal affairs. There was again a media campaign and a lot of hostility. Some months later, however, the anti-American campaign abated. Stevens himself, I believe, retained some suspicion that the U.S. government had it in for him.

Q: Let me ask, had Ambassador Miner come back by this time?

PETTERSON: Yes, I said earlier that he had returned.

Q: Okay.

PETTERSON: This was in November.

Q: Okay. Well, this took some of the pressure off of you. Do you think that Ambassador Miner was successful in disabusing Stevens of his suspicions?

PETTERSON: I would say not. Neither the ambassador nor I was able to erase some residue, at least, of suspicion from Steven's mind. This suspicion was occasionally manifested in sometimes-bizarre ways. Once, when I was chargé d'affaires again, he told me that an American submarine had been sighted in Freetown harbor and was obviously up to no good. He wanted Washington to explain it. Well, the explanation was that there wasn't a submarine within thousands of miles [laughter] of Sierra Leone. It was just an idiotic idea. This was nonsense, and I told him so, diplomatically of course. Another time, he summoned me to his office. I walked in, and he plunked down a .45 pistol (a U.S. Colt .45) on his desk, and demanded to know why U.S. arms were coming into Sierra Leone. I explained that American arms cold be found all over the world, and that one .45 pistol was hardly something to get exercised about. At his request I asked the State Department to obtain whatever information might be obtainable from pistol's serial number. This was done, and that was the end of the matter.

In late 1971, Stevens called me in to complain that embassy general services officer Bernie Nolan had taken his mid-assignment leave in Sierra Leone instead of going to Europe or someplace, that he was staying home a lot, and that he was seen changing the license plates on his car [laughter]. Stevens somehow thought this meant that Nolan was up to no good.

I told him that an American employee of the embassy could take leave in the local country if he or she wanted to, and that Nolan had chosen to do that. As for changing his license plates, the minister of foreign affairs had instructed all embassies to change their vehicles' license plates to newly issued ones, and that's why Nolan was doing that.

Q: So what you're describing, as I hear it, is a really sort of hyper feeling on the part of the host government about really relatively minor, unimportant details of international light. General Service's officers are not usually the subject of observation and supervision by host governments. The whole atmosphere of Freetown sounds really sort of nervous and hypertense!

PETTERSON: Nervous, hypertense, and unsophisticated. Stevens was not a well- educated man. There was a certain insularity about him and about his government, and they tended to pick up these stories and believe them without really thinking them through or considering that there could be a logical explanation. Their nervousness also manifested their underlying suspicion that the United States was so interested in Sierra Leone that it would do just about anything to skew events there in its favor. Ambassador Miner tried to make it clear to Stevens and others that the United States simply did not care much at all about what was going on in Sierra Leone's internal affairs.

Q: [Laughter] That must have been rather awkward! [Laughter]

PETTERSON: Well, it had to be done. Stevens was considered to be left wing. He assumed that this didn't sit well with the United States government.

Q: You would presume though, that the leader of a former British colony would be much more interested in and much more concerned about what was going on with the British High Commission. Did you have a chance to talk with your British counterpart or your French

counterpart?

PETTERSON: Oh, sure.

Q: And see if they were also subject to this attention?

PETTERSON: No, it was focused on us. The British didn't have the problem that we did. There was some antagonism towards the British, but it didn't amount to much. The animosity wasn't directed against the British government, but instead against British-based commercial firm: DIMINCO, a diamond mining company, and the Sierra Leone's Selection trust, which was also involved in the diamond business. Despite commercial agreements with those companies that had been favorable to Sierra Leone, Stevens and his cronies suspected that they were ripping off Sierra Leone. This was ironic because Stevens and others were enriching themselves in illegal deals involving diamonds.

Another example of Stevens' frame of mind occurred in January 1972. I was chargé d'affaires again at the time. Stevens called me in, this time to complain that Bob Luneburg, the deputy director of CARE - (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc.), which was helping provide assistance to Sierra Leone - had been seen outside the army barracks examining weapons and taking notes. Soldiers detained him briefly. Stevens said that this behavior could not be countenanced, and he was inclined to deport Luneburg.

I asked him to hold off and let me talk to Luneburg, which I did. Bob told me that, after a party at one of their houses, he and a group of friends went on a treasure hunt. One of the requirements was to estimate the weight of the brass machine gun in front of the gate at Wilberforce barracks. So Luneburg went there, looked at this thing, and while he was writing down what he thought it might weigh, was detained. Phil Johnston, the director of the CARE operation in Sierra Leone, and I wrote a report on what had happened and delivered it to Stevens. We then met with Steven's press officer, and got him to agree not to publish an account that was about to be released to the media, which would have made the government of Sierra Leone look silly. He (the press officer) saw this and pulled back the story. Luneburg was not thrown out. Phil Johnston, incidentally, become executive director of CARE USA in 1980 and its president in 1989, and I would see him later on in my career

Despite this kind nonsense, relations between the U.S. and Sierra Leone were generally improving. We gained a lot of credit and good will from our self-help program. We didn't have a formal USAID program for Sierra Leone, but we had a well-funded self-help program. The embassy would evaluate proposed self-help projects and provide funds for those we approved. Some proposals came from Peace Corps volunteers who, working with villagers, devised projects.

Q: How come no AID program?

PETTERSON: In those days, USAID was phasing out its operations in a number of African countries in conformance with congressional legislation that limited the number of countries receiving U.S. economic aid to forty worldwide. Only ten of these were in Africa. Sierra Leone

was one of those countries that lost out. There was a residual USAID program, projects which had been started and whose funding was not exhausted. The U.S. was, for example, helping the WHO (World Health Organization) eradicate smallpox. A Center for Disease Control doctor was attached to the embassy for this program. The last known case of smallpox in the world was in Sierra Leone.

One of our most successful self-help projects involved providing piped water to villages. CARE had the plastic water pipes, Peace Corps volunteers in the villages designed the projects, village leaders approved the design, and the embassy provided money for transporting the pipes and for necessary supplies and equipment. We helped villages get, for the first time, piped water. This meant that the women would not have to walk, sometimes for miles, to get water from a stream and carry it back to the village. Piped water revolutionized their lives, and our program was immensely popular. Through the self-help program, we also helped build schools and feeder roads linking a village to a main road. These kinds of projects were also very popular.

I enjoyed working with CARE and certainly with Peace Corps staff and volunteers. Julie and I traveled a lot in Sierra Leone, often with the children. We met and stayed with volunteers when we went up-country. The villages we visited in connection with self-help projects received us like royalty. Often native dances would be organized. Sierra Leone had some of the most exciting, vibrant dancers in all of Africa. In this and in other ways, we had a very good life in Sierra Leone. Freetown was on a peninsula, and on that peninsula were some of the nicest beaches I've ever seen. Along the west coast of Africa, the surf generally comes pounding in, making it unsafe for swimming. But because of the way the peninsula was situated, there was no heavy surf along its beaches. So just about every Sunday, we and friends and our respective children would go to one of several different beaches and have a great day.

Ambassador Miner turned 60 in the summer of 1971. That was mandatory retirement age in those days, and he left Sierra Leone. It would turn out that I would be in charge of the embassy for almost a year thereafter.

We expected the arrival of a new ambassador, Howard Mace, the director of Personnel, who had been nominated to replace Ambassador Miner. The Senate, however, did not confirm Mr. Mace. At his hearing he was opposed by the widow of a Foreign Service officer who had committed suicide. Charles Thomas had been selected out. He was a class four officer and under 50 years of age. Because of the existing policy, he did not get a pension. That is, if you were not an O-3 or you were not 50 years of age, if you were…

Q: Neither of those…

PETTERSON: Yes, right. Then you didn't get a pension.

Q: Then you got nothing.

PETTERSON: Not until you turned 60. Thomas was despondent and committed suicide. His wife, at the hearing, testified against Mace, blaming him as a head of Personnel for a policy that led to the death of her husband. The Senate did not reject Mace, but they never him voted him

out of committee. After six months the administration pulled his name back.

The next nominee was Clint Olson, who'd been DCM in Nigeria when I was there. He too ran into flack. At Olson's hearing, Ray Wach, who had been selected out of the Foreign Service because of the very negative report he had received on his performance in his last year at Lagos, testified against Olson. Roger Morris, a former FSO and a writer who had been strongly critical of the embassy's actions during the crisis leading up to Biafra and during the war, also testified against Olson. Despite the negative testimony, the Senate, after a few months, confirmed him.

All this time I had to explain to Stevens why the new American ambassador didn't show up. He simply could not believe that somehow it wasn't a manifestation of U.S. hostility toward him. The rest of the time I was in Sierra Leone (that last year), I saw Stevens grow increasingly autocratic and repressive. For example, another execution took place, this one of a political opponent. It was sad to see a country of promise, like Sierra Leone, be slowly but surely robbed of its diamond riches by Stevens and his cronies. When I was in Sierra Leone, one of the residual AID programs was aimed at improving agricultural production. The university experts there from Michigan State believed that Sierra Leone had the potential to become self-sufficient in rice production and, as well, an exporter of rice. But this never happened because of the corruption and mismanagement that just pervaded the whole government, thanks to the corruption and misrule of Stevens. Under Stevens, Sierra Leone began a downward spiral that has yet to end.

Q: We're what, 20, 25 years later?

PETTERSON: It's close to 30 years now. We left in '72, twenty-nine years ago.

Q: How tragic!

PETTERSON: Let me parenthetically ask, "Why do we have an embassy in this place, all this bizarre stuff going on and the country of little interest to the United States?"

Well, the U.S. government had adopted the policy of universality. We would be represented in every country in the world. There was some American economic interest. In Sierra Leone, inasmuch as a U.S. company owned the rutile mine. But Sierra Leone was really not of major importance to the United States, obviously. It wouldn't have made a lot of difference if we didn't have an embassy there, but universality was the name of the game.

Q: I believe this was under President John F. Kennedy?

PETTERSON: That we started the universality?

Q: Yes, I think that that was part of the Kennedy approach to foreign policy - that we would go anywhere, do anything, so we should have an embassy everywhere.

PETTERSON: We certainly didn't have universality in the prewar years. But in the post- war world, in the Cold War, it was seen as important that we be represented everywhere, and we were and still are.

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Q: What was in it for them to deal with us at all?

PETTERSON: Because the United States is the strongest country in the world, it carries great influence with international organizations that can make decisions favorable or unfavorable to a country like Liberia. To make progress economically, Liberia needed to attract private investment. Its ability to do that was impaired by its poor relations with the United States. In addition, in Liberia there is a sense that no Liberian government can really succeed without the blessing of the United States, which is seen, as some Liberians told me, as "our father." Others told me that the U.S. was "our mother," and others called it "our big brother." So - father, mother, big brother. No Liberian leader could be totally comfortable if he was at odds with the United States.

Although our influence helped in some ways to improve the lot of the Liberian people, it was not such that Taylor would change his behavior and begin to do the right things not only for the Liberian people but also for the people of Sierra Leone. His support for Sierra Leonean rebels contributed to a terrible war in which rebel forces were committing the worst kinds of atrocities, cutting off people's hands and arms-

Q: Children's.

PETTERSON: Men's, women's, and children's. Wanton killing, a state of vicious anarchy.

Q: When you look at what happened in Liberia and then Sierra Leone, you know, what was the root of this viciousness? I mean, you know, there's a difference between taking over and destroying villages, and particularly when you start maiming children. But the whole thing seemed to have gone down to a level of depravity that we haven't seen in a long time.

PETTERSON: Well, we have seen it in former Yugoslavia.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: Why did it happen in Liberia and then in Sierra Leone? It's hard to say. The hatreds that grew between contending organizations were tribally based, for one. One side would do something to another, then the other side would retaliate, and then it would get out of hand. It got to the point that human life had no meaning for some of these fighters, many of whom were children, or barely teenagers, who often were plied with liquor or drugs and told to do things and did them - terrible acts that they normally would never have committed. There was a spiral downward of terrible, mindless violence. It happened first in Liberia, then in Sierra Leone.

Q: What was Taylor doing in Sierra Leone?

PETTERSON: Diamonds. Diamonds were at the heart of the descent of Sierra Leone, from a country that could have been prosperous to a country that is one of the most devastated, poorest

countries of the world. From the time of Sierra Leone's independence greedy men sought to get a share of the diamond wealth that was being produced from the country's diamond mines. Diamonds corrupted the leader of the country, Siaka Stevens, and just about everyone else in high positions. The diamond producing areas were in the northern part of Sierra Leone. In years past, the diamond production had been largely a controlled enterprise, but even then there were many illegal diggers. A considerable portion of the illegally mined diamonds was smuggled out through Liberia.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: With the advent of the war in Sierra Leone, no longer was diamond mining a controlled enterprise, in part or in whole. The RUF made arrangements with the diggers and, in collusion with Liberians and with Taylor's blessing, got the diamonds into Liberia and from there to the world market. In exchange for his cut, Taylor was helping the rebels in various ways, including providing them with arms and ammunition. Some of this war materiel came from Libya and was flown to Liberia from Burkina Faso.

Taylor continued his involvement in this even though the United States government and others, the British government in particular, told him to stop it. A cease-fire in Sierra Leone was brokered in July 1999, shortly before I left Liberia. Later it broke down, and hostilities resumed. In 2000, a UN report implicated Taylor in his dealings in diamonds with the RUF, arms trafficking, and other kinds of profiteering. In May 2001, the Security Council imposed sanctions against Taylor for backing and arming the rebel group.

Q: Yes.

PETTERSON: As recently as a few months ago, accusations were still being levied against Taylor, charging that he was helping perpetuate the situation in Sierra Leone by continuing to assist the rebels.

LEON WEINTRAUB
Field Research in Sierra Leone
University of Wisconsin (1971-1972)

Mr. Weintraub was born and raised in New York City, educated at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and the Universities of Pittsburgh and Wisconsin. After service in Liberia with the Peace Corps he entered government service, first with the Navy Department and then with the State Department Foreign Service. His service in Washington and abroad involved him with a variety of countries and issues including African Affairs, International Organizations, Narcotics and Peace-Keeping operations in Africa. His foreign posts were Bogotá, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Quito and Geneva. Mr. Weintraub was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

WEINTRAUB: Well, we arrived in September ’71 and we left I guess in May or June of ’72.

Q: What was the situation in Sierra Leone when you got there?

WEINTRAUB: Well, it was pretty much a one party state. I forget - I think it was the Sierra Leone Peoples Party under President Siaka Stevens - they had, it was kind of a benign, paternalistic one party rule. Obviously I was not particularly involved in that. As part of my research, I had developed a proposal to study an agricultural development scheme. This was where the government was trying to convince people to switch from a traditional cultivation of rice, the staple food, from so-called upland “slash and burn” kind of rice cultivation. Typically, they’d slash a field of leaves, bushes, trees, whatever and they’d plant it with rice. They’d farm the land for a couple of years, then the nutrients would be all depleted and they would go on to another field, slash and burn the debris off that field, farm there for a few years and then continue the cycle and then eventually return to the first piece of land. This was a fairly unproductive use of land, output was not that very high, and it is fairly wasteful of vegetation.

So the scheme was to convince the farmers to seek suitable land that had water running through it, either marshes or other water-fed fields. They would then need to build some kind of low bunds around the field - if you will, low walls or berms and introduce some kind of control, little primitive wooden dams to control the flow of water into and out of the field and grow swamp rice or paddy rice, much as rice is cultivated in Southeast Asia or China. And I thought this was worthwhile studying because there was no use of high technology. At this time I had thought I was a fairly decent student of development and I’d seen the evidence and heard a lot of stories about scores of development schemes that had failed because they relied upon machinery that was not delivered or broke down, or depended upon sophisticated inputs of one kind or another, and one of the phrases in use at this point was “appropriate technology.” That became the start of this type of mantra, if you will, for development. And there was no machinery involved in this project, the people were given incentives through the use of money to hire labor, to slash the trees and other vegetation in the area, to build the little wooden or the little earthen walls around the fields. They were also given the seeds - the seeds were different, so the project did depend on some fertilizer and herbicide but not overly sophisticated stuff. So I wanted to see how this experiment was working out.

As part of the field work, I became involved with some people from University of Illinois. The University of Illinois had a contract with USAID at the time to enhance an agricultural school in the interior of Sierra Leone. So they were at a town called Njala, it was at Njala University, and I set up shop in the town of Bo, not too far from there. I was independent, but kind of under the auspices of someone from the University of Illinois at Njala. And my wife and I lived in Bo, the second biggest city in Sierra Leone after Freetown, and for the most part we were on our own. We rented a home and the first few months I did a lot of interviewing in the ministry of agriculture. Eventually I designed a survey, a questionnaire if you will, and hired two young men and we went around quite a large area of the country. It’s a small country, but we went around quite a large area of the country. I was able to work through agricultural extension agents in each of the districts, I was able to get a roster of people who were participating in the scheme, how many hectares they were enrolled for, because they got subsidy payments depending on how

many hectares they were trying to convert to swamp rice. So I had, if you will, a universe of people who were participating in this development scheme.

And what I would do is I would visit these villages and towns all over the country with my two interviewers to help and my wife, of course, and I would take kind of a random sample of the homes in the town or in the village. Some of these villages were quite small, and some were larger; but we would interview people who were participating in the scheme and other farmers who were not participating in the scheme. And I did the interviews of people who spoke English and my interviewers, after I trained them, interviewed farmers who did not speak English, using one of the other local languages. And basically it seems that, number one, people who were participating in the scheme usually, but not always, usually were already prone to some kind of innovation because they had some other kind of relationship with the modern world, if you will. Either they had served in the military in Sierra Leone, they had served in the police force and were now retired; they had some kind of other introduction to the modern world outside their village and they were more prepared to listen to specialized advice, scientific advice, technical advice and see what they could do.

The great majority of the farmers who did not participate were peasant farmers, for lack of a better term, who had not heard much of anything else. And also I found that, in fact, there were significant problems: what seemed simple enough for me, such as the introduction of "appropriate technology," etc., as I described earlier - in fact there were serious problems in that the extension agents often did not get paid by the government on time so they tended to hold back the payments from the farmers, they used the money themselves. Or the transportation broke down that was supposed to bring the bags of fertilizer or seeds or herbicides. And there were a lot of inefficiencies because the transportation system was bad, a bridge would be out after heavy rains; there was a lot of - you know, you couldn't fix one thing before you fixed six other things. So - but it was a good year for me, I learned a lot about the development process, I made some good friends there and my wife and I enjoyed it. For me it was a little bit of a homecoming to West Africa, but for my wife that was a new experience, she hadn't been in that part of the world before.

Q: What was her background?

WEINTRAUB: She was from Albany, New York. She had graduated from college in '67 and then moved to Washington in the fall of '67. She started working as a computer programmer for the Central Intelligence Agency. This was before there were computer programmers as a field. She was a math major and those were typically the kind of people government looked for to become computer programmers. So this was interesting; when we were going out together, her local friends were for the most friends she had developed at work, friends she had developed at work in the Central Intelligence Agency, in the CIA. And, of course, all of my friends were former Peace Corps volunteers. And this was quite a volatile mix as you can imagine. So we didn't share a lot of friends together.

As a matter of fact, I have an interesting anecdote here. When I was in the Department of the Navy, before I left to go to Wisconsin, and before I had resigned from the job and joined the consulting firm, a lot of my Peace Corps friends would regularly ask me, "How could you do this,

how could you work for the Defense Department?" This was during the height of anti-Vietnam demonstrations, huge demonstrations in Washington. And so occasionally they would ask me, what exactly do you do? And I said, with mock seriousness, well, I hate to tell you this but I personally have to sign the authorization orders for the shipments of napalm to Vietnam. And this was when, of course, there was a lot of bad press in the U.S. about our aircraft bombing villages with napalm and there were pictures in the paper almost every day of people on fire in Vietnam. And people used to take this seriously, how could you do this? Anyway, that was another anecdote.

But anyway, to return to the subject, my future wife came from Albany, and worked for the Central Intelligence Agency. Somehow we met at a New Years Eve party and then we were married in June of 1970, and she joined me in Wisconsin. And she was a good sport. She started out, after having married me one year earlier, on an airplane to Africa. And she adapted quite well, I think, for a young woman who hadn't had the Peace Corps orientation and experience that I had, hadn't had the "initiation" that I had. She had proven herself very adaptable under difficult conditions in Sierra Leone. So I think we had a good year there.

Q: How did you find the government of Sierra Leone? You mentioned that people weren't being paid and all that. Was this inefficiency or was corruption or what?

WEINTRAUB: Oh, probably a fair amount of both. I think the - I may have, at one point in my early interviewing, I may have had an interview with someone in the ministry of agriculture, either the minister himself or the deputy minister of agriculture. But, for the most part, my contact was with the people in the regional office of the ministry of agriculture where I lived in Bo. These regular contacts were people who had gone to agricultural school or college, and they had backgrounds in agronomy or some other field of agriculture, and they seemed to be willing to do their job, but, you know, you just saw in the office there were no supplies, no paper or typewriter ribbons, or things weren't there on time. And, you know, the stories were legion about funds being siphoned off. And typically roadsides were littered with bulldozers or earthmovers that had been imported to start one project or another and then were abandoned for lack of an oil filter. You know, in countries in the Third World, these stories are around forever, for decades. So I didn't become aware of anything particularly egregious about this. I mean, somehow my wife and I did manage to - we got our Sierra Leone immigration papers in order, we followed the appropriate procedures for expatriates to get drivers licenses. You know, we didn't have an embassy General Services Officer helping us. We did it just as a foreigner because I needed a driver's license in Sierra Leone. You know, it was very inefficient. We had to wait long hours in immigration offices or motor vehicle offices. Now, maybe if we had paid someone under the table we would have got it in half the time, but I wasn't about to start that. So, whether we waited for so long because people were hoping we were going to bribe them or because they were just inefficient, I just couldn't say at the time.

Q: Did you have much contact with the embassy or AID while you were doing this?

WEINTRAUB: I had a little bit of - as I said, I had a fair amount of contact with the people from the University of Illinois who were there as AID contractors. I had a little bit of contact; I introduced myself to the people at the embassy. As a matter of fact I met someone who I'd meet

years later in the Foreign Service, Peter Chavez, who recently retired from the Foreign Service. He's now at Ft. McNair as the head of the African Defense Research Institute, something like that, at Ft. McNair. He went on to become ambassador to Sierra Leone years later. I think it was his very first assignment as a political officer in Freetown in 1971. And I went in to introduce myself, just to register myself at the embassy as I had been advised to do.

I met a very nice fellow in the admin section by the name of James Johnson; we kept in touch over the years for a period. And it turned out that - I hope I'm not speaking out of school here - they had a spare embassy flat or a couple of flats, a couple of apartments, which were used, I guess, when people were arriving in country before their housing was ready or when they were departing from country. And I guess they kept these on long-term lease for other uses and Johnson said when - he let my wife and I, whenever we came to Freetown, we came to Freetown maybe about three or four times during the academic year that we were there - if we let them know beforehand and it was available we could use the flat to stay in rather than in a hotel. So I think we used the flat a few times. We appreciated that very much. We were pretty low on resources. When you have an academic research stipend you don't have much money there, so Jim Johnson, I remember, was very helpful.

I don't remember, maybe the ambassador was Don Petterson; he may have been the ambassador or the chargé. I may have met him once, I'm not sure. But it was not regular contact – I had only occasional, sporadic contact with the embassy. I met some Sierra Leone academicians at Fourah Bay University, one of the major universities that the British had founded, a very good school of high quality, people in the agricultural economics department, but for the most part we were on our own. We felt reasonably secure, the country was reasonably safe. There was the usual amount of petty crime, housebreaking, particularly of ex-pat homes that we had to be aware of. We met Peace Corps volunteers, we were friendly with Peace Corps volunteers in Sierra Leone, who came to visit us occasionally. I like to keep up that kind of a connection. But we really didn't have much to do with the political life in the country, either on the Sierra Leone side with the embassy.

Q: Well, when you came back in '72, and you did your dissertation then?

WEINTRAUB: Yes.

Q: What basically was the dissertation, I mean, what was the conclusion?

WEINTRAUB: Well, I think as I mentioned earlier, I found out the different backgrounds of people who volunteered for this innovative experiment, and I thought this was significant because everywhere in the Third World it seemed like governments were attempting to get people to innovate: either to practice a new form of agriculture, a new form of animal husbandry, to send children to school who otherwise might not go to school, maybe to filter their drinking water, to take anti-malaria pills; trying to get people to innovate. And it seems that there needs to be some kind of a cascading phenomena of getting people involved in development and once they see a little bit of success in some kind of development, in some kind of innovation, they're much more likely to be accepting or willing to innovate in some other areas. So you can't just

make a broadcast appeal to a mass population that had not been involved in any kind of introduction to a modern way of life before and hope for any degree of success.

And the other finding was - in fact - how difficult it was to introduce even a simple scheme that did not involve machinery, did not involve any high tech equipment but yet, unless you could pay the implementers on time, like the agricultural extension agents, unless you had vehicles in a reasonable state of repair, unless you had roads under pretty good shape, unless you could make sure the inputs were delivered on time, I mean, the seeds had to be delivered at the planting season and herbicides and pesticides had to be delivered at certain times or else they're of no value. So unless you can make sure that the whole delivery system was there -- which means you had to have a ministry of public works to take care of the roads, and everything depends on everything else. Everything was systemically involved with everything else and you couldn't just introduce an agricultural development scheme because it sounded good and expect it to work.

Q: Well, how did this- what was your attitude after this? Throwing up your hands or?

WEINTRAUB: Well, it just made me, you know, more interested in this as a complex problem. It made me more convinced than ever that it's not just economics -- politics is necessary, you have to energize people to get involved because I found similar attitudes in Sierra Leone to what I found in Liberia from people in the village: "Oh the government will do it." Villagers might say, "We have to build a bridge over this road because the river floods periodically in the rainy season. Well, the ministry of public works will do it, the government will do it." And the villagers didn't activate themselves to do it. It's a result, I think, of a paternalistic government. First of all there was British rule in Sierra Leone, sapping initiative -- they didn't want the villagers to do things for themselves. Then there was the post-independence government itself having a very paternalistic type of role, not exactly amenable to a lot of local initiative. There were no elected officials at the village level and there was this kind of sitting back - "Oh, the government will do it" - I found this failure of interaction pervasive. Since the government in fact did not tax people very heavily -- of course, there was not much economic activity to tax -- I found people in fact didn't have much expectations of government. The government didn't ask them to pay taxes very much, so in turn they didn't hold the government to any high standard of performance. And this was a cycle of nonperformance, if you will. So I became convinced that you had to get, you know, a more positive relationship between the people in villages and towns and the government if you're going to have a functioning and responsive system.

Q: Well, did you find that your- did you have any problem defending your thesis and all that?

WEINTRAUB: Well, you know, from an academic perspective I remember after the first considerable dissertation interview or major interview I had to make some revisions along the line of what the professors had advised. I can't remember the details now. You know, I remember being very crestfallen, as every doctoral student is sure he's solved all the world's problems in his dissertation and suddenly you get quite a few probing kinds of questions -- well, have you looked at this and have you looked at the relationship between this and that, and what makes you think this is a causal relationship here? So you have to go back to the -- not exactly back to the drawing board, but you have to invest a certain amount of time in doing it again so

that's kind of to be expected when you're doing a dissertation. But you know, eventually you persevere and somehow it's done.

CYNTHIA S. PERRY
Peace Corps Volunteer
Sierra Leone (1971-1973)

Ambassador Cynthia S. Perry was born in Terre Haute, IN in 1928. She received a bachelor's degree from Indiana State University and a doctoral degree in International Education from UMASS-Amherst. She served as a Peace Corps trainer in both Kenya and Sierra Leone. In 1982 she assumed a position with USAID in Washington. Her Foreign Service career included ambassadorships to Sierra Leone and Burundi. Ambassador Perry was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 21 1999.

Q: At one point you ended up working with the Peace Corps volunteer '71-'73 in Sierra Leone.

PERRY: Yes, after finishing my program at the University of Massachusetts, I married and went to live in Houston, teaching at Texas Southern University. There, I designed a reverse Teacher Corp/Peace Corp program which prepared teachers first to teach in Houston's inner city schools for one year, then sent them to Sierra Leone and other countries for two to three years with Peace Corps. My husband and I were responsible for overseeing their graduate studies while in the country, so we traveled from time to time to provide instruction and guidance toward their academic degrees. That program is finished now but we trained over 200 teachers, about 100 who because Peace Corps volunteers, well trained and already knew the language when they got to Sierra Leone.

Q: What is the language in Sierra Leone?

PERRY: English is the commercial language, which is taught after early grammar school. Krio is a broken English patois, but has a formal, written language, which has become the official language. There are also several tribal languages, including Swahili.

PAUL H. TYSON
Student, Njala Agricultural College
Sierra Leone (1972)

Mr. Tyson was born in Virginia into a US military family and was raised in army posts in the United States and abroad. Educated at Dartmouth College and George Washington University he entered the Foreign Service in 1974. As a trained Economic Officer, Mr. Tyson served in a number of foreign posts, including Bonn, Dhahran, London and Kuwait City. His Washington Assignments

were primarily in the petroleum and international economic fields. Mr. Tyson also served with the Sinai Multi-National Force & Observers. Mr. Tyson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2001.

Q: Sierra Leone - you were there, it must be, '72 or so?

TYSON: Yes, January to mid-March of 1972.

Q: What was Sierra Leone like when you went there?

TYSON: Sierra Leone, in some ways, was actually a sweet little country. It had its dictator there, but, you know, there wasn't really much going on. We showed up with our group which had been split along racial lines, just because the blacks were all hanging out with each other, and we got to Sierra Leone and discovered a group that was virtually all-white from Kalamazoo College in Michigan who'd been there for three months already. So they had figured out where the beaches were, what you did, and all this and that. At first we were up at the dorms at Fourah Bay College up on the mountain above Freetown, and it became rapidly obvious to our black colleagues that it was really useful to have a white with you in black Africa. People would stop when you were hitchhiking, you got moved to the heads of the line; there was just a whole lot of leftovers from colonialism still there.

We ended up moving down the mountain and living with an African family on Lester Road; Mrs. Wright and her sister had two houses near each other, so we were split up. We were doing a lot of independent study and had weekly seminars and then a number of us went up to an agricultural college at Njala for awhile, some went up to Makeni. All names that became tragically familiar much later on. And then you'd also go out to the beach. I mean, it was also the type of country, even as a student, you had money. You know, the police down at the bottom of the hill were selling marijuana for ten cents an ounce; the Kalamazoo people had figured that out. You know, they had Star beer there, Lebanese restaurants, and movies. So, it was nice.

It was interesting. It was obviously a poorer country. Graham Greene had set his first novel there. They had the Creoles, who had been the returned slaves. Just an interesting place. I had gone there because in large part I figured, when will I ever do Africa? So I mean, in that sense it was fascinating. Aliun was out there and, frankly, he had his life, we had ours. He gave us a lot of latitude - or we took it. But it was an interesting time; truly something I would've never thought of doing.

Foreign Service connection; that December, just before leaving, I had taken the Foreign Service exam in the post office in Hanover, New Hampshire, because one of my pol/sci professors had said, "Well, Mr. Tyson, you've taken every other examination. Why don't you take the Foreign Service exam?" So, about three of us did and I was the only one that passed the written portion. My roommate was forwarding mail to Sierra Leone and I was at Njala Agricultural College in Sierra Leone when I got a letter saying I'd passed the written test and could I be in Boston in ten days for the orals. So I wrote back saying, "Love to do it, but I'm in Africa. Can we reschedule?" I eventually got a letter back saying, Washington, five days before you graduate from college, where I did pass the orals. But, we went from Njala back to Freetown, so wearing my African

sandals, my shorts, my t-shirt, and my frizzy hair, I walked into the American Embassy with my little letter and said, "I'd like to talk to someone about the Foreign Service." Incidentally, I can't remember the name of the man, he might have been in consular or admin. [administration], but he brought me into his office, had a pot of coffee and some cookies, and we sat around and talked about the Foreign Service.

Q: You took the orals, this would've been in '72. Do you recall the oral exam?

TYSON: Very much so.

Q: I would like a sample of what sort of things were asked of you.

TYSON: My oral exam was interesting because it was headed by a young black officer, Richard Moose, and then two older white guys in suits. One of them had extensive experience in South America, I remember that. The other one I really don't much remember. And I think it was very broadly questions of international policy, a lot of sort of trivia, you know, do you know different parts of the world. I remember the South America guy hammering me a bit on South America. But what I think was most interesting about the interview was, of course, they all had in front of them, I was just back from a foreign study program on Africa and Moose, the black guy, looks at me and says, "Did you have racial problems in your group?" and I looked at him and said, "Of course we did!" and you could literally see the other two guys almost falling off their chairs, figuring, "Oh my God, we're going to go there." And you know, I basically said what I already said, you know, in Hanover, New Hampshire you'd walk out of the classroom, the eight blacks would go one way, the four whites the other. We meet in New York, fly to London, have a twelve hour layover, go into London, the eight blacks go one way, the four whites go another, and then we get to Africa where Aliun actually broke us up in terms of roommates, and I got Mike Orr. But, it became obvious to them that hanging out with the whites in Africa had its pluses. So we talked a lot about it and Sierra Leone, and then I walked out, and they said, "Well, you've passed." So, that was fine. My memory of that was the question, and just the looks on the faces of these guys, "Oh my God, he's going to go there."

CLINTON L. OLSON
Ambassador
Sierra Leone (1972-1974)

Ambassador Clinton L. Olson was born in South Dakota in 1916 and moved to California when he was 15 years old. He received a bachelor's from Stanford University. While pursuing an MBA in graduate school at Stanford, Ambassador Olson was called into active duty as a U.S. Army Reserve Officer in 1941. His Foreign Service career included positions in Austria, Iran, Russia, Martinique, England, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. Ambassador Olson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 17, 1996.

Q: When you heard about going to Sierra Leone, can you tell me how that developed?

OLSON: As I told you earlier, my wife told me in Saigon that I had been named Ambassador to Sierra Leone and that surprised me. A couple of days later, I did get the message from the Department. They asked me if there was any reason that I could not accept this post. Then, of course, I was all set to go through the procedures of being named and confirmed when Roger Morris caught up with me.

Q: Can you tell us about that?

OLSON: One of the guys in the Department, a friend of mine, said, "I heard about your assignment to Sierra Leone, did you know that they're going to try and block that?" I was in a state of shock. I said, "What on earth for?" He said, "There's a couple of disgruntled people who are out to get you." I said, "Well, that's lovely news. Why and how? What have they got to go on?" It turned out that it was this Consul who disobeyed my orders and who was assigned to Hong Kong along the line. Bob Barnard had gotten together with some of the pro Biafra people in the Department. One was a Junior Officer and was not only pro Biafra, but he was almost a Catholic priest he was so deeply involved in religion. They were the ones who tried to torpedo my appointment to Sierra Leone.

Q: Along with Roger Morris?

OLSON: Yes, Roger was the key man, I think.

Q: He was still with the NSC at that point?

OLSON: I think he had just left the NSC. He was hanging around the Department in some capacity. I told you that I was investigated by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and a fellow named Henderson, who was the Chief of Staff of the Foreign Relations Committee. They examined me down to my little toenail for about a month, but Roger insisted on testifying.

Q: Can you explain how that happened?

OLSON: The Senate Committee told Roger Morris, "Look, we've investigated Mr. Olson down to the nth degree and we find that his record is damn near perfect and there is no basis for any complaints on the part of the Foreign Relations Committee for the way that he has conducted his entire career. If you insist on making these kinds of charges because you will get the "black eye" not only from the Senate Foreign Relations Committee but from the State Department and elsewhere. So, we recommend that you do not testify on Mr. Olson's appointment before the Committee." Well, Roger Morris ignored that and did testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and Senator Bill Fulbright said, "Mr. Morris, do you have anything to add to that?" He said, "No" and they said, "Our Committee thinks that Mr. Olson is a fine Officer and we're going to recommend confirmation. We don't want to hear any more from you." The Foreign Relations Committee, including the staff on the Committee who had been briefed by Morris, who tried to torpedo me, confirmed me 100% with no dissent. It was a rather trying experience.

Q: Absolutely.

OLSON: I didn't want to be Ambassador to Sierra Leone that much, to go through that. But, when you're faced with that sort of thing, you have to see it through.

Q: You were Ambassador to Sierra Leone from when to when?

OLSON: From the summer of 1972 to the winter of 1974.

Q: When you went out there, what did you see as American interests in Sierra Leone?

OLSON: That's an interesting question. Quite frankly, I don't think we had any great interests there. It was just another West African country. There was very little of international interest. There were some Chinese fiddling about in the background and the Russians, of course. They had an Ambassador there and a Mission. I would have recommended that we have one super Ambassador for several of those small countries and have charge instead of having a full scale Mission in those countries.

Q: Soapy Williams was the one who made the determination that we would put an Ambassador in every African country and it's something that we've been living with ever since.

OLSON: Soapy did it, and I think my good friend Dave Newsom went along with it at the time. I've never talked to Dave about whether he's had second thoughts about that.

Q: What was the political situation in Sierra Leone when you were there?

OLSON: The political situation basically was that the country had been run by the Creole types, who were sort of a distinguished lot. Fourah Bay University in Sierra Leone was about the leading African university and there was a cluster of African intellectuals who worked out of Fourah Bay and were doing a good job. They were the culture of Sierra Leone. Then the people from up country, the tribal sort of thing got out of control, the government under Siaka Stevens.

Q: Was this before you got there?

OLSON: Yes, before I got there. Siaka Stevens was definitely running the show with a bunch of somewhat primitive people from up country, running the various Ministries and so on. There was no great problem, except to see that African culture pushed aside, including the academic field and taken over by the somewhat primitive people. Siaka Stevens was the head of that group and he became a dictator, like most of them do. He was a remarkable man financially, because his salary was something like $12,000 a year and he was able to build some high-rise apartments in the Canary Islands during his tenure. He was robbing the country like so many others. They had as a great resource the diamond mines and controlling of the diamonds. There was much smuggling and it could not be stopped. There was the famous case of the robbery at Sierra Leone airport where a diamond shipment was set down in Freetown and gangsters came in and robbed the whole lot. We're sure that was staged by Siaka Stevens and a Lebanese diamond merchant. You read "Diamonds Are Forever," didn't you? That was the opening scene.

Q: That was a book by Ian Fleming. What do you think about the Chinese Communists and their role in the country?

OLSON: It was very minor in Sierra Leone and I would say minor in all of Western Africa. But in East Africa it was another picture. They built the railroad in Tanzania. They were in there pretty deep. The Soviets were every place else to some degree. Nigeria was their number one target, with all its resources in the form of personnel, money and what have you. West Africans just aren't built for Communism. They're all basically capitalists at heart. How they make their money and so on. As I said to you, in retrospect of my years in West Africa, I was in favor of turning it over to the Soviets and letting them try to straighten it out.

Q: Did you find in Sierra Leone that you were playing any particular role, or was it more watching? Did the British have the prime foreign influence?

OLSON: No, the British didn't have too much influence here. At one point, the watching game for us was that we were suddenly aware of outside intelligence operations and, in fact, there was an attempt to penetrate into our Embassy and the Israeli Embassy by the Palestinians. We found that our cars were being followed and so through intelligence activity external to Sierra Leone, we were aware, we had been alerted and checked it out and, sure enough, we were being shadowed all over the place. It was the Palestine Organization headed by George Habash. It became somewhat alarming. We got the Israel Ambassador to complain to President Stevens and I sounded off on that also. This was a dangerous situation. We increased our security around the Embassy and around the Israeli Embassy. Unhappily, the Israelis were located almost together on an isolated hill. We finally convinced the President of Sierra Leone that something had to be done about this. The President got in touch with the leader of the Lebanese community, who had also been involved with the diamond hijacking and told him that something had to be done. The Lebanese leader was told that if anything happened to the American Ambassador or the Israeli Ambassador as a result of these people being around, he was going to throw all of the Lebanese out of the country. So, George Habash's guys disappeared after that. We had no further threats. We were going around armed for awhile and the President very kindly gave me a personal guard to secure me around the house at night. This personal guard would arrive at dusk and spread a blanket on the ground and tell my regular guards to wake him up if anything happened. I went to check on a couple of different nights. One night, I stole his Tommy gun while he was asleep and all of my guards were asleep, too. Pretty soon, somebody came knocking on the door in the middle of the night, saying, "Somebody had stolen my Tommy gun." I said, "I wonder who that could have been."

Q: When you were dealing with the George Habash organization, that's serious. How about the UN votes? This was always one of the things that Ambassadors of every country and particularly the smaller countries. Each year, there is a list sent out of UN votes. How did you find Sierra Leone responded to this?

OLSON: They voted against us most of the time. Then you'd have a long talk with the President and tell him how important it was that Sierra Leone support us and they would promise that, yes, they'd do it, but then they would vote the other way.

Q: Did they belong to a particular group in the UN?

OLSON: It was just the Africans in the UN, not any special African group.

Q: But there was no particular ideology behind it?

OLSON: Who knows. It was mostly voting against the great imperial powers.

Q: Did we have much economic interest in the area?

OLSON: The diamonds and we had a rutile mine that we were involved in. Titanium Dioxide is rutile, the ore of that and Pittsburgh Plate Glass, PPG, was interested in that and also Bethlehem Steel. They jockeyed back and forth as to who would control this and it was a very difficult thing because the rutile was a volcanic rock and very rough and rugged that would wipe out digging equipment very rapidly. There were a lot of problems with that. On the other side of the coin, you had the people from the States who wanted to buy the rutile, that were being pressured to contribute something to the President. There was a lot of that sort of thing. There was no overwhelming economic responsibility there.

Q: When did you leave there?

OLSON: I ceased to be the Chief of the Mission in the fall of 1974. I was then held onto for some months as a Political Ambassador while they were waiting for a replacement to come along. The Kissinger rule at the time was that if you'd been Ambassador to one country, then you should get the hell out and let somebody else have t hat position. It was a stupid rule in some respects. So, I said farewell to being an Ambassador. I did have the opportunity to continue as a Chief of Mission, but that would have been to the West African country of Mauritania.

MICHAEL A. SAMUELS
Ambassador
Sierra Leone (1975-1977)

Ambassador Michael A. Samuels was born in Ohio in 1939. After graduating from Yale in 1961 he pursued a master's degree at Columbia University's Teacher's College and completed his graduate work in Great Britain. Upon completing his education he spent several years as a schoolteacher in Nigeria. In 1970 he returned to the United States and assumed a position in Congressional Relations at the State Department. His career has included ambassadorships to Sierra Leone and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), as well as positions at the Department of Commerce and the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Ambassador Samuels was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on October 21, 1991.

Q: *Here we go again. Today is November 6, 1991 and this is a continued interview with Mike Samuels. Mike, why don't we start with Sierra Leone? You were Ambassador there from 1975 to 1977. How did you get the appointment?*

SAMUELS: I suspect the fairest way to describe it is that it was a recognition of the performance that I had put in in my previous position as executive assistant to the Deputy Secretary, and an awareness that I was an African specialist in the context of the movement of the then Deputy Secretary Rush to a Cabinet level position in the White House. Rush and Kissinger made a decision that I should be offered an ambassadorial position and Sierra Leone on review seemed to be the most appropriate place. In effect, that is how I got it.

An interesting little vignette concerning the pace at which it came through. The decision to offer me the post was made in May, 1974. The nomination was not made until December, 1974. A lot of things could explain the delay, but the key factor was that my predecessor had been, if I am not mistaken, a fraternity brother of a guy who quickly became a White House advisor to President Ford. He was a career Foreign Service officer who knew that upon departure from Sierra Leone he would go into retirement. He wanted to avoid that. So he tried to utilize his friendship to forestall or at least delay his replacement. That succeeded in delaying it for a few months, but in the end not to forestall it.

Q: *Obviously you had been dealing with African affairs so you weren't a novice and you weren't a novice at the State Department, but before you went out--we are talking about the mid-70s--how were you prepared for the assignment? Was there a formal preparation or did you just talk to the Desk before departing?*

SAMUELS: There was a good preparation. My wife and I were even given tutorial Krio language lessons. Krio is basically a separate language that developed over the years first as a Creole and later became a Krio language.

Q: *It has no relation with the Creole of Haiti?*

SAMUELS: It is a separate language although there may be similarities in the way in which it evolved. We were given intensive language training which frankly turned out to be very useful image-wise for us in Sierra Leone. There was a guy by the name of John Collier, who I think is still at FSI, who put on a special Sierra Leone seminar one day where they brought in Sierra Leone specialists from around the country--academics, people in the government who knew something about Sierra Leone. That was a normal ambassadorial course. I also spent a lot of time going around visiting relevant offices in the US government that had a Sierra Leone interest. So I was pretty well prepared. As you can tell, I had a long time to prepare.

Q: *Yes. When you went out there what did you perceive to be American interests in Sierra Leone?*

SAMUELS: At the time there was a process of identifying those interests. Every year we went through an exercise that listed our interests there. It was clear that the number one interest in Sierra Leone was not to be accused of being involved in their domestic affairs.

Q: *What was the political/cultural situation in Sierra Leone at the time that we had to avoid getting involved in?*

SAMUELS: Well, in the late '60s there had been coups and counter coups, elected government changed leadership, a military coup to keep them from coming into power, radical movements of one kind or another. At one point two events led to a tense relationship between the US and the government of Sierra Leone. One was the PNGing of a guy in our...

Q: *PNG means to declare persona non grata.*

SAMUELS: Exactly, meaning that the government wanted out of their country one of our diplomats who was accused of intelligence activities and eventually he was removed. About the same time there were protests against our Embassy which led to mobs attacking its facade, if nothing else, and ripping down the U.S. flag. Relations were tense for some time. In fact, when I came in there were a lot of threats against the Peace Corps, which was our largest presence in the country, and one of my goals was at least to neutralize, if not win over, the leader of the kind of anti-Peace Corps movement, because anti-Peace Corps became a kind of symbolic anti-US effort.

The leader of that at the time was Vice President of Sierra Leone, a man named S. I. Cariama. I spent a lot of time with him trying to win him over. I think I was pretty successful.

Q: *Often these anti-US movements are just designed for purely political purposes internally. You have to have an enemy, we are not immune from this ourselves. Was there any justification, looking back subjectively, for this anti-American and focus on the Peace Corps situation?*

SAMUELS: I am not in a position to answer that question because the events that were utilized to justify this so-called anti-Americanism were events that took place quite some time before I arrived. I was just the recipient of the atmosphere. The relative ease with which that atmosphere was able to be molded gave me the feeling that if there had been justification back then it was easy to move on to the next phase in the relationship. In fact, I believe that trying to move on to the next phase in the relationship, which was part of my responsibility, coincided with the desire of the strong President, Siaka Stevens, to improve relations with the United States for his own purposes. They utilized both my youth (34), as a sign of the rejuvenation of the relationship, and the fact that I was a non-career ambassador, the first one they had ever had, as a sign that the political scene in the US was beginning to focus on Sierra Leone.

Well, that obviously wasn't true, but there was no reason why we shouldn't utilize that to improve relations. After all, Sierra Leone was not a big piece of our African policy, but nonetheless it wasn't useful to have tension in a relationship with any country when it wasn't justified.

Q: *When you arrived there, what was the political situation?*

SAMUELS: There was a President and a Vice President. It was an elected government. At the time, there was an elected opposition but, during the time of my stay there, they evolved into a one party system utilizing the Zambian scheme as the appropriate model to follow. There had

been a series of pretended coups. At the time I arrived there had been jailings, trials and some death sentences for coup-plotters. Some of the opposition were forced into exile. There were claims of dictatorial government that were common. Some of the strong opposition found its way in both the UK and US, but frankly much of what took place took place off the front pages and out of anyone's ability to analyze so not too much was known about the opposition.

Q: *What was the U.K. connection there at that time? Was it still quite strong?*

SAMUELS: Not really. Obviously there was a UK High Commissioner, but the U.K. tended to send older people down who were tired. At one point they had a guy down there as High Commissioner who didn't want to be there. He was a Arabist who felt that somehow he was being given penance by being assigned out there and that kind of attitude showed to the Africans. They had some aid program, but basically the U.K. was more a stopping place for Sierra Leoneans who were either in exile or were going on trips, and they would always go through there. But they were not an important factor in local affairs.

Q: *I assume they had a military of some sort?*

SAMUELS: There was a military. It had been responsible for past coups. President Stevens was very wary of the military. In fact, up to the time I arrived, there had been a long delay in any contact between US Defense Attachés then resident in Monrovia, Liberia, and the military in Sierra Leone. One of the "accomplishments" of my tenure was to develop a dialogue between the US military and the Sierra Leone military. Stevens was reported to have restricted the military access to both guns and ammunition and it was known that his Party, the All Peoples Congress (APC), was, itself, armed with enough equipment to be able to give the army a bit of a battle if necessary. And some people felt that, in certain ways, the APC was better armed than the military. It was a military that was present and had a good marching capability, showing up for parades, etc, but it wasn't very well armed. They had two naval vessels for patrolling their shores, and it was widely suspected that they had no one who could really sail them.

Q: *So there was no drive to equip this military on the part of the United States?*

SAMUELS: We had no relations with them.

Q: *Did any other, the British, the French, the Soviets, get involved?*

SAMUELS: The Cubans. There were Cuban advisors around but they were not a significant factor. Stevens would not allow it to become an important factor. He kept it constrained. It is current to note, in passing, that the current President of Sierra Leone, Joseph Momoh, was, at the time, head of the army. Stevens evolved him from being head of the army into being someone who could be accepted by a civilian system. That is symbolic of how Stevens kept him tied with the civilian system. In fact, at some point, he was given a place in the Parliament. There were places that were given to the head of the army, the police, and a few others like that.

Q: *Were your dealings mostly with the Foreign Ministry or did you see the President mainly? Where were your connections?*

SAMUELS: My connections were everywhere. I had connection with almost every minister. I traveled to the constituency of most of the ministers, with them. I had access to President Stevens almost anytime I wanted it. The Foreign Ministry had no ability to constrain any kind of informal contact I wanted to have. It was a funny place. If one were gregarious, it would have been simple to have contacts with Cabinet level people. I was gregarious, and my wife and I did a lot of entertaining at that level. In fact, I knew the whereabouts of most of them most of the time because it was such a transparent society. At any given night, if I were interested in finding a Cabinet member, I just had to go to one of the casinos in town and chances were good that you would run into one of the Cabinet members.

Q: *Were there any issues that came up outside of your trying not to be accused of interfering?*

SAMUELS: There were a few problems that came up that I might pass on. I can think of three in particular.

Even before I presented my credentials I received instructions from the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, Nat Davis, to express concern to the Foreign Minister of Sierra Leone, Desmond Luke for his behavior critical of Davis. I think it was related to the Allende affair because Davis had been Ambassador to Chile at the time. At an OAU Foreign Ministers meeting at Kinshasa, Luke had been critical of Davis, and I was given instructions to express our strong disapproval of that behavior even before I presented my credentials. In passing I would note that that was probably the single most difficult assignment I ever received because I didn't like Nat Davis. He had been a man who had given me a lot of trouble when he was Director General of the Foreign Service and when I was working for Kenneth Rush. Nonetheless, I had to carry through that assignment even though I knew it would make my own assignment in Sierra Leone more difficult. It was the hardest thing to carry out I ever had.

Q: *How was this received?*

SAMUELS: I don't remember that. Subsequently Luke quit being Foreign Minister and went on to be a lawyer/businessman and became a friend. Now I understand that he has an eye out to becoming President of Sierra Leone assuming that they are going to open up their system to a more democratic approach.

Q: *You were saying there were three major problems. One was having to make this protest, what were the others?*

SAMUELS: The second one was a fascinating little diplomatic vignette that was lost on the world and probably of little importance but was fascinating. During the time I was there one or both of the Koreas were spending a tremendous amount of energy and money trying to win friends and converts on the African continent. At the time I arrived there was a North Korean diplomatic presence in Sierra Leone. Shortly after I came, the Sierra Leoneans committed themselves to accepting a South Korean presence as well. It would have been the first country in Africa, I believe, that would have had diplomatic relations and presence from both Koreas.

Well, in due course, a South Korean arrived to be the first South Korean Ambassador. He called on me even before he presented his credentials. He was a nice man by the name Lee.

One day I was called to the State House, where the President had his office, by President Stevens who asked for my help. The story that emerged was the following.

Ambassador-designate Lee had been picked up by the Presidential limousine as was normal for the presentation of credentials; was driven to the State House; was greeted outside of the State House by the normal buglers blowing whatever it was they blew to welcome such a person; was greeted at the front door by the Foreign Minister who then ushered him to a waiting room off the side, which was normal, where he sat and sat. He was visited by the Foreign Minister who asked him to please excuse the delay, something had come up but they would be with him shortly. And he sat and sat. The Chief of Protocol came out and said, "We are very sorry, Mr. Ambassador, but something has come up and we will not be able to go through with the presentation ceremony today. We are sorry about any kind of inconvenience."

It was then that President Stevens called me in and said basically that he had a big problem. The North Koreans had been very active, which I have to assume means they paid some people, in his Cabinet, and he had a big problem with his Cabinet and could not go forward with the receiving of the credentials of the South Korean Ambassador. It was a domestic problem that he had to deal with and he intended to deal with it. He gave me his word as President and a friend that he would, indeed, accept the credentials of this man because he had made a commitment to do that, but he had a domestic problem that he had to work out. He was telling me because he knew how close the US was with South Korea, and also because he needed my help.

He needed my help over the coming weeks and months to call on his Cabinet members, and he named a few, who were potential trouble makers on this issue, explaining to them how important it was to the United States and to the improvement of the relations between Sierra Leone and the United States, something both President Stevens and I were committed to, for the Sierra Leoneans to go forward with their commitment to South Korea. He wanted me to do that for a while and then he would accept the credentials of the South Korean.

So I suspect I reported that back to Washington, I don't recall exactly what or how much I reported. My memory tells me that Washington didn't take it very seriously. At no time was I given instructions to do or not to do something. So I played that little vignette out in Sierra Leone and in a reasonable time frame the South Korean Ambassador's credentials were accepted and we then had ambassadors from both countries.

Q: *Did you get together with the South Korean and tell him what the problem was?*

SAMUELS: He had no idea what it was. It was beyond his control. Both of the Koreas were willing to utilize their own revenues to do whatever they needed to do in countries in Africa. At the time it related to support on Korea related issues in the non-aligned movement or wherever. If you look back in the newspapers in Sierra Leone of those days they were half filled with news and advertising about the Koreas. You thought you were in the wrong part of geography.

Because they would take out two or four full-page ads about Korea. In that way they would kind of buy the editors and publishers of the newspapers who needed that revenue.

Q: *They could then probably display back home their efforts.*

SAMUELS: Exactly.

Q: *You mentioned one other issue.*

SAMUELS: I did. I am trying to remember what it was.

Q: *Well, we can go on. You mentioned the Peace Corps.*

SAMUELS: We had a couple of hundred people there from time to time. Most of them were doing either teaching or swamp rice production. It was a good program.

Q: *Looking at this from a practical side, it has often been said that the main benefit of the Peace Corps is that it is good for our potential leaders to get out there and do this work and come back with knowledge of how the other half live. What was its effect in Sierra Leone?*

SAMUELS: Well, the first thing I would say is that it was the biggest single sign that the US was trying to work with Sierra Leone to resolve its problems. Therefore, it was the biggest single bona fide that we had in our bilateral relationship. I do think it was helpful for those people who were in it...helpful to have those people back home, kind of salt and peppering American communities that by nature might have been more isolationist than they would be with returned Peace Corps volunteers within them. But, on the ground in Sierra Leone, it was an important piece of our diplomatic presence.

Now what about in terms of Sierra Leone's development? It is much harder to measure, but my own view is that if countries are not able to get their own act together, the opportunities that are presented by Peace Corps volunteers and the work of Peace Corps volunteers are likely to go close to for naught. In the case of those who did rice production, without that being a more vital part of the Sierra Leone agricultural policy--of the extension policy, the pricing policy for agriculture, the import policies, it would be insufficient, and basically Sierra Leone didn't have the right policies. Had they had the right policies, what we did would have been quite significant, and it would have been a mistake not to have gone forward with it. I don't know the current state of the Sierra Leone Peace Corps program. I hope we are still doing it, because Sierra Leone is a potential exporter of rice.

In terms of teachers? I happen to think that it is useful for (and here I speak as someone who spent two years as a teacher in Africa and therefore am a bit prejudiced) Americans to be in classrooms in foreign countries because basically we are likely to be good teachers, creative teachers, and it is useful for the next generation of Sierra Leoneans, in this case, to have had positive experiences with Americans.

Q: *Do we have any AID programs there?*

SAMUELS: At the time I arrived we didn't have an AID program. One of the things I feel I accomplished was to recreate an AID program. There had been an AID program in the '60s, but that died with that exercise of flag burning that I described previously. I got Sierra Leone back in the good graces to create an AID program, and a few things were started. To the best of my knowledge they have been carried on. By AID program I mean something other than Food for Peace. The PL 480 program, as you know, is first and foremost a sales program for US agricultural goods and therefore, I am less willing to use it as an example of an AID program. There had been a small PL 480 program that had continued, but we went beyond that during my day, and I think there has been some continuation, although Sierra Leone hasn't behaved in their own policies sufficient to justify a more creative and larger AID program than it has received.

Q: *We got involved with two neighbors of Sierra Leone--Guinea and Liberia. Did this cause any particular problems in Sierra Leone?*

SAMUELS: At the time there was a Sekou Toure government in Guinea that was closed and was harsh on its own population, so you frequently found Guineans seeking refuge in Sierra Leone. People from Guinea would try to come across the border to buy things in Sierra Leone where more stuff was available. The diplomatic corps came across to buy things in Sierra Leone. Many of the petty tradesmen in Sierra Leone were really Guineans plying their trade. For example, almost all the tailors were from Guinea.

In the case of Liberia, there wasn't much of importance while I was there. There was the first bridge across the Mano River that separated Liberia and Sierra Leone. That was built in hopes of expanding commerce and communication, but there really wasn't a lot of contact except for the kind of rural bush traffic across borders that didn't have much meaning. But in terms of one's interference in the other's affairs not very much. There was a direct relationship between President Stevens and then President Tolbert in Liberia, and there were rumors of joint ventures of one kind of another, particularly fisheries, but nothing very much.

Q: *What about the United Nations votes?*

SAMUELS: You have put your finger on the third issue. That issue had the effect indirectly of redirecting my own career. Much of the good relations that I was able to develop with the Sierra Leone government was utilized by the US government in relation to votes in the UN. Usually votes related to Puerto Rico, or Guam or American Samoa. I don't recall, but my guess is that at best the Sierra Leoneans probably abstained. In retrospect one wonders whether they were of sufficient importance for us to expend all the energy expended in trying to get people to take seriously our concerns about UN votes on those areas.

Q: *What were the basic problems?*

SAMUELS: I am sure it was a colonialism issue but I haven't a vague idea now.

Q: *Well, these things kept surfacing in the UN...that we were being a colonial power in Guam or Puerto Rico.*

SAMUELS: There were these votes that came in the special committee on colonialism, or whatever it was called. And frankly it was really hard to do. I would sometimes get these urgent messages to wake up the Foreign Minister to make sure that he focused on the importance of their UN vote for the overall U.S.- Sierra Leone relationship. I even talked several times to President Stevens about Puerto Rico and Guam. The reason for that, and this might be of some significance, was that there was constant concern in Washington that the Sierra Leone ambassador to the UN, like many ambassadors from small countries to the UN, was acting without due regard for the overall effect of a small vote on the relations between his country and the United States. On votes like this, there were no instructions from capital; the assignment that I, as ambassador in capital, was getting was an assignment to try to see to it that some instructions went out.

Frequently, there would develop in New York, and here I only know from hearsay, a kind of sociology of Third Worldism that would lead to a kind of steamrolling on a variety of votes. Our goal would be to try to break apart that steamroll in some way. The best way you could do that was by getting some kind of instruction from capital to the representative in New York.

I don't remember how successful we were, but I do remember, and here is where I say it affected the direction of my own life, that if you tie those UN goals with the way by which the US went about trying to set up an AID program, which was to be concerned about the basic human needs of Sierra Leone, I was able to contrast the efforts that I was doing in Sierra Leone with the efforts, for example, of my British, French and German colleagues, all of whom were out there selling products that their country was exporting. My mandate at no time involved selling anything in terms of US exports.

I remember one day opening up a Sierra Leone newspaper and seeing a big headline which said something to the effect..."Big New German Aid Program For Sierra Leone." When you read the article, basically it described a German government credit to allow the Sierra Leoneans to buy Mercedes buses. I realized that we would never have that kind of headline related to the United States.

When I returned, left government service and went to the Center for Strategic and International Studies to head up the Third World Studies program there, one of the areas that I started to look at had to do with US export policy towards third world countries, with an eye towards seeing the extent to which US paid attention to how competitive it was in those countries with our fellow industrial democracies. The impetus for doing that began with that headline about the German aid program. As a result, of that I got involved with US export policy generally and this expanded into my doing some writing on US export competitiveness.

In fact, I like to feel that I was a decade or so ahead of other Americans in trying to focus on US export competitiveness in the late '70s. I even had a big project at CSIS on US export competitiveness back in those days. That led to my next job which led to my next job as Ambassador to the GATT. All that resulted from that German headline and those instructions on Puerto Rico and Guam which I found ludicrous.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Bureau and the Department? Did you pretty much call your own shots, other than the UN? Was there any particular micromanagement or anything like that?

SAMUELS: No. For the most part the Bureau didn't pay much attention to what I was doing. I think they were satisfied with what we were doing and how we were doing it. When my DCM was leaving to be reassigned, I was given a group of potential replacements. I didn't want any of those. I asked for another set of names and didn't want any of those. I tried to find my own and picked a guy who I thought would be absolutely perfect for the position and offered him it. But showing the brilliance of Ray Seitz, who is now our Ambassador to the UK, he said he didn't want the job. Eventually in the third batch they sent out there was one I chose. He subsequently went on to being our first ambassador to Djibouti.

There was very little micromanagement. Relations were good I think.

Q: *How did you find your staff at the Embassy?*

SAMUELS: Generally speaking reasonably good. Hard working. When I first went there we had a very bright young junior officer, in his first assignment, who tripled as the consular, economic, commercial officer. He went on to have a good career. He is now ambassador in the OECD. The youngest career ambassador I think we have ever had in OECD. They were good people, I think.

My general view is that in places like that young officers tend to do well because they have a lot of energy and you need a lot of energy in order to do well.

Q: *Before we move to your GATT business, is there anything else we might cover here?*

SAMUELS: I do remember one interesting thing. During the period I was in Sierra Leone, which you recall was early 1975 until mid 1977...actually there are two things...one related to Angola. At the time there was a lot of activity going on in Angola.

Q: *That was one place that Secretary Kissinger was paying attention to in Africa.*

SAMUELS: That is right. And it is interesting to note that of all the people in the Department at the time there were few who were as knowledgeable about Angola as I was. I had written my doctoral thesis on it. I went to the office every day expecting to receive some query about my views or some request that I come back and consult on Angola, but it never happened. That was a disappointment on my part. I didn't raise my flag which, I guess, I could have done.

Q: *But that is very typical. Once you have departed from one scene...there is practically no collective memory. Probably nobody knew.*

SAMUELS: Even when there was a key moment where Sierra Leone was a key player. Here my dates are not very good so you will have to excuse me. It was when there was a vote scheduled at the OAU as to which of two parties would be supported by the OAU, either the MPLA, which was at that time supported by the Soviet Union and Cuba, or UNITA, which was supported by us

and South Africa. The vote was even. Sierra Leone was one of those potential swing votes. The Nigerians were on the side of the MPLA, largely I believe because of the South African connection on the other side. The Nigerians at that time were willing to utilize their oil revenues for diplomatic end. I think it was during the Presidency of Obasanjo. They sent a Nigerian government plane around West Africa, and particularly to Sierra Leone.

There were rumors that money was in cash form in briefcases. There was a clear indication that bribery was in the works in order to get Sierra Leone to vote on the Nigerian side of that issue. President Stevens did call on me and did tell me of his dilemma. He gave me a chance to put my oar in in some fashion.

As I recall there were some efforts on my part to try to get greater attention paid to this on the part of Washington. And, if I am not mistaken, Washington ignored it. In the end I was unable to present a message from Kissinger or Ford on the subject, and Sierra Leone voted on the other side of the issue. I recall one or two phone calls from President Stevens to me at my residence urging me to do something and my inability to get Washington to take this seriously. In fact, it makes me want to look back into this and recall the details a little better.

Q: *One does wonder why? This was not a minor issue. Of all the issues dealing with Africa, this was about the only one that Kissinger focused on and when he focused on something things usually got done.*

SAMUELS: That is right. In retrospect, it was a badly conceived policy. We had an opportunity to keep the OAU from choosing sides, because the OAU started out not wanting to choose sides. It was we and/or the Russians who forced that choice. We would have been better off to have strengthened the OAU's ability to keep a choice from having been made, and we did not take that position. It was a mistake.

Q: *Before we leave Sierra Leone, did...*

SAMUELS: There was another issue that is probably worth calling to your attention because it was one that both gave me an opportunity to exercise that policy priority that I had mentioned earlier and at the same time lengthen my tenure in Sierra Leone.

In early 1977, I believe, perhaps before the Carter Administration came into power, there was rioting and strikes in Sierra Leone. Up until that time Stevens had been able to curtail such events for a long period of time. There were rumors of a coup. There was a major strike and unrest at the university, which in Sierra Leone is physically located on a mountain overlooking the capital and therefore could be cut off by closing the road up the mountain. President Stevens' party, the APC, was very identifiable when it wanted to be. They always wore red shirts and carried red flags. They were a bit of an anti-intellectual group and there was a certain tension between the ivory tower university and the students who were there and the political party, the APC.

The tension was building up. It so happened that it developed approximately a week after I delivered a graduation speech at another educational institution, a teacher training college, on the

outskirts of Freetown, a place called Milton Margai College, named after one of the early Sierra Leonean leaders. The principal of that college happened to have been a Sierra Leonean with whom I had done graduate work and whom I knew, therefore, quite well.

My speech there was an unusually candid one for a foreign representative of any kind, in that it identified serious shortcomings in the Sierra Leonean educational scene with the precision of a trained educator, which I was and which many in Sierra Leone knew that I was. It was a speech that I knew would get unusual circulation. I had made it a point of giving copies of it ahead of time both to the Minister of Education and to President Stevens, himself, because I knew it would be a significant speech. The speech was done with an effort not just to be critical, but really to be helpful.

Could it have been done in another way to be helpful? Perhaps, but I wanted to do it this way. I knew I was on my way out, and I wanted to leave a little mark in a way that I thought could help Sierra Leone...shake it out of its educational doldrums. It was a country with a long tradition of educational excellence. That college up on the mountain had been the first university in West Africa and had, itself, trained the leaders of the governments of Nigeria and Ghana back in an earlier day.

There were some who felt there was a direct connection between my speech and the growth of unrest that took place at the university. At that point my entire stance changed. I had been a very involved ambassador. I had spent a lot of time with Ministers. At that point, which was toward the end of my tenure anyhow, I started to take tennis lessons. I went to the club and spent a lot of time on the tennis court. I would fly my flag wherever I went, particularly when I went to tennis lessons. I needed to make sure that somehow the US didn't get accused of involvement with this problem which was exclusively a domestic Sierra Leone one.

I didn't want the re-creation of the problem that had happened in the '60s. Of course, there was some talk. There were rumors of my being here, there and the other place. But I really had constrained my activities and made it a point of letting everyone know where I was so that it couldn't be misconstrued that I had gone somewhere else.

I think I was successful, although I have to tell you that I run into Sierra Leoneans now who were students at the college and remind me of those days because they remember that speech that I gave. I think it may have been a factor in spurring them to do whatever it is they wanted to do. And that really hadn't been my intention.

It also had the affect of extending my stay in Sierra Leone. When the Carter Administration people came into power they sent to the remaining political ambassadors, of which I was one, a telegram that basically said, "Go home as soon as possible." It forgot to say, "Thank you for your service." The whole exercise was such that I almost wrote an op-ed piece to be titled "The impossibility of leaving the US government with grace."

I had already begun a dialogue with the African Bureau at the time, trying to figure out the most appropriate time for me to leave, because as a result of this tension in Sierra Leone, Stevens had committed himself to an election which was to be held in May, 1977. I argued that it made sense

for me to leave just after the election so that the new ambassador would come when the new government came in so there wasn't a sign that somehow I was being asked to leave because of the problems that took place, but rather that my departure was a normal movement in the US tradition and it would coincide with a whole new government in Sierra Leone.

The African Bureau agreed, but the problem was trying to get the Director General side of the Department, which was somehow connected with the political side of things by then, to buy into the policy side of the Department. We had to develop links that did not automatically exist within the Department in Washington. Eventually that was done and I was allowed to stay until the appropriate time for me to leave, which was after the election in May, 1977 took place, and there was a normal transition.

JOHN A. LINEHAN, JR.
Ambassador
Sierra Leone (1977-1980)

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

Q: What was the situation? You were in Sierra Leone from 1977 to 1980.

LINEHAN: Right.

Q: What was the situation there?

LINEHAN: Well, when I appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for confirmation, one of the Senators was interested in rumors that Sierra Leone was about to become a one-party state. It had inherited a parliamentary, democratic system from the British. What did I think about that? I said, "Well, I find it a little difficult to think about it because I haven't been there. But certainly, I will be interested in what does occur." He said, "Well, perhaps you'll come back and tell us about it." I said, "Sure," but I never did and he never asked.

The situation was one where the system inherited from the British wasn't working very well. As President Stevens told me later, "We've had no experience with it." And, as in many other African countries, the loyalty of the individual is first to his family and then to his tribe, the term "country" is something they don't even think about. It just doesn't exist. And there had been some very severe riots and clashes earlier, primarily between the Mende and Temne tribes. There had been a lot of shooting and, you know, that sort of thing. So President Stevens seemed to feel that with one party that was truly representative of the people would be better.

Q: This was President Siaka Stevens...

LINEHAN: Yes, he was known as "Pa Shaki." And so he did, in fact, achieve the change to a one-party state while I was there. Certainly, as an American, I certainly am all for democracy, but when you don't know what it's all about, I'm not sure that it's necessarily the best way.

Q: Did we get involved in the protesting or anything like that?

LINEHAN: No. Sierra Leone wasn't of much interest to the United States.

Q: In fact, when you went out, did you get any instruction about what were American interests, or what to try to do, or anything like that?

LINEHAN: In terms of instructions from on high, not particularly. But I did go to meet Maurice Tempelsman--for diamonds are a big thing in Sierra Leone as well as Harry Winston before going to Freetown.

Q: These were diamond...

LINEHAN: Diamond merchants.

Q: Major figures.

LINEHAN: Yes, Harry gave me a huge stone--unfortunately of plastic, a replica of the "Star of Sierra Leone." He died subsequently. Maurice came out [to Sierra Leone] more than once. I saw him in Sierra Leone. He had very close ties with Tubman--I'm sorry, with Stevens. As an aside, he frequently escorts Jackie Onassis in New York.

There was a company in Sierra Leone in which Bethlehem Steel had a partial interest, which was dredging--I guess that was the word--for titanium. The operation had originally been started by Pittsburgh Plate Glass. They gave up, and then a couple of American companies, including Bethlehem Steel, got involved. And I think eventually that they gave up. When I was there, they had still to produce or make an economically viable situation there. [The operation] has since been taken over by another company, which is doing it successfully. But it's an extremely complex process of production. Beyond that, there is very little American interest [in Sierra Leone].

Q: This is a former British territory. Did we leave it pretty much to the British? How did we play that?

LINEHAN: Not so much. The British, of course, were still prominent in terms of commerce--external commerce. There wasn't a spoken arrangement. On the other hand, we did there what we had done in Ghana and in Liberia. I met with the British Ambassador [in Sierra Leone] on a regular basis to share notes, ideas, and all that sort of thing. I had done that in Ghana and indeed in Liberia, but for different reasons.

Q: How did you find dealing with the government?

LINEHAN: It turned out fine. I had very good access, sometimes to the point of embarrassment. I remember that on one occasion I received a message from President Carter [for delivery to President Stevens]. I went over to the State House. My good German colleague had been waiting there for some time with a distinguished German visitor to see President Stevens. But President Stevens wanted to see me first, so it was a little embarrassing. I had no problem of access at all.

Q: How about the perennial issue, particularly with the smaller states--the UN votes?

LINEHAN: Oh, yes. We were always dilly-dallying about that. But primarily, I did that with the Foreign Minister. The President's interests were not in that particular area. Well, on some of the really big issues, he might get involved. But primarily it was with the Foreign Minister. He was a very capable young man who happened to live across the street from me.

Q: Were there any major problems? Was Libya mucking around there at that time?

LINEHAN: No. Libya was represented there, we had the two Korea's, and there were the Chinese [Communists]. I was there when we recognized [the People's Republic of] China, and they recognized us. This happened on January 1, 1978, as I recall. The very next morning I had a call from the Chinese Ambassador, who wanted to call on me because he had more recently newly arrived at the post than I. I decided for this occasion we would have some photos and champagne. It was no big deal. Then I arranged to call on him. One upmanship. I got a miniature Chinese meal with wine. It was very pleasant. His wife then called on my wife. We had met them maybe once, at a party. My wife nearly dropped dead, because in came this woman with a big hug and kiss, out of the blue! This was something we had never expected. So then we went through this diplomatic dance. I said that I wanted my wife to call on his wife. Well, the Chinese Embassy asked if they could call us back about that? I said, "Sure." They called back and said, "Would we mind, instead of a call, if my wife and I and my deputy and his wife would come to lunch? We said, certainly. We didn't mind at all. We had a very nice lunch.

After the recognition the Chinese acted as if they had graduated, as if they had finally entered the big leagues. Then they started participating in all the regular things that everybody else in the diplomatic corps did, whereas before they had been very reclusive. It wasn't long before--every time I saw the Chinese Ambassador--there was an "abrazo." I didn't know the Chinese went in for that sort of thing.

Q: Maybe they took courses.

LINEHAN: Maybe. Conversations were stilted, because of the interpreter. We never got far from "hegemony" and "the Great Bear," and all of that jazz. It grew boring, after a bit. They were quite nice people, and when we left Sierra Leone, the Chinese Ambassador and his wife gave us a farewell dinner.

Q: What about "the Great Bear"--the Soviets?

LINEHAN: "The Great Bear" was represented in Sierra Leone by the Dean of the Diplomatic Corps, no less, who had been in Sierra Leone for seven years, when I arrived there. I don't know what he did to deserve that, but anyway he didn't speak any English--after seven years. A pretty poor performance. But by that time our exercise in detente had rather gone by the boards. We had rather cool relations.

Q: And particularly toward the end, there was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan...

LINEHAN: Which really stopped things cold. So we didn't see much of the Soviets, although their Embassy was just down the street from ours.

Q: You know, you talked a bit about our aid program there. Were there any programs which repeated your experiences in Ghana?

LINEHAN: To some degree. What had happened was that, some years previously--I can't remember when--there was the so-called "Korry Report" which looked at our aid operations in Africa and made recommendations that we concentrate our aid on countries that were important to us, either strategically or for whatever reason. Sierra Leone was not among them. So our aid ceased. My predecessor, Ambassador Mike Samuels, was a political appointee. He was a capable man. I believe that he was 35 when he was appointed. He did a very good job. I have to say that. He talked the Department into reconstituting the AID Mission. This time it was very small. We ended up with three people, plus two secretaries. What I found awkward was that we had no history of what had gone on before. I did know that we had put a lot of effort into the medical field, including a hospital. But it was gone! And nobody seemed to have good records available, which I thought would be extremely useful. So it was quite as if--and indeed we were--starting totally anew. The emphasis was primarily on agriculture. We were establishing an agricultural training operation in the Njala University up-country, which was very good. I went there to look at it.

What I did have was pressure from AID to take more people. So I said, "Well, what are they to do?" I was told, "We'll decide that after they get there. We'll see what programs can be done." I said, "I'm not going to take anybody unless we have a program that they can be assigned to. I don't want them just laying around, looking for make work, or whatever you might want to call it." And so I didn't take anybody. I was firm in telling people not to come. We didn't have a Marine Guard [detachment]. There was some talk about sending a Marine Guard force, but I said, "It's ridiculous." You have to have, I think, a minimum of six [Marine Guards]. And, percentage-wise, they would be an enormous percentage of the Embassy, in a place where the threat was minimal. We had a lot of Lebanese there, and some of them were good Lebanese, or a lot of them were good Lebanese. I said, "I've got a lot of good friends in the Lebanese community. I'm pretty certain that if someone showed up who shouldn't be here, I would find out about it." Inshallah! But I didn't see the need for it. The thought of coping with Marines in Freetown was depressing.

Q: You're talking about a group of basically young and partly teenagers...

LINEHAN: Yes, exactly. I had a lot of trouble with the Marine Guard detachment in Ghana, starting with when I first went there. Two black Marines came to see me. They were complaining about their "Gunny" and said that he was discriminating against them.

Q: The "Gunny" is a term for the Gunnery Sergeant, who is the detachment commander.

LINEHAN: He was from the South. I don't know how much truth there was to this complaint, except that I assume that Marines, who tend to be very much aware of authority, would not have come to me without reason. It took some, shall we say, concern on their part to come to see me. So I called the "Gunny" in and said that they've made this complaint. I said that I'm not interested in the details, but one more complaint and out you go. I wasn't fooling around. I had Marines getting into trouble all over the place. They're just so young. In Liberia most of them were Vietnam veterans. Those guys were grown and responsibly mature and good to have around. In Ghana we also had a "Gunny" who was a wife-beater. His wife jumped out a window and broke her leg, at one point. That's no kind of example for young Marines. Another Marine was friendly with the lone enlisted man in our attaché office. Between the two of them they conspired to put some highly classified, military material in the consular office, in another building three miles away, apparently to cause trouble for the Defense attaché. They were discovered. The Marine confessed, and he was sent home. I don't know what happened to him. But the enlisted man in the attaché office was court-martialed. After this...We really had no need for Marines, I can assure you.

We also had problems...Can I talk about Station [CIA] personnel?

Q: Yes, why not? We can cut it out if you decide that you don't like it.

LINEHAN: I just wanted to say that we had had a Chief of Station [in Sierra Leone] some years before. He was PNGed [declared Persona Non Grata] for alleged involvement with an anti-government uprising, which had been a failure, and never replaced. We still had one communicator from the Station, and there was pressure on me to take a new Chief of Station. I said, "What for? What is he going to do here that is all that important?" I was successful in keeping all of them away, but my successor got them all!

Q: You left [Sierra Leone] in 1980?

LINEHAN: Just as a matter of interest I should say that, when the coup d'etat occurred in Liberia, when President Tolbert--who had succeeded Tubman and who, of course, I had known--was assassinated, communications between Liberia and the rest of the world were shut down. We, however, had our own communications. So, there I was in Sierra Leone, getting news by the hour from Liberia through the Embassy. I decided that I had better brief President Stevens on what was going on. This happened to be on a Saturday. I said that I was going to go down and see the President. My wife was very upset about this because she thought his people would have become very nervous at that point, and you never knew what would happen. I drove to his private house because my driver hadn't arrived. I pulled up at the gate. The guard said, "Yes?" I said, "I'm the American Ambassador and I've come to see the President." The guard said, "Oh, fine, come on in." So I talked to President Stevens in his trophy room, I guess, where every gift

he'd ever been given was on display. And, as always, he loved to talk. So here I went to see him about one thing, and we wound up talking about 25 other things as usual.

But in speaking of the Liberian coup d'etat he said, "That's too bad." You know, there was a problem in Liberia about the vote. There were property qualifications for voting. He said, "But Sekou Toure [former President of Guinea] and I told Tubman, `Give the people the vote.' You can fix the paper later,'" the paper being the constitution. We went on to talk about his desire to retire, which he did, finally (and died in his bed). He said, "You know, we have this problem with tribes here. I've tried to solve it, but it's a big problem. My own tribe, the Limba people...before I became president, they were very helpful. So when I became president they come to me and say they want this, they want that. So I told them, `Fuck off.'" Then he said, "Oh, excuse me, Mr. Ambassador." I said, "That's OK, Mr. President." He was a down to earth type and a lot of fun, actually. Corrupt as all get out.

During my stay in Sierra Leone a man from the States arrived, representing companies which were concerned with waste disposal. Our understanding was that he had talked to President Stevens about, in effect, dumping waste materials in Sierra Leone. We had the impression that President Stevens had agreed to this. We reported this to the Department, and someone in the Department leaked it to the press. It made a big stink all over West Africa. The Nigerians and the Ghanaians got hot under the collar. Obviously, it was very embarrassing for Sierra Leone. I was instructed to call on President Stevens and explain to him that if he wished to do this, we would be happy to send some experts out to handle this disposal problem in the safest way possible. I called for an appointment with President Stevens. This time his office stalled me, and I didn't get the appointment for two weeks. It was the only time that happened. I don't know what went on but I had a pretty good idea that President Stevens did a lot of soul-searching. Finally, I was invited to call on him and he told me, in the presence of television cameras, that he certainly had never entertained any idea of doing that, it was never going to be done, and on and on. I realized that I was part of a show for the public, and this was supposed to settle the issue, which it did.

THERESA A. HEALY
Ambassador
Sierra Leone (1980-1983)

Ambassador Theresa Healy was born in New York in 1932 and received her BA from St. John's University. Her postings include Naples, Milan, Bern, Brussels and Wellington with an ambassadorship to Sierra Leone. She was interviewed by Ann Miller Morin on May 10, 1985.

Q: It must have been very interesting to you to see the difference in styles between two different people, one very experienced and one who was new to the job.

HEALY: But it's inevitable because there is no such thing as a single way for an ambassador to operate. It will be different from one person to the next, inevitably and always. So when people talk about an ambassador who did this or an ambassador who had a habit of doing this, you're

basically speaking about individuals. There may be no way you can sort of synthesize a list of ambassadorial traits or characters. I think it's been tried. I think I've seen such lists, but it's very hard to do because everything depends upon the personal predilections of the individual, the background he or she brings to it, the interactions within the office, the demands of the job, the culture in which you're operating. You can go on forever as to why each ambassador is unique.

Q: Exactly, yes. But all of this must have been wonderful training for you, because you're next assignment was to be an ambassador yourself.

HEALY: This is the classic example. This is the way it's supposed to happen, that as DCM you learn how to be an ambassador and then you get to be an ambassador. It doesn't always happen that a DCM ends up as an ambassador.

Q: No, I know.

HEALY: It was a surprise to me. It was nothing I'd asked for, nothing I expected at that point. It happened.

Q: Have you any idea who put your name up?

HEALY: By that time Ambassador Laise had retired. I had really no idea. The senior training officer in PER called me up out of the clear blue sky. We had already been discussing possible onward assignments, possibly DCM somewhere else, political counselor at a large post, perhaps even Washington. I remember telling him that I always enjoy going back to Washington after a foreign assignment. But he called me up out of the clear blue sky and said, "Terry, if you were to be assigned as ambassador to Freetown, if you were to be offered that position, ambassador to Freetown, would you accept?" Well, I had never been to Africa at the time. I was pretty certain Freetown was the capital of Sierra Leone, but I was not certain enough to say it over the telephone, I mean, reveal my ignorance. So the first thing I said was, "Why do you ask, Bob?" He said, "We've had a couple of instances where an offer was made and the person turned it down, and it's pretty embarrassing for the department and the system and the White House to have somebody refuse." So I said, "Rest assured, Bob, I will not refuse. If I am offered the ambassadorship to Freetown, I will accept." Then of course he proceeded to say, "Don't count on it, Terry, there are four or five others on the list. It's a very dicey thing. I just have to ask the question and just don't count on it." I said, "Don't worry, Bob, I'm not buying ambassadorial stationery," or something to that effect. But he called back in about a month and said that's it. You're going to be the next ambassador to Freetown.

Q: Now this was still under President Carter?

HEALY: Yes. It would have been the January-February-March time frame of 1980.

Q: 1980, I see. So how early did you leave New Zealand to come back and ready yourself?

HEALY: I was reading all the books I could lay my hands on. Not much, because I was also under the obligation to reveal to nobody what my next assignment was. You can hardly go

around asking people if they have any books on Sierra Leone if it's supposed to be a secret where you're going. So I had to be cautious, and I was. I left, I think, sometime around June to get back to Washington and start briefing myself on Sierra Leone, and I had a couple of months in Washington, plus leave of course. I had perhaps three weeks leave and then three or four weeks in Washington for briefings, to attend the ambassadorial conference, for the hearing on the Hill, and then the swearing in. And all of this was marred by my brother's unexpected death that same summer.

Q: Were your mother and father still alive at this point?

HEALY: My father died in '71 and my mother is senile, so she didn't understand.

Q: How tragic.

HEALY: That was too bad. But my sister and her family and my brother and his family came down from New York for the swearing-in. We had two or three other guests. I did not really invite anyone to attend the swearing-in except two or three of my oldest friends and Anton De Porte, and there was, of course, no party.

Q: Was this on the eighth floor of the State Department?

HEALY: It was in David Newsom's office. I'd asked Roz Ridgeway to swear me in. Roz is an old friend. I think at that point she was counselor at the department. But for some reason Roz couldn't. I think she was out of town. She asked Dave Newsom, who was then the undersecretary for political affairs, to swear me in. And while Dave Newsom doesn't know me, hardly at all, he very kindly performed the ceremony and that was it, since we were making it very quiet and very informal. Then I went up to New York with my family that same day, spent another few days with them and took off for Sierra Leone.

Q: Why was your choice to have a very small ceremony?

HEALY: Because of my brother's death.

Q: Oh, I'm sorry, of course, naturally. Stupid of me. Can you remember any anecdotes about your appearance before the Senate?

HEALY: Not really. As happens in the summertime, the Senate was behind in its work and pushing toward what I guess would have been the Labor Day recess and they had a backup of ambassadorial appointments. Three of us - was it three of us or was it five of us - were going to Africa, and rather than have us appear individually one by one in front of the committee, we appeared as a group.

Q: They did you in batches?

HEALY: They did us in batches. [laughter] I don't know if it was a first or what. The senators were asking the usual questions and we were providing rather standard answers, because it was

basically pro forma. We were career people, we were going to small African countries. There was no controversy involved with those countries or with us as individuals. So I would say that the hearing lasted about fifteen minutes.

Q: Oh, is that all? Did you happen to be the only woman in that particular group?

HEALY: I think I was. I'm not absolutely positive. I think I was the only one, but I am not positive. I remember there was somebody. Barbara Watson was going out to Malaysia, but she wouldn't have been in that group of three or five of us.

Q: Of African ambassadors?

HEALY: Of African ambassadors. But there may have been, there's something nagging at my mind but I can't remember.

Q: Frances Cook.

HEALY: Frances Cook. When did she [go out]?

Q: She went in June of 1980.

HEALY: Then no, she would have not been appearing with me in August before a Senate committee.

Q: That's it, so I think you must have been the only one.

HEALY: Perhaps there were only three of us. Yes, two men and me.

Q: Two men and you. When you were at the War College, were you the only woman from the State Department in that particular class?

HEALY: Yes. There was only one other women among the student body. She was an Army colonel.

Q: I see.

HEALY: She and I were the two women in the student body. Today that has changed, of course, there are more women, but let's face it, there are not too many people with the proper experience and age, which would have meant that they would have started their careers twenty-five years ago, twenty years ago. There's not a large pool to draw from.

Q: That is exactly it. It will take years before...

HEALY: Well, we've already got a good ten-year backlog already. Ten years from now we'll have plenty of women to draw from in the way of a pool for something like senior training. I think, I hope, I may be wrong. I have not looked at the figures.

Q: What sort of preparing did you do? You said that you read and briefed yourself. Did you talk to the diplomatic group from Sierra Leone here?

HEALY: I paid a courtesy call on the ambassador. You don't really expect them to brief you on what's going on.

Q: No, no. Mostly through reading?

HEALY: Through reading and talking to people on the desk. Talking to AID officers who had served in Sierra Leone, talking to Peace Corps people who had served in Sierra Leone, USIA, talking to the intelligence agencies, to Defense. When you really start digging around for information in this town, you can find it in a lot of different places. Then I went up to New York for two or three days to talk to businesses and banks.

Q: What was the situation between the United States and Sierra Leone at that time? How were the relationships?

HEALY: The relationship was normal. It was fine. Sierra Leone is a small country which looks to the United States for the little bit of aid we feel we can spare for a country that has no enormous importance for our national interests. The relationship is a calm and peaceful one.

Q: No particular problems of AID?

HEALY: No, my only concern was that because there were no problems, because there was no high visibility of national interest, I was a little bit afraid that if anyone wanted to cut budgets, cut AID programs, cut Peace Corps programs, Sierra Leone, along with about twenty-five other African countries, would be logical candidates for the list of cuts.

Q: I see. How did the host country react to having a woman?

HEALY: I don't think they care. They had a woman mayor. They have women in their own diplomatic corps. I forget whether I was the first woman ambassador to serve there. I have no recollection that I was, so I presume there have been other women ambassadors there. There is still a little bit of the cultural signs of a male society. The dinner club was the primary social club in town, dinners once a month, I think, for the political and economic elite of Freetown. That was exclusively male. And, in fact, since the American ambassador had always been a member there was an actual vote taken - well, I can't say that because I don't know that an actual vote was taken - but I was definitely considered for a membership and the decision was made to stick with the all-male membership with which they were familiar.

Q: Can you remember your arrival at the post?

HEALY: Oh, yes.

Q: Who met you?

HEALY: The traditional meeters and greeters, the DCM, my secretary. I believe the AID director. The USIA director was there and somebody from the office of protocol, of course.

Q: Yes.

HEALY: We landed at the Freetown airport. I guess I was on French Air and thanks to some of the economies of Washington, I was in second class.

Q: You don't mean it?

HEALY: I certainly do mean it.

Q: But I thought ambassadors always went first class.

HEALY: At some point in the Carter administration the decision was made that the president's personal representatives would travel tourist. The announcement came over the loudspeaker, "Would the American ambassador please identify himself." When I pressed the button and called for the flight attendant, I could hear the whispers. Number one, I was a woman, and number two, I wasn't in first class where they expected to find me [laughter] and hadn't been able to find me. They'd asked, I think, every first class passenger.

Q: And why did they want you?

HEALY: To take me off the plane first because protocol was waiting for me.

Q: What happens when you arrive at a post and you're going to be the ambassador? You're met by a group?

HEALY: Your own people, your senior people from the embassy will be there to greet you, along with either the chief of protocol or his representative. You are a non-person until you present your credentials. I was able to function inside the office and inside my own home, but I was not permitted to call on anyone or take up official public duties until after the presentation of credentials. Since President Stevens was about to pay an informal visit to Washington, protocol hurried up the presentation of credentials ceremony. I got there on the eighth of September, I think, and presented credentials on the eighteenth, ten days later. Once I had presented credentials I was officially recognized and could start paying courtesy calls on my ambassadorial colleagues, government ministers. I could start entertaining. I could attend functions. The key point comes with the presentation of credentials.

Q: And can you describe that ceremony?

HEALY: It's a very formal one. The president sent his own limousine for me, flying the American flag, and, I think perhaps the Sierra Leone flag. It was an open car. The chief of protocol was in the car. My DCM was in the car as well. Then there [were] a couple of others from the embassy who traveled separately, but in this particular car there was the chief of

protocol and me and then my DCM. We drove with motorcycle escort to State House, where I was escorted to a waiting room, and after a few minutes wait, escorted in to the reception room, the formal reception room of President Stevens. There the ceremony is also cut and dried since we had exchanged remarks ahead of time. I believe I spoke first and then presented my letters of credence to him, then he replied and then they brought out the champagne. We toasted each other and we sat and chatted for three or five minutes. Then he rose to indicate that I could leave. I took my leave of him and back we drove. Oh, this time with the flag flying. That's right, the American flag was not flying on the limousine when I was brought into town. Then we just drove back home where I offered the chief of protocol again the obligatory glass of champagne and that was it.

Q: Did you wear any special clothing for this?

HEALY: No, I think I wore the same dress I wore for my swearing-in, and no gloves and no hat. Sierra Leone, thank god, is an informal country. I don't recollect, I might have carried a pair of gloves. I certainly wasn't wearing them. And I was not wearing a hat.

Q: Just an ordinary afternoon dress, you wore?

HEALY: Something a bit better than a dress you'd wear to the office, the dress that I wore to my swearing-in. I thought if it was appropriate for one, it's appropriate for the other.

Q: Of course. And the president, did he wear a business suit?

HEALY: As I recollect, he wore a business suit.

Q: Now, what about your own DCM? He was there when you arrived?

HEALY: He was there when I arrived. He had been there over a year, I think. That would have been September of '80, September of '81... Yes, he had been there for a year and as his second year was coming to an end, he asked if he could extend for a third year and I agreed that he could stay on for a third year. So Dick had three years in Sierra Leone.

Q: Had you known him before?

HEALY: No.

Q: Could you describe the size and makeup of the mission?

HEALY: The staff of the embassy was quite small, of course. When it comes to Department of State people, counting myself and the DCM, the American secretary, the consular officer, and communicators, we couldn't have been more than seven or eight at most. USIA had one officer and frequently had a short term junior officer trainee. AID had three officers and a secretary. Peace Corps had perhaps four staff members living in Freetown and directing the efforts of two hundred volunteers upcountry. We had what you can call the odd bod floating around, semi attached to the embassy such as the AFL-CIO labor advisor, but that was about it.

Q: Were you able to develop a close relationship with the head of state?

HEALY: I never tried to develop a close relationship with the head of state. I think it would be inappropriate. Relations between an ambassador and head of state, I think, are best characterized by formality, openness, but no attempt to be buddy-buddy, except in very, very unusual circumstances, which have existed, I'm sure, in the past in certain posts in the world.

Q: What host government officials did you see the most of carrying out your duties?

HEALY: It depended upon the particular issue that was on the fire at the moment. I might be calling on somebody in Treasury or the Development Bank, or I might be talking to one of the UN people about financial affairs. It depends on the issue. But after your initial courtesy calls and some effort at developing contacts, you should know somebody anywhere to whom you can turn for the information you need, or to make the points you feel have to be made.

Q: Do you develop a social relationship with these people, or their wives?

HEALY: Oh, yes. Well, it's a bit harder with the wives because the wives have their own social circles which exist when everybody else is in the office. But yes, certainly in the evening affairs I organized, I would attempt to establish a more friendly relationship with a particular minister or deputy minister and his wife. But again, given the fact that you are the official representative of one country and they are official representatives of another, you realize that in most instances your relationship will have to remain formal.

Q: What about colleagues from other embassies?

HEALY: You certainly, of course, develop official relations and friendly relations with the other members of the diplomatic corps, and since there the relationship does not tend to be quite so formal, you're more inclined to develop personal friends, or people with whom you are inclined to do such personal things as play a friendly game of tennis.

Q: Yes, it's by personalities, I suppose?

HEALY: It's not so much by personalities, there is always that, but it's just a little bit easier to suggest a game of tennis to the British High Commissioner than it is to suggest a game of tennis to the foreign secretary, the foreign minister. If he were a great tennis player and I very much wanted to play tennis with him, I would suggest it. But that didn't happen.

Q: Did China or the Soviet Union or Cuba have missions there?

HEALY: There was a Chinese ambassador, a Cuban ambassador, and a Soviet Union ambassador, yes.

Q: Were you invited to things that they were at? Did it create any problems for you?

HEALY: The North Korean ambassador and I just did not even acknowledge each other's existence. The Cuban ambassador was the dean of the diplomatic corps so there was some inevitable, as I recollect, there was some inevitable formality of acknowledging. (End of tape)

-strike, a general strike and reputed involvement of an American labor advisor, which came to nothing in the end.

Q: What was your relationship with the local press? Did they report on your activities?

HEALY: Not really. This is a very, very small town in a very small country. These papers are struggling to find the paper and the ink to print an issue once a week. They're not going to waste time on what the American ambassador is doing. The reporting was more inclined to focus on what the government was doing that would effect the lives of the people of the country. There was no such thing as a gossip column, really, no. It was very basic newspaper reporting.

Q: What about US press? Did any reporters come to visit Sierra Leone while you were there?

HEALY: I think there was some journalists who came through in January of '81 as part of the annual OAU meeting which took place in Sierra Leone that year. But other than that there would be nothing that would bring an American journalist to Sierra Leone.

Q: I see. Were consular matters a major problem at your post?

HEALY: Not really, because there were so few American visitors. We had one American prisoner who was in jail for a good year or so, and I took considerable interest in his case because he was in fact the only one. But eventually he was released and I think stayed on in the country. Visa problems sometimes did arise. Problems with students wanting to study in the United States. Some small handful of citizenship problems, but it was not a very active consular post.

Q: Could you describe the AID function at your mission?

HEALY: Well, it was a very small AID program, three to six million dollars, much of it Food for Peace, PL 480. It was basically... Much of the money was concentrated in what we call the Acre program which was an agricultural research and extension program designed to increase the agriculture output of the small farmer in the country.

Q: I see.

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Today is September 13, 1985.

Did foreign service inspectors come while you were at the mission?

HEALY: We did have an inspection while I was at the mission. I believe it was sometime in the

early summer of '82. I'm not absolutely certain about that, it might have been '81.

Q: How did they treat your mission?

HEALY: There were no problems, as I recall. They were basically looking at a number of things, as they always do, reporting, economic and political reporting, consular work, and administration, particularly auditing, checking contracts to be sure they were properly done. We had a problem with a dishonest employee which was of interest to them. They checked into that fairly carefully. They checked into whether or not we would be able to prosecute him in a court of law. But for the inspectors, Sierra Leone was, as I recollect, a two or three day inspection, perhaps it was a whole week, but I think they may have been there for that length of time simply because of plane connections out.

Q: Did you feel they were fair in their assessments?

HEALY: Of course. As I say, it does not ring any strong bells in my memory so there clearly couldn't have been any problem.

Q: Yes. Getting back to your function, particularly the representational one, how often did you entertain officially?

HEALY: Well, a lot depended upon circumstances, whether we had visitors, for example, such as Warren Robbins, the museum director, or whether a particular occasion caused it, the visit of an American ship, for example, July Fourth certainly. I would say I probably entertained about once every week, perhaps ten days.

Q: Did you have a particular type of entertaining you preferred, such as a reception or a dinner?

HEALY: I generally tended to prefer a lunch or a dinner. Receptions are difficult in the sense that they're very tiring because you are on your feet for perhaps two hours. You have to make a very special effort to get around and talk to a large number of people, which means that you don't have a chance to engage in any discussion in depth with any one or two or three people. I generally found lunches and dinners more satisfactory from both the personal point of view and the professional point of view.

Q: Sure. Who planned your menus, and took care of the seating arrangements, and flowers, and that sort of thing?

HEALY: Generally speaking, I did, but my supervision was minimal because the household servants had been well trained by previous ambassadors' wives. They did the flowers or the gardeners did the flowers. I would select a menu and provide some kind of minimal oversight. I can remember that the first time I gave a lunch, I asked for curried chicken and discovered, only after all the buffet guests had gone through the line, that the cook had not cut the chicken into little pieces, but had produced chicken breasts for every guest [laughter]. Since it was buffet and people were supposed to be eating on their laps, it provided some difficulties and I was quite annoyed with the cook. He didn't do that again. But apart from little problems like that, they

were well trained and I could just simply say, "We'll have this for the first course, this for the second, and we'll have this for dessert," and that was it. I was not very demanding when it came to gourmet cooking. I couldn't be, of course. And with regard to desserts, I was normally content with a fresh fruit salad or some kind of a pudding.

Q: Did you import a lot of food from, say, Denmark?

HEALY: Yes, I imported virtually everything except some fresh stuff. Fruits in particular were available locally. Vegetables were a little hard to come by. Tomatoes were available, some lettuce, but by and large I imported everything from either the United States or, to some degree, from Denmark. Mostly from Denmark we imported the liquor.

Q: Were you able to eat lettuce, the local lettuce and fresh things?

HEALY: Oh, yes, the servants in the house were very well trained when it came to boiling water and preparing fresh fruits and vegetables. I had no trouble and I don't believe any of my guests did.

Q: Was it you who took care of the residence accounts?

HEALY: No, basically it was my secretary. And I must say my secretary was terribly efficient in this respect. She lived right next door in the staff housing and was very, very competent and conscientious about this kind of thing. As I recollect, the servants, the cook - is the one in particular who would buy some fresh fruits and vegetables and some fresh fish and shrimp and lobster - the cook would present bills and I would carry them into the office and Liliana would pay them, either directly to the merchant involved, or by sending the money home to the cook. But by and large, if a vendor came to the door with lobsters, for example, I normally relied on Liliana to decide whether they were needed. I'm afraid I also let Liliana do the bargaining on the price. She was an enormous help to me in that respect.

Q: How did you handle little things like dry cleaning and hair cuts and...

HEALY: There was no such thing as dry cleaning in town. I saw to it that I didn't buy anything that wasn't easily washable. There was one hair dresser in town, perhaps more than one, but the one I happened to go to was at a small hotel in the center of town. When I say small, I should say it was the hotel in the center of town, the other major hotels being out by the ocean front. The principle operator at the hairdressing shop was British, married to a lawyer, a Lebanese lawyer. She generally was able to get her hands on the equipment and the expendable supplies she needed. Perhaps, and my memory is a little vague on this, perhaps I did send to the States to a drugstore for the supplies for hair coloring. At this point I just don't even remember.

Q: Was the post considered unhealthy?

HEALY: Much of Sub-Saharan Africa and Western Africa is considered “unhealthy,” but what with the use of anti-malarials and with reasonable precautions, most people stayed pretty healthy. I myself was very fortunate. I had a problem with a skin rash and a problem with a bad back, but

the bad back, of course, had nothing to do with West Africa. As for the skin rash, it eventually, after quite a long period of time, cleared up. It may have been an allergy, it may have been sun, it may have been heaven knows what.

Q: Sure. Did the mission have any health facilities? Did you have a first aid room?

HEALY: The embassy itself had nothing, but only a block away at Peace Corps headquarters, we had a health room staffed by the Peace Corps doctor, who was there except for the times he was traveling upcountry to look after the Peace Corps volunteers, or on a trip to Liberia, because he was also responsible for the Peace Corps volunteers in Liberia, as I recollect. But there was also a registered nurse, a Sierra Leonean registered nurse and a couple of medical technicians, and the embassy people used it regularly for consultations and shots and pills or whatever.

Q: Those medicines came from the States, I presume?

HEALY: I believe most of them did, yes, although certainly the Peace Corps doctor was in constant touch with local physicians and was able to refer people with specialized complaints, as for example my skin rash, to a local doctor.

Q: Did any of your people have to go to hospital while you were there?

HEALY: Let me think. I do know that we had a couple of people, in fact more than a couple, who had to be medically evacuated. Once or twice under emergency conditions, but normally just as a routine precaution, either for pregnancy or whatall. A few people were hospitalized, yes. Generally speaking we used a private clinic or the military hospital up at Wilburforce.

Q: Excuse me, where's Wilburforce?

HEALY: Wilburforce is part of Freetown. It's a neighborhood in Freetown.

Q: I see.

HEALY: But fortunately most people managed to stay healthy enough to avoid the need for hospital treatment except for perhaps a day or two for observation.

Q: Were any babies born?

HEALY: While I was there I don't recollect that there were any babies born in Freetown. Before I came I do know that one young woman, a foreign service officer, did have her baby in Freetown.

Q: Otherwise they went up to Germany?

HEALY: It depends on the individual. The one baby born while I was in Freetown was born in Latin America because the mother was originally from one of the Latin American countries and she went back home to have her baby there.

Q: So the Department allows people to go where they wish in cases like that?

HEALY: Really, I'm not able to say. I think that the department would only pay for a trip to Germany for a pregnancy and this was cost reconstructed travel. I think that's the way it worked.

Q: Now you've mentioned Liliana. Was she the only personal secretary you had while you were at the post?

HEALY: Liliana was the only American secretary at the embassy. There was an American secretary in the AID mission, and I believe that was it. But Liliana acted as my secretary, as the confidential secretary to the entire mission, and her efforts were supplemented by part-time, temporary work on the part of one or two of the wives.

Q: I see. I can't recall, did you say you did or did not have women officers at the post?

HEALY: We had one woman officer by the time I left and there was... We're talking now about the Department of State?

Q: Yes.

HEALY: And there was one woman officer, I know, at post before I came. The one I mentioned who had her baby at post. Then we had, of course, one or two women professionals over at Peace Corps, not at AID, as I recollect. But we had one or two women, yes.

Q: And did they enjoy the post?

HEALY: I assume they did. I never sat down with them in particular as opposed to anyone else. Naturally when an ambassador sits down with somebody and says, "How are you enjoying the post?" you're not certain you're getting a very straight answer.

Q: That's true. What did the wives of your officers do to occupy their days?

HEALY: Most of the wives were busy at part-time jobs, or just raising their children. There weren't too many children at post, but the DCM's wife was raising her children. She was also a registered nurse, so she was a great help informally to a lot of people at post. A couple of the wives were occupied working as secretaries on a part-time basis at the embassy. One wife was in charge of running the self-help program on a part-time basis. Another wife was helping run the little commissary on a part-time basis. One of the Peace Corps wives was doing some teaching of English, as I recollect. Most everybody interested in doing something was able to find something to do, even if it happened to be only volunteer work.

Q: Yes. So this kept morale high, I suppose?

HEALY: I would expect so, yes. I think that most people, as I say, found something to keep them busy and interested and happy.

Q: Sure. Did the wives help you out at parties? Did they help serve as assistant hostesses or that sort of thing?

HEALY: There was never anything as formal as that. I mean everybody knew that as Americans invited to my house, they were, in a sense, under a certain responsibility to see that things went smoothly, but I never said anything to them about it and so far as I recollect everybody pitched in to make the party a success, as any guest does.

Q: Yes, exactly. How often did you entertain your staff? Were they included in your parties?

HEALY: I made a special effort and Liliana helped me in this. I made a special effort to see that people were included regularly. I also, however, did not want to burden them, because being invited to receptions or dinner parties that are basically for official reasons, is not always something that a person wants to do. So there were many times when I would issue an invitation to an official reception or dinner, but through Liliana I would make it quite clear that if somebody did not really want to come or had something else of importance to do, it was not a command performance. Then when it came to entertaining the staff separately, I did that now and again, particularly to something like Thanksgiving dinner, when I might have twenty people or so over for a turkey dinner.

Q: What did you do for the Fourth of July?

HEALY: The usual reception. I tried to make it around lunch time or early evening, and I was sorely tempted to cut it down to nothing but a glass of champagne and a toast and everybody go home, but I never managed to get around to that.

Q: Was that strictly an all-American affair?

HEALY: Oh, no.

Q: It was not?

HEALY: Oh, no, no, no. For one thing I'd have a hard time coming up with enough Americans to make a reception. No, the July Fourth reception in the tradition of the Foreign Service is to entertain the members of the host government, not to entertain Americans.

Q: Funny, I've been at posts where it's been strictly American.

HEALY: If I gave a reception strictly for Americans, I would be paying for it out of my own pocket.

Q: That's true.

HEALY: I'm not about to give a reception for a host of hundreds, if I could find hundreds for that purpose. No, official representation is official representation. The July Fourth party was for

members of the government of Sierra Leone and members of the diplomatic corps.

Q: Yes. What did you do for recreation, to keep yourself fit?

HEALY: I played tennis and I played golf. My back problem limited the tennis playing pretty severely. But I did manage to get around the golf course a couple of times a week, so I did have that amount of exercise.

Q: Was there any good place to swim?

HEALY: Oh, heavens, yes, Freetown has one of the loveliest beaches in West Africa. I'm not much of a swimmer, though, so it was not a sport that interested me.

Q: How did you obtain books and periodicals?

HEALY: I had my own subscriptions and we had a small post library. I know that when I first came, I brought along about a hundred paperbacks that I had selected indiscriminately from the supply of books that the American foreign service wives had upstairs, I guess on the eighth floor somewhere, in the Department of State, and every now and again I would send for another supply of any hundred paperbacks. I was not so much interested myself, I always seemed to have enough to read, as I was in restocking the little paperback library at the embassy. And of course every American, as soon as he would finish a paperback would put it back in the library, so there was a regular circulation.

Q: I get the feeling, Terry...

HEALY: We also had the library, of course, at USIS.

Q: Of course. Of course. I get the feeling that you were very concerned about your staff, that you wanted to make this sort of a family. Am I correct in thinking that?

HEALY: I am concerned, I always have been concerned about the staff, but I also am not the kind of person to interfere too much in their personal and private lives. Freetown is a small town already and I wanted to ensure that while I was aware of any difficulties anybody might have, and I was available to help if I could, and I certainly did everything I could to make life pleasant both at work and elsewhere for the staff, I did not want to give them the feeling that I was watching every move they made, that they had no privacy. So you have to walk a very thin line there.

Q: Yes, Did you travel a lot around the country?

HEALY: I traveled a fair amount within Sierra Leone itself, but not outside, no.

Q: This was official, was it?

HEALY: This was official within Sierra Leone, yes. But I did not have a chance to get to

anywhere else in Africa, except for a three-day trip to Liberia, which was business.

Q: I see. Did you have young officers who were just starting out?

HEALY: Oh, heavens, yes.

Q: What steps did you take to assure that they got the proper training?

HEALY: Generally speaking, I would talk to them when they first came, indicate to them that my door was open, give them some general bits of advice, and just say, "Come talk to the DCM, come talk to me, come talk to Liliana." We were a very small operation. As I've said, my main effort was to see to it that I kept out of people's hair, rather than the other way around. We saw each other every day, so there was always this continual exchange. The DCM, as well, had been charged with the responsibility of seeing to it that the new junior officers were given the guidance they needed.

Q: Were you able to rotate them in the various sections?

HEALY: No.

Q: You couldn't do that.

HEALY: The mission was much too small.

Q: I understand. What would you say were your major successes, Terry?

HEALY: That is very difficult to say.

Q: Yes, I know, it's an awkward question.

HEALY: Since there were few problems there, I certainly don't feel I can make any great claims to solving any. I would just say that I minded the store properly and left things in at least as good shape as I found them, and perhaps in better shape.

Q: Can you think of any way in which your being a woman contributed to your being able to carry this out?

HEALY: Not really. Not really. West Africa is very receptive to a business role for women or a social role, or even a leadership role for women, since some of the ethnic groups have, in fact, very frequently for many, many years in the past, had paramount chiefs who are women. I didn't feel that there was any great surprise at having a woman ambassador.

Q: How did you feel about the job when you finished? Were you well satisfied that you had done the best you could?

HEALY: Yes, I would say I was. I wish that in some other way, shape, and form I could have

made a greater contribution to the welfare of Sierra Leone, but given the restrictions on the amount of AID available, the US government did what it could there. There was no possible way I could get the millions in AID I would have wanted to put the country right.

Q: Do you think, looking back, that your presence made a difference in Sierra Leone-US relations?

HEALY: That's impossible for me to say.

STEPHEN EISENBRAUN
Deputy Chief of Mission
Freetown (1985-1986)

Stephen Eisenbraun was born in Iowa in 1947. After graduating from the University of Northern Iowa in 1969 he spent a year studying Hindi at Delhi University and began work towards a master's degree at Johns Hopkins SAIS. His career has included posts in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sierra Leone and Kenya as well as an array of positions at the State Department in Washington. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on December 14, 2004.

Q: Well, then, you left the Tunisian desk in '85. Whither?

EISENBRAUN: I went out as Deputy Chief of Mission to Sierra Leone, in West Africa.

Q: And you did that from '85 to?

EISENBRAUN: One year, '85 to '86.

Q: Who was the Ambassador?

EISENBRAUN: He was a fellow named Arthur Lewis, a career USIS official. Before his Foreign Service work, he'd had had a career in the Navy, rising to Chief Petty Officer, so he had a lot of experience. He had been the ranking African expert at USIS, and Lewis took a great deal of pride in the fact that he'd been to every African country at one time or another on official business.

It's worth telling how I got that assignment. I was on the Tunisia desk and I was interested in still broadening my horizons further regarding Africa, and I happened to mention this to a friend of mine from the India office days then working on West African affairs. So in the fall 1984 when Art Lewis was back on consultations and looking for a new DCM, my friend mentioned my name to him. I met Lewis, we hit it off, and I found myself assigned to Freetown.

Q: What was the situation politically and economically when you got there in '85?

EISENBRAUN: It was a time of transition in Sierra Leone. There had been a long-serving president, Shaka Stevens, who was quite elderly, and while I was in country, he retired and named a successor, General Joseph Momoh. Stevens had been president of Sierra Leone virtually since its independence from Great Britain in 1961. I think it is fair to say he was a benevolent dictator. I don't think there were any great human rights abuses during his tenure, as long as his people gave him his due. There was a friendly relationship with Washington. Our interests in Sierra Leone were limited primarily to providing a bit of economic assistance, and not much of that either, and maintaining a large Peace Corps presence. We didn't have any strategic or significant commercial interests, outside of one extraction plant that produced rutile, used in the production of paint. We hoped for occasional support in international bodies like the UN, but that didn't happen often because Sierra Leone felt it had to support the African bloc on most issues, and that was generally not friendly to the United States.

Sierra Leone has great natural resources, principally diamonds that can be dug right out of the ground, and even though their diamond deposits had been exploited for most of the 20th century, there were still diamonds to be had too easily. They played a terrible role in financing the civil war later in Liberia and that spilled into Sierra Leone in the 1990s. They could have been a great resource for the country, but their mining didn't benefit the people of Sierra Leone at all because of the smuggling, organized partly with the connivance of government officials for their own benefit. There were some gold deposits as well, and then there were abundant fishing fields off the coast, which were being exploited by others, including the Soviets, with no payment to the government, except for bribes that may have gone into officials' personal accounts

The Sierra Leone people didn't benefit from the fish, they didn't benefit from the diamonds, and they didn't benefit from whatever gold was left. The country was exploited by one group or another, including its own government, and by the resident Lebanese, who had grown wealthy from the diamonds and the fishing and whatever other commercial opportunities they could exploit. In the meantime, the infrastructure that the British colonial authorities had developed had virtually ceased to function, like the railroad lines that was torn up and sold off as scrap.

I found Sierra Leone a country that was suffering a lot, but it was still a peaceful place when I arrived in '85. I guess you might say the Peace Corps contingent was the engine of American foreign policy in the country at the time. They had 250 volunteers at the height of their involvement, which started as soon as the Peace Corps was organized back in the Kennedy Administration. The Sierra Leonean people really liked the American Peace Corps volunteers, who did a lot over the years to further bilateral friendship. The truth is, there wasn't much foreign policy to conduct; it was mostly a matter of showing the flag and meeting everybody and being nice.

Q: Well then, I'm thinking this is probably a good place to stop, Steve, and we'll pick this up in '86. So onto '86 next time, what happened then?

EISENBRAUN: I was in Sierra Leone one year as DCM, and a fair amount of that time, about six months if all added up, I was in charge of the post, that is, Chargé d'Affaires. After that, I was at a crossroads in my life because I was just separated from my wife and I had two little children and the question was what to do next. I literally had a weekend to decide whether to go

back to Washington as Kenya/Uganda desk officer, or go to Rabat as a political officer, which was offered to me by the Ambassador there, who was a friend from my previous days in Washington as Tunisian desk officer.

Q Who was this?

EISENBRAUN: That was Tom Nassif. He offered me a political job in Rabat and the stars seemed all aligned, because I knew and liked Nassif, the DCM, and the political consular. It would have been perfect. But I was just getting separated and I thought it was better to be in Washington for my children, so I went back to the Kenya-Uganda desk. But there are a couple of stories I'd still like to tell about Sierra Leone before I go into that.

Q: Sure

EISENBRAUN: It turned out I did not see eye to eye with Lewis. He had a different management style than I did. Of course, my style was still developing, and he was a very seasoned officer used to bullying people to get what he wanted. It became pretty evident within days that this relationship wasn't going to work. However, I was Chargé for quite a long period when he was out of the country. Then a new Ambassador was appointed, a political appointee, imagine, even to a small country like Sierra Leone, in the spring of '86. The question became whether I was to be continued as DCM. The new appointee, Cynthia Perry, called me back to Washington to meet me, and we seemed to hit it off very nicely and she said I could continue as DCM. So I flew back to Freetown thinking I was set, but then she changed her mind a few weeks later and didn't provide a reason. So I scared up the two offers I mentioned earlier. Later, Cynthia and I had six weeks of overlap when she arrived at post in the summer of '86. I asked her then why she had not kept me on. She replied that she felt she would not be able to trust me. I might pick up the phone and report directly to Washington if I didn't like how things were going at post. She thought she had reason to feel that way, as it had turned out.

Before I had left Washington in the summer of '85, the Deputy Assistant Secretary in the Africa bureau, Jim Bishop, a really decent individual by the way, said to me, if there ever comes a time when you need to call me for something that comes up at post, don't hesitate to phone me directly. At the time, I filed that away with appreciation, but I couldn't imagine ever doing such a thing. I don't know whether he said this to all out-bound DCMs, or whether he knew there might be good reason for me to need to make such a call. My guess is a little of both, because he was an astute manager and probably suspected I would encounter serious difficulties with Lewis in Freetown.

As it turned out, I did need to place that call, and the result was that I got sacked by the incoming Ambassador who felt she wouldn't be able to trust me. Bishop was quite helpful to me, however, when I got in trouble, telling me on the phone that while there was nothing he could do regarding the loss of the DCM job because the new appointee had friends in the White House, he could engineer my return to the Kenya desk, and some months later he also arranged my posting as Principal Officer in Mombassa, Kenya, a real garden spot. It all turned out very well for me in the end, thanks to Jim.

Q: Go on, please.

EISENBRAUN: OK. I was in charge of the embassy when a vote was coming up on the annual UN General Assembly resolution we sponsored condemning Cuba for various wrongdoings. I had worked this issue previously on my desk officer assignments without much luck. It seemed to me that Sierra Leone had no direct interests regarding Cuba and that they might be persuaded to support us. Ordinarily, Sierra Leone would have been unwilling to go against the Africa bloc at the UN, which supported Cuba. Anyway, I made it my own personal lobbying effort with the Foreign Minister and the President to get their support. I didn't know exactly when the vote was scheduled in New York, but at a reception in Freetown, the Foreign Minister, A. K. Khan, took me aside and said, hey Steve, did you see our vote at the UN on Cuba? I replied no, I haven't been informed from Washington. What happened? He said, we voted with you. He gave me a high five and I returned it.

I had to go back to the office and cable Washington to ask if this story was accurate. They did some checking and confirmed that it was true, and I think they added that Sierra Leone was the only sub-Saharan nation to support us. That latter has to be checked; my memory could be faulty. However, my next point was, well, if they did support us, then we've got to gin up a letter from somebody ranking to show our appreciation. So a letter came out, and I had the pleasure of going over to State House and thanking President Momoh for his support.

The new Ambassador, Cynthia Perry, came out in the summer of '86 and presented her credentials at State House in an impressive ceremony. Afterwards, she said to President Momoh, let me introduce the members of my country team. She started with, this is Mr. Eisenbraun, my deputy, but Momoh cut her off to exclaim, "Oh, you mean Steve, he's one of us!" and he shook my hand warmly. That was a nice way to end my tenure in Freetown.

Q: That's great. We never covered why you had trouble in Sierra Leone. Was it the fact that your politically appointed Ambassador to Sierra Leone didn't like the fact that you were too well regarded, I mean, too well connected in Sierra Leone or what was it?

EISENBRAUN: No, there was a particular incident, which we didn't discuss. It made her feel she couldn't trust me. Do you want to go back and cover that?

Q: Yes, yes.

EISENBRAUN: OK. That came up in December of '85. I was Chargé d'Affaires, that is, acting Ambassador. Lewis had left the day before for about a six to eight week vacation in the States. As it turned out, the Peace Corps Director had also departed the previous day for an extended vacation, leaving his deputy, Jan Auman, in charge. I came to work the first day as Chargé and found the Peace Corps/Embassy nurse, Ebun "Ebu" Shears, a local citizen employed on a contract, in my office, sobbing. She had had her contract terminated by Lewis the previous afternoon. She cried that this was unjust, as she had a sterling record as nurse for the previous seven years, and now she was being thrown over. By the way, the combined Embassy/Peace Corps medical section had only one nurse and no doctor at that time to take care of the needs of the embassy staff and the 250 volunteers scattered around the country. She had been discharged,

and neither I nor the Peace Corps deputy had been informed. So here she was, distraught. She knew her medicine, had been trained in Britain, and had a good reputation. Her contract had been up for renewal, which I had not known, and the Ambassador stepped in arbitrarily and said I'm not going to renew it.

Q: Do you have any idea why?

EISENBRAUN: Yes, Lewis wanted to appoint the wife of one of the newly arrived officers, a lady who was also a nurse. She might have been a good nurse too, but this wasn't the way to go about it. First of all, she was American, she didn't know the medical situation in the country, and it was not appropriate to dismiss somebody out of hand after seven years of exemplary service. Well, that's only the beginning of the issue. She was also white, and that ended up also being a major factor. Ebu cried that the embassy can't destroy my family and my professional life like this. I had to figure out a solution to this problem. I talked to Jan Auman over at the Peace Corps and found he was just discovering the issue too.

Auman and I asked Ebu if she would stay on while we looked into the situation. She said she would. However, later that morning, I got a call from one of the western-trained African physicians in Freetown who headed a medical association of the dozen or so physicians who had agreed to be medical consultants to our mission. He said we understand that Ebu has been terminated. He said, we see this as discrimination, as she is Black African and the proposed replacement is white and American, so we're going to boycott your mission and not see any patients until Ebu is reinstated. The medical association head said also that there had to be an apology from the embassy stating that it had acted wrongly, as well as a renewal of her contract.

This was really serious stuff because in Sierra Leone there are all kinds of mysterious fevers striking people down all the time, and there was always a Peace Corps volunteer being medevaced on an emergency basis, to say nothing of our embassy staff and their children. There were all kinds of vulnerable people out there in a very tenuous medical environment. The nurse was still on station but she couldn't get the local doctors to stand down until she was officially reinstated. This was a full blown medical crisis. I had to call Jim Bishop in Washington that morning to report this problem.

In the meantime, I had learned that the resident doctor, Tom Watson, at the neighboring embassy in Liberia was coming over on a previously scheduled consultation. He didn't know about the medical crisis brewing in Freetown. I got this idea that he could look into the problem as an outsider but also as someone qualified medically to evaluate the situation. He could determine if the present nurse was qualified, and give a recommendation on next steps, acting as an arbitrator. I suggested this to Bishop, who liked the plan. Bishop added that he would inform the medical section in the Department and handle all communication on that end.

So Dr. Watson arrived. I briefed him on the situation, and he agreed that the dangerous medical environment demanded a quick resolution of the problem. He interviewed the nurse, whom he knew only slightly, and looked at her evaluations. It took him about two days of really careful evaluation before he concluded that she had been terminated inappropriately and that she was the only person who could fill the nurse role because she was African and had the support of the

local doctors. He made a recommendation to me and to Med in the Department that the nurse be reinstated; I backed that recommendation, as did the acting Peace Corps director.

I told Bishop in Washington that we should reinstate her and write a letter of apology to get the medical association back with us, and Bishop said the Department agreed. Ambassador Lewis was never consulted, only informed once all action had been taken. This was Bishop's doing. The nurse was grateful; she continued working; the boycott was withdrawn, I wrote a letter of apology and hand delivered it to her and her husband at their house on Christmas Eve.

I had ended up thwarting the Ambassador's intent, as well as the newly arrived spouse of the admin officer, who wasn't very happy about it either, to say the least. Lewis was eventually briefed by the Africa bureau in Washington after it was all finished and everyone had signed off, including the medial office and the inspector general's office, which also had been brought into the matter. Even Assistant Secretary Crocker had signed off on the resolution, according to Bishop, and had lectured Lewis on his dubious management practices. Lewis wasn't very happy, mind you. He called me from the States and asked what on earth I had been doing at post.

Soon after Lewis and his wife Fay got back to post, Fay took me aside at an evening function and told me that she would be my sworn enemy for life because of what I had done to her husband. Lewis and I virtually never talked for the next five months.

Almost immediately, the post was engulfed in a previously planned inspection, but the focus changed from a routine one to a referendum on Lewis's management of the post, in light of the nurse incident. The inspectors were not pleased with Lewis. They also did a written review of my work, which in those days was not a mandatory thing for them to do as it was later. They said they did this to protect me from the Ambassador's wrath, as my annual EER (review) was about due. Their report was exceptionally good, and I was promoted that fall.

Once the inspectors left post, Lewis announced that he and his wife were returning to the States. When they came back to post some six weeks later, they packed up. In his last month or so, Lewis came into the office in the mornings, smoked a lot, met some people and talked on the phone, but I cannot remember that he conducted any serious business. He told me to take care of my duties myself; I think what he actually said was, I don't care what you do. So I did the usual things a DCM does to coordinate the running of the mission, and I hardly informed him of what I was doing, and he didn't inquire.

The afternoon of his departure in early June, I went into his office, uninvited, to ask if there was anything I should know, as I was about to assume officially the running of the mission as Chargé. He didn't offer anything. I asked what he was going to do once he returned to the States. He replied, I'm going to retire. He added that he had been on the short list to be Ambassador to Zimbabwe, but I had ended any hope he had for that post. That night he flew out, and I was once again in charge of the post for the last six weeks until Cynthia Perry, the new Ambassador, arrived in July.

When I left Freetown, in recognition of my efforts on the nurse issue, the FSNs in Freetown awarded me their own Meritorious Honor Award, outside of the Department-issued ones. All the

African staff signed it, as did Cynthia Perry.

CYNTHIA S. PERRY
Ambassador
Sierra Leone (1986-1989)

Ambassador Cynthia S. Perry was born in Terre Haute, Indiana in 1928. She received a bachelor's degree from Indiana State University and a doctoral degree in International Education from UMASS-Amherst. She served as a Peace Corps trainer in both Kenya and Sierra Leone. In 1982 she assumed a position with USAID in Washington. Her Foreign Service career included ambassadorships to Sierra Leone and Burundi. Ambassador Perry was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 21 1999.

Q: You are talking about in the Black community?

PERRY: Yes, in the Black community, especially in Johannesburg and Cape Town. My last trip there was significant to me. I went down there with the Black Education Association, although there were many whites in this organization. It was considered a Black organization for the training of teachers. AID sent a number of people to work in teacher training; many South African teachers and students were being recruited for long-term and short-term programs in American universities, managed by IIE and other international organizations. My job was to figure out what kinds of projects the U.S. Government should support, to whom the money should go and to do what. It was while I was down there in 1986 that I received "the" call from President Reagan asking if I would be his Ambassador to Sierra Leone. I danced and danced, in my book you will have to read it, *All Things Being Equal*, which gives greater detail.

Q: Let's talk about this. Had you done any preliminary work you know sort nudging people over at the White House saying I'd like Sierra Leone? You'd been there before.

PERRY: Yes, I was in contact with the White House. They knew about my interest from my original letter prior to my appointment to AID, during Mr. Reagan's first administration. I had met from time to time with people in the White House, not necessarily those who made the decision. The first year of Mr. Reagan's second administration, friends of mine in the White House were urging me to inform the White House appointment office what I wanted to do. I did get an appointment with the Appointments Office and I told people there about how I worked all these years to become Ambassador and I was interested in going to Africa. I doubt that many people were expressing such strong interest in becoming an ambassador to African countries.

Q; Political appointees very seldom went to Africa:

PERRY: Many, as you know, preferred European assignments. But, a good many accepted appointments in Africa. The White House examined my credentials including the letter from George Bush. They called me shortly after that, informing me that I was being considered. They

gave me a short list of about five countries and I think I stopped at Sierra Leone and said, "This is where I would like to go." The original contact had already been made, but no commitment until President Reagan telephoned me.

Q: Did you get any training before you went out to Sierra Leone?

PERRY: Yes. Of course, I was already in the Government and my knowledge of the bureaucracy was of great benefit. A two week seminar was conducted for new ambassadors, organized and conducted by retired and inservice ambassadors. Some of the appointees had never lived in Washington before; some said they had never been there before. I knew the jargon. I knew the locations of places and had worked with s number of organizations. Our training included meeting with various governmental agencies for briefings on their policies toward Africa and their separate programs and activities. The new ambassadors were being sent to countries in Africa but to other countries as well. We had our separate meetings on policies, depending on countries and regions. We also were briefed on embassy management procedures, diplomatic behavior, staffing, government properties and their management.

I think it would have been very hard for me had I not already been in Africa. I knew the constraints and limitations. I truly did not know the full power of the Ambassador. I soon learned. They told us, "This is heady. This is not like anything you have ever done before. You are the President of the United States in that country where you are going to be. You are speaking with the voice of not only the President but the Congress and the people of the United States, and you have to be sensitive to all that." The best trainer we had was Shirley Temple Black. She had served as Ambassador to Ghana on her first tour.

Q: She founded the program.

PERRY: She was very good at it. She gave us the benefit of her experiences but she also had senior Ambassadors who would come in and talk to us from time to time. It was good training. Most of us felt we could have taken more, there was so much to learn. The problem here is that I was a woman in a male role you might say. My husband received training normally given to the spouse, the woman, that is. It was like these are the records you are going to have to keep and you have to count this and you have so much money budgeted to do this. There were two other men in the program with him and they just quit and said, "We'll go down and visit our wives from time to time. We are not going to run their household." J.O. had recently retired from Texas Southern University to go with me, and the spousal role was one he never accepted.

Q: You were in Sierra Leone from '86 to '89?

PERRY: Yes

Q: What was Sierra Leone like? Could you talk about the economy and the government and American interest in Sierra Leone at this time?

PERRY: Looking back when we were training Peace Corps volunteers, President Siaka Stevens was in control as he had been for years and years; the economy was high, the people had very

little but were not suffering; the diamonds were the chief export and rice became the second. Everything was up; you could feel the excitement, the energy, in the streets. There weren't a whole lot of foreigners there at that time. Peace Corps was very larger with many volunteers stationed about the country. People loved them.

When I returned as Ambassador, the degradation was heart-breaking. The buildings were falling apart, unpainted. There was this lethargy that you sensed among people on the streets, the kiosks were not swarming with people buying stuff. There were deep underlying problems as the administration changed. A new President had just been appointed the year before my arrival.

Q: They are not elected?

PERRY: Well, supposedly. This was a most unusual situation. The former president, Siaka Stevens, had run the country into bankruptcy due to his excesses and had been forced by his parliament to step down. There was nothing left when he agreed to remove himself if his replacement (the only candidate) were elected to the office. Although technically, President Momoh was popularly elected, it was clear that Siaka Stevens had put him into office. Momoh was his top General and a respected man, but the manner of his "election" was deeply resented by the people. He also seemed not have the fire, the passion for the position, I guess you could say, that Siaka Stevens exhibited. He was a military man and not prepared to run the Government. He had to rely upon people who were generally Stevens' people, whose mandate was to maintain the status quo. Stevens built, at government expense, a mansion on top of the mountain where he could see everything. He was still in control, and controlling all things through Momoh or outside Momoh's knowledge or consent. I made this joke that I wanted to be Ambassador to the Mau Maus, right? Instead I got a Momoh.

He and I bonded immediately, perhaps because I was coming in new as Ambassador and he was coming in new as President. I recommended many actions to him that, that surely today with my current knowledge, I would have a hard time suggesting. He acted on them, which angered some of his cabinet members, many who felt he did it because I was a woman. Certainly, the pressure from me, if any at all, was softer than that expended by my diplomatic colleagues. My advice was related to how to approach my government to achieve the desired results. As time went by, the unrest between the major tribes increased dramatically. In many ways, it helped that he was not from a major tribe.

Q: What was the tribal characteristic? I read something about the slave trade. The British took slaves, they captured slave ships and they took them to Freetown. That's where it got its name, I guess. Then they turned them loose but they came from a whole variety?

PERRY: These repatriated slaves came from Europe, primarily from England; but they also came from Nova Scotia, from Jamaica, from places in the British Empire that were prohibited by law to continue their traffic in slavery. This group eventually established Freetown as a dropping off destination, although they may have originated from other countries. They called themselves Krios, and spoke a patois. This new colony met with great opposition from the tribal groups already occupying this territory and without support received from the British Navy, Freetown would have been wiped out by sheer numbers of the tribal forces. Some of the Krios were

racially mixed and were considered misfits, foreigners who didn't really belong to that country. But, the Krios were powerful and soon became the managers of the British Colony and civil servants for England.

Tribal resistance came from a great many tribal groups; but the major tribes were the Mendes and Temne who had historically battled over territory. Most had populated the uplands, avoiding the coast which was swampy and full of malaria. Once established on the Atlantic coast, Freetown began to flourish and established a great economy that generated wealth throughout the country. But the wealth and the diamonds and so forth were in the hands of those two tribes. Over the centuries, the Krios succeeded in assimilating tribal youth by bringing them to Freetown for their education. Most of the leaders from these two tribes were graduates of the British type schools in Freetown. They went off to England to pursue their higher education and were able to prosper in the Krio society upon their return. However, the friction grew between the Krios and a growing mass of educated people in those tribes who thought, as a majority, they could run the government better. President Momoh was eventually overthrown by the combined effort of these groups. He was still in office when I left in 1989, but it has since fallen into chaos and anarchy.

Q: We're talking today of a horrible situation in Sierra Leone and there's really no rule at all you just have some warring warlords doing terrible things to the population. It's not even a country really anymore.

PERRY: You know it goes back to their history and the perception of the majority of the people that they were still under colonial rule; that is, by the Krios - not considered a native group. The controlling power of the Krios was diminished following the demise and death of Siaka Stevens, himself a powerful Krio. But, the two major tribes - supported by a number of powerful but smaller groups, seemed unable to establish a coalition government by which to govern the country. The major concern was to establish control over the country's wealth and its government, not a shared control. In this case, when a rebel group led by Sankoh took control, everyone suffered - all the people suffered greatly.

Q: The same thing is happening in Liberia.

PERRY: In Bosnia and almost every place else. The world is struggling with the concept of ethnicity; who should be in control. Look at Rwanda and Burundi.

Q: Did we have any particular policy? This is the last part of the Reagan Administration. Did you see any effort made by the State Department to stop the carnage in Sierra Leone, or were our efforts limited to reporting?

PERRY: The carnage began a few years after my departure, when the Embassy was closed and all personnel evacuated to safer areas. While I was there, American interests were narrow at best. One great concern was the mischief that could erupt from the manipulative power of the merchant Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese who gained economic control. There was also the reported interest of the Russians and the Libyans in the country, how that might affect American business and presence in the country.

Q: Who was your deputy?

PERRY: Greg Talcott, my first deputy, was a career Foreign Service officer with considerable experience. He left after the second year and his experience, but his knowledge helped get us through some tough spots. Gary Maybarduk succeeded him for my final year. I knew the personality of the country and people far better than either of them, due to prior experience. We did not always agree on the analysis and reporting regarding the situation in the country. Sierra Leone was a big market for PL-480 rice and wheat, which kept certain American congressmen and farmers happy. I quarreled, however, with bringing "free" rice into a rice producing economy. They could no longer grow the local rice and sell it at a price that was competitive with ours. They in fact did not like our long grain rice. They would accept the low cost bags of American rice and trade them for one bag of theirs because their rice tasted better. We could have done more in that country to help them to grow their own rice. What we did was spur the illegal international rice trade over the borders of Liberia and Guinea, both local rice and PL-480, which brought foreign currency into the hands of merchants - defeating government controls.

Q: We had a big rice lobby in the U.S., one of the most powerful ones in Louisiana.

PERRY: Here in Texas too. There was nothing wrong with the rice; it just didn't cook up or taste like their rice. Certainly other rice-producing countries were competing for the market; e.g., China, and Malaysia, who could bring it in at a lower price than ours. Their shipments would often sour, especially the wheat, and the quality wasn't as reliable as ours. PL-480 became a big business for rice distributors in the country.

Q: While you were there for example, the diamond trade, did you find pressure? I understand Mr. Tempelsman or something was a major figure, an American, very much involved in New York with Jackie Kennedy. Did you find the diamond policy intruded in your work?

PERRY: It did and intruded greatly with government. Everybody was involved in mining and selling diamonds out of the country, illegally, including government officials. These are alluvial diamonds, gemstones, highly prized in the European markets. They were easily accessible until later years, and there were lots of them. The government tried valiantly to gain control, but smuggling was rampant and it was seemingly impossible. Eventually, the government claimed all diamond lands and cordoned them off with military watch to prevent the rampant theft. It was a deadly business leading to lots of government fraud and corruption.

President Momoh said to me quite early in our relationship something very poignant that stuck in my memory: "No matter the safeguards and policies put forward regarding the diamonds, nothing will work in Sierra Leone - nothing will get better until the diamonds are all gone, absolutely gone." Since there are still deep shaft diamonds not yet exploited, it will be years and years before the country is at peace. Today's events, with the murdering and maiming of innocent children, show to what extent this is true.

Q: It is highly easy portable wealth. Were you doing anything to provoke commerce or was this

just a government that needed support rather than try to develop trade?

PERRY: I was trying to bring more American entrepreneurship I should say. This is not a country that can support big industry. There was, however, one huge American venture in the mining of rutile, which was a multi-million dollar operation Do you know about rutile

Q: No, I don't. What is it?

PERRY: Rutile is a mineral, a pigment that is used in paints and it is also an element used for manufacturing struts for jet engines. It is also called titanium. It is quite rare ore and large deposits are found only found in two or three places in the world; e.g., Sierra Leone and Australia. This was a high tech, high cost but lucrative venture deep in the country. Outside of some small ventures, like a flour mill, for example, Sierra Rutile was the only substantial American investment in the country. Trying to increase American business was a large part of my mission there. Most companies who investigated the possibility felt the infrastructure was not strong enough to support any kind of industry.

Q: How about the British? Did you find yourself in competition with the British or working together, how did that work?

PERRY: We worked together I think more than competing with each other, as in some other countries like Kenya. This was a former British colony; we were newcomers. Living in Sierra Leone provided a rather leisurely lifestyle for the different expatriates and business people who lived there. The tensions were greater between the Sierra Leoneans and the Lebanese, for example, who had been there for more than fifty years. They effectively controlled vast pieces of the economy and dominated almost every industry that was. So, there was bitterness among the Sierra Leoneans who felt money was being siphoned from their economy to support the war effort in Lebanon.

Q: I would have thought, looking at the East Indian situation in Uganda, at some point the Lebanese must be thinking sometime we are all going to get kicked out of here? Was that something they were concerned about?

PERRY: I'm sure that it was behind everything that they were thinking, but I don't think it was a great inhibitor for their continuing behavior. The Lebanese moved quite freely to and fro without harassment from the government until it appeared other nationalities were using them as a convenient cover; e.g., the Iranians, Libyans, etc. At that time, the U.S. was having serous problems with Iran. There was considerable tension between the Islamic sects and competition for members and influence. The Iranians and Libyans opened embassies in Sierra Leone eventually, and established Islamic schools throughout the country, gaining favor with the rural and uneducated population.

Q: There were Sierra Leoneans who were Muslims?

PERRY: Yes, ethnic groups throughout the country were about evenly split between Christian and Muslim; perhaps there were greater numbers of Muslims in the rural areas.

Q: This was a time of continuous terrorism, were you under any threats at all?

PERRY: No, we tend to measure levels of threat on the basis of whether it came from an internal or external source. The internal, which seemed the greatest potential threat, came from the increasing tensions between tribal groups and the government. Also, the large Islamic population in that country included those with whom we were having serious political disputes; e.g., the Iranians and Libyans. Although it was necessary to maintain caution, it made little sense that these groups would make trouble in a country granting them refuge. Nonetheless, it posed a frightening internal threat. Eventually, the external threat came from rebel forces in Liberia who eventually overtook the cities and regions of Sierra Leone, eventually taking the capital. In reaction to this threat, together with the internal threat, forced the U.S. Embassy to close its doors.

Q: Were the Libyans messing around there, too?

PERRY: Yes, heavily involved with their "green book" operation, until many were expelled for interfering with the government. They closed their embassy, but left their relations intact so they could return if things changed.

Q: Did you have a CIA station there at all?

PERRY: We did not have a declared station.

Q: How was life as an Ambassador?

PERRY: Great, fantastic, demanding, exciting, exhausting. And I think in many ways it was different for a woman Ambassador. My relationship with government officials was overall positive. I was not the first female American Ambassador, nor the first Black American Ambassador - I was the first who was both black and woman. Although the women embraced my strength and felt empowered by my presence, the men in government were somewhat threatened. Traditionally the Ambassador had been a male - all of my colleagues heading the fifteen or so embassies were male. Some men (and especially the military) made a point to salute my husband when he accompanied me.

I know I brought a certain softness to strained situations that allowed me to get information as well as to influence decisions. On the other hand, I did not have a good relationship with the Foreign Minister. He was supposed to be my first contact in the government, but I had a direct line and open door to the President, which the Minister resented. He was Muslim and on his first visit to the State Department (which I had arranged) he tried to have me recalled. He didn't know I was going to be in the meeting. His face fell when he saw me, but he said simply there was a problem between us that he did not think could be resolved. Surprised, I asked him, "What do you think the problem could be? What is it?" He said, "You do not like my religion." It was ridiculous! I had never done anything to offend Islam, other than just being a woman - in leadership. It was fixed clearly in his mind that as a woman, I could not be Ambassador. That was the biggest thing.

This inexcusable and unprovoked action taken by the Foreign Minister against me became a sore point between the two. The President first apologized to me, and then began the necessary political actions to remove him from his Cabinet. He succeeded, but not before I left the country.

Q: Did you find President Momoh and his role not very popular? Was he still sort of subordinate to the former President?

PERRY: Definitely for the first two years at least. Siaka Stevens continued to run the country, as head of the ruling party. President Momoh eventually managed to get that leadership away from him and he was named the leader of the party. In my final year in Sierra Leone, Papa Siaka died and President Momoh became leader of the Party. His two vice presidents representing the two major tribes were also maneuvering for leadership. His first vice president, a brilliant attorney and parliamentarian, who came from a Mende stronghold called Pujehun, was charged with treason during my final year, and was actually hanged to death after I left. But again I think he was not the one they were really after. It was an attempt to scare off other forces who eventually took over anyway.

Q: Did Momoh come to you and sort of talk about his problems with the former President and all that?

PERRY: Yes, in answer to my direct questions about the perception that the country was being ruled from the top of the mountain. There was little guile in this man. He would confess, “Well you know he is a very powerful force and I do go up and talk to him and he gives me advice like he gives everybody else and I take what I think will work and otherwise I don't." He didn't say that there were great pressures put upon him but we knew that there were. In order to try to maintain this balance, not being a member of a major tribe, he had two Vice Presidents, one was a Mende (who I explained was later hanged for treason) and the other was a Temne. The way he kept the peace, Momoh said, was to keep them at each other’s throats so he could appear to be very kind and generous and an unbiased mediator. He considered them as vicious persons. I also tended to trust one more than the other but then I realized I also had to maintain a balance. Momoh was not in a good position and he said many times, "I wish I had not accepted the Presidency. I always wanted to be a preacher. That's all I ever wanted, just to be a preacher and to help people." I said, "Well, maybe you can do that after you give up the Presidency." He said, "Don't you know there is no giving up the Presidency? You are relieved one way or another." His life was threatened when the government was overtaken by a rebel force, but he escaped to neighboring Guinea where he was given refuge. So far as I know, he remains there today.

Q: At the end of the Reagan Administration, you went to Burundi in 1990. How did that come about?

PERRY: When Mr. Bush became President, I knew I had only a few months to remain in Sierra Leone as Ambassador. Most political ambassadors would be recalled, as in any change of administration. So, I returned on short leave to talk to the new White House transition team, to make known my interests in serving Mr. Bush as ambassador. I informed the person interviewing me that I was the only black woman, political ambassador, serving abroad in the Reagan

Administration. I felt I had done a good job in a hardship post in Africa; I was always a Bush supporter, and I wanted to go out again to serve Mr. Bush's administration. Then I returned to Sierra Leone to complete my mission. The upshot was, within a few weeks, I received "the" call from President Bush asking if I would go to Burundi.

Burundi is French-speaking, a former Belgian colony. My French was minimal and I knew I was going to really have to get to work on it but it would be a good opportunity to learn French so I said, "Yes."

JOHNNY YOUNG
Ambassador
Sierra Leone (1989-1992)

Ambassador Young was born in Georgia and raised in Georgia, Pennsylvania and Delaware. He was educated at Temple University and entered the Foreign Service in 1967. Before being named Ambassador, Mr. Young served in a number of embassies in the administrative field, including Madagascar, Guinea, Kenya, Qatar, Barbados, Jordan and the Netherlands. In 1989 he was named US Ambassador to Sierra Leone, where he served until 1992. He subsequently served as US Ambassador to Togo (1994-1997), Bahrain (1997-2001) and Slovenia (2001-2004).Ambassador Young was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: As you went up, what had you learned about Sierra Leone at the time? We're talking about 1989.

YOUNG: 1989.

Q: What was the situation there politically, economically and what were you getting into?

YOUNG: Frankly, it was a country that had had so-called multiparty elections, but they were not. They were basically one party elections. They had some problems in their human rights record particularly the continued imprisonment of people who had been arrested during the time of Siaka Stevens. Economically the country was in a shambles. Corruption was a major, major problem. The military was okay, lacking in equipment and what have you, but not bad. Diamonds ruled, diamonds were the name of the game and that was at the center of so much of the corruption. A country very rich in potential. At the time there was a major American company there mining something called rutile, which I had never heard of before until I got involved.

Q: What is it?

YOUNG: Rutile is a titanium ore. It is dug out of clay, out of earth that looks like clay and then it is put in enormous washing machines. They look like huge dryers. The machines that dig this

clay up and dump it on to trucks and then take it to these washers, these digging wheels, they must be about three or four stories tall. They're huge and if you could see the devastation that they do to the area where this stuff is done, it's a horror story, that's all I can say, but it was a very successful operation. Sierra Leone was one of the major producers of rutile in the world at that time. This earth is dug up, put on trucks. The trucks take it to these huge washers. It is washed in water and cleansed. Because of centrifugal force in these washers that also become like a spin dryer, the rutile is separated from the sand and the dirt. Then the rutile is put into these dryers where it is dried and it becomes a white powder. That white powder is used in a couple of ways. One is in the manufacture of paint, white paint of all things. It is used to make the titanium skins of airplanes. It was a big operation at the time. In 1989 that operation in Sierra Leone was valued at $500 million. That was a huge investment. Originally this plant was put in by Bethlehem Steel. Then I think somebody else bought it and then somebody else bought it and it eventually became Sierra Rutile. It was a consortium of American, Canadian and I think Australian companies. A country with great potential, great possibilities. It was stable politically. It had many ethnic tribes and there were some tensions there, but basically when I got there it was a stable country. You have to keep in mind.

Q: Surrounded by what countries?

YOUNG: By Liberia, the Ivory Coast, Togo, and Guinea.

Q: At the time you went there were there any border problems with those countries?

YOUNG: Once in a while there'd be something, but nothing of great import, no. The borders that were artificially drawn following the end of the colonial period remained respected and basically intact. At my hearing we thought that one of my colleagues would get more questions than I would, but then I got a number of questions basically on human rights and what I would do in terms of trying to encourage democratization and those kinds of things.

Q: Well, tell me, when you go to a hearing, I mean usually the embassy of a country in which you are going, in a sense as an observer. You're treading on somewhat difficult things because you can say something that can blow you out of a job if the country to which you are going is too critical.

YOUNG: I had that later on and I'll tell you about that when we get it.

Q: Did you feel there was any problem of answering?

YOUNG: No, none whatsoever. I had no problem. I don't recall that Sierra Leone had an observer at that point, but I think one of their newspapers was certainly there and they were observing and they report every word you say in these things. It gives the people in the country you're going to a sense of who you are and what you're going to stand for. You can use that to your advantage. I did that at another post deliberately.

Q: Well, then you got out there when?

YOUNG: We arrived in November of 1989.

Q: Did you have children with you?

YOUNG: My daughter was in her last year of high school and that was a major problem to deal with, how we were going to handle that. She had previously been in the high school in The Hague and then she'd been in high school in the States here for the year. We were only in the States a year. We were fortunate in being able to find a family in The Hague. It was a family we had known when we were in The Hague that agreed to house her and allow her to go to the American School of The Hague to finish her last year which was good because she could then reconnect with some of her friends.

Q: That last year or two of high school is crucial.

YOUNG: Yes. Our son was already in university at that point.

Q: Where did he go?

YOUNG: He was at Brown University. So we arrived, my wife and I, the day before Thanksgiving 1989 and I remember the DCM invited us to his home for Thanksgiving. We of course were met by the Sierra Leone protocol people and what have you who treated us very nicely. The arrival was a bit scary because just before we arrived there had been a helicopter crash. Helicopters were used to carry people from the airport across the channel to the main city of Freetown. The ferry service had basically broken down and was in a state of disrepair. When we were whisked off the plane and into these helicopters, you know, I thought oh God, will we ever see the light of day again? It worked out nicely and we didn't have any problems with the helicopter.

Sierra Leone has a very special place in my heart and in my history. I had mentioned earlier that I was born in Savannah, Georgia. The woman who was my mother and my biological father and all of his brothers and his sisters and what have you, they were not born in Savannah, Georgia. They were born in a place called Lady's Island, South Carolina. Then from Lady's Island the family then migrated to Buford and then from Buford to Savannah. Now, Lady's Island and Buford are part of what are called the Sea Islands and the Sea Islands are off of South Carolina, Georgia and there's some in Florida as well. The interesting thing about these islands, the ones in South Carolina in particular, is that they were populated by slaves from Sierra Leone. The slaves were sent there to grow rice when cotton was no longer viable and they grew rice. The language that they spoke was Gullah in the U.S. and if you look at Mende or if you look at Creole the language spoken as sort of the lingua franca of Sierra Leone you would see they are identical. There is a definite link between those two. And, of course, rice culture is also another link between those places.

Q: I was wondering some of those coastal tribes and areas there were not so much suppliers of slaves as going out and getting slaves from the hinterland. In other words, many of the rulers along the slave coast or whatever.

YOUNG: They captured their own.

Q: Either their own or going farther inland.

YOUNG: Yes, that's true. I mention that as a bit of background. When I got to Sierra Leone and I had my presentation of credentials, I called the president's office and asked if I could bring my wife to the presentation of credentials. He said yes. He said, "We normally don't do that. This is for the ambassador only, but in your case I'll make an exception." So, he did. My wife was there with me. It was quite an elaborate ceremony where all of the presidents, ministers were present. I walked in and my wife took a seat and then I went through all of the pageantry of presenting the papers to him and he received them and then made a little speech and then I made a little speech. As I was walking out I heard one minister say, "Welcome home brother." It was very nice and it added to the moment. I'll never forget it. That's how we got started in Sierra Leone.

Q: Well, let's talk a little about your impressions. What was Freetown like?

YOUNG: When we arrived by the helicopter we couldn't see very much of Freetown simply because it was by helicopter. It was at night. We couldn't see anything and I wondered what it looked like. I had read really wonderful descriptions of what it looks like from the sea, how pretty it is, and what a magical looking place it is until you get up close and you see how run down it is. We were taken to the residence. We got out of the car and I remember we looked around and we thought, oh, what a nice house. This is not so bad. It wasn't so bad. The residence was located in a spectacular location. I couldn't even tell at that point how spectacular it was and I really had to wait until the next morning to get a real sense of what it was like. I was told next door was an apartment building that belonged to the embassy. It had I think about six apartments in it. A nice looking building. The grounds were very nice. Now, before I had gone out to post I had learned that my predecessor, Ambassador Perry, had on her own initiative done a number of improvements to the residence. She knocked out the walls of a bedroom to make the kitchen larger, more appropriate in size for what was needed for a residence. She took another room and knocked a wall out and made a combination of a little sort of family room off of the bedroom. She had done all kinds of little things in the garden. She had built little waterfalls and all that sort of stuff. It was all very nice. Mind you the bureau of foreign buildings was quite upset with her because they said, none of this was done with our approval and we never had the funds for it. She just did it. They were quite annoyed. The inspectors I think even tried to get her to pay back the funds that she expended in undertaking these projects, but she'd have none of it and she never paid anything back. I was very grateful and it was in good shape by the time I got there. I could only think, my God, if I had tried this they would have put me in the jail. Not only in the jail, but under the jail. I was really grateful for all of the nice little changes that she had made.

The next morning when we got up I could really see that we were on top of this hill with this magnificent panoramic view of the Atlantic Ocean. It was just a splendid setup. The house was nice. The garden was built up along the side of this hill in kind of a terraced style. Nice rooms, just a nice residence. Then as I drove around town I could see other nice houses. It was very tropical, very lush. You could see though that in the government buildings that there wasn't much care, that they needed a lot of attention. Things were falling down and breaking down. You could see all of the old mildew and where moss had eaten things up and that sort of thing. The

glory days had long passed, but yet you could see the potential was there if only they had taken care of some of these buildings. The embassy itself was located in a large office building, well, it was large at that time. We owned the entire building. I think it had about four floors if I'm not mistaken. It was right on the corner of a very historic point in town.

At that point there was a circle, a roundabout, and in the middle of this roundabout there was this absolutely enormous cotton tree. It was called a cotton tree and it was huge. I mean absolutely huge. Many things were centered around this cotton tree. It was like a center with spokes from this cotton tree. The courthouse and ministry of this and that and what have you. It was quite nice. The impression in all of this lush vegetation and these lovely trees and flowers was of buildings that had seen much better days and that were really deteriorated and falling down.

I began my series of calls on various ministries and ministers and found that very interesting and very worthwhile and found a cadre of very talented people. Sierra Leoneans were really quite smart.

Q: Where had they gone to, had they gone basically to, many of them had gotten their education in England or not?

YOUNG: Remember that at one time Sierra Leone was the key location. There were two prominent universities in English speaking Africa. One was on the East Coast in Uganda, Makerere University and the other was in Sierra Leone at Fourah Bay College. These two schools were very important in training the first generation of leaders following the end of the colonial period at the beginning of the 1960s. They would train their own at Fourah and then from Fourah they would then go to Manchester or University of London or Cambridge or Oxford for graduate degrees. In many ways it was very similar to what we had in the United States in terms of the training of blacks up until the time when mainstream universities were fully open to black candidates. Blacks would train initially at historically black colleges, let's say in the South and then from there they would go to the University of Chicago and Harvard and Wisconsin to get graduate degrees. So, it was a similar situation in Sierra Leone. Fourah College played a very historic role.

Q: In a way Sierra Leone was somewhat similar to the relationship that we had with Liberia wasn't it, to England?

YOUNG: No, not quite. There are some similarities. What happened was following the international ban on slavery, a place was needed basically for people to be sent when they were picked up on the seas and freed.

Q: They were very active on picking up slavers and taking them back to Africa.

YOUNG: Right, so they took them to Freetown. They had this land that they governed and ran in Sierra Leone, so they took them to Freetown. In Freetown these people were from Portuguese speaking places, French speaking places. Here you had all of these different mixtures, so what happened is that to understand each other and to communicate they created a language of their own. They created Creole and Creole is a mixture of English, Yoruba, Portuguese, French. It is a

mixture of all of those put together in Sierra Leone and it's the only place where you have it. They have this Creole which helped the people to communicate with each other. That's how that came. The name free town, that's how they got the name Freetown also.

Q: Let's talk about what was on your plate when you got there.

YOUNG: Number one democratization, economic reform, and political reform. This is what we wanted to push the government to do. To reform itself, to become more democratic. Now, at that time the Berlin Wall had just fallen.

Q: November of?

YOUNG: October of 1989. It had just fallen. The full impact of that wasn't appreciated at that point. We knew that the ramifications were going to be felt around the world, but we didn't know the extent. It was really in 1990 with the end of the Soviet Union that you had a tremendous impact on Africa because when that happened we completely changed our interest in the continent. Russia changed its interest in the continent. The competition between the two subsided and we basically cut the knot and put it adrift. I thought that was a major, major mistake. A major mistake. The country didn't have money. It didn't have food. It didn't have the means for development and we weren't interested. At that point '89 to '90 we said it's a whole new paradigm, a new world, new reality and we're going to only focus on countries that are democratic now. So, I asked the question, how were these countries to become democratic overnight? They had no history of democracy per se.

Q: Well, supposedly Sierra Leone had been independent for 30 or 40 years?

YOUNG: '61.

Q: So, in a way do you feel, I mean it's a little bit presumptuous for us to go and say we want you to be a democracy.

YOUNG: True, but that's what we were saying at that point, particularly after the dissolution of the former Soviet Union because then that was the end of the competition. It wasn't a question of well, this African country is on our side and that one's on our side and what have you. It was just a whole new ballgame. It really made things worse for Africa. I don't think it made things better for Africa. Now, we began to talk about focused countries and all kinds of things like that. One of the focused countries was Zimbabwe. That shows you how, well, I don't want to get into that.

Q: We're talking about at this point under Mugabe or Zimbabwe is an absolute disaster.

YOUNG: Well, of course it's a disaster. But I'm just saying we thought it was going to be a model that we could show the rest of Africa at the time and it didn't work out that way at all. Some of the other ones that we had picked out as models didn't quite work. Zaire I mean and some others didn't work out as well. We got to Freetown in November of 1989. Most of November was taken up with introductions in learning the lay of the land, the issues and that sort of thing.

Christmas Eve 1989 we got a report that there was an incursion into neighboring Liberia up by the border with the Ivory Coast. It was carried out by Charles Taylor. I got an instruction to go to the president who was Joseph Momoh at the time and to elicit his support in weighing in with President Doe of Liberia to bring an end to this as quickly as possible. I went to the palace; there was nobody at the palace. No one knew where Momoh was. No one knew where any minister was. It was Christmas and all of the ministers had gone to their villages. Everybody had gone to their villages for the holiday. There was nothing I could do until after Christmas. I think it was the day after Christmas I got my meeting with the president and he was a very helpful man. He says, "Well, I will do my best. I will certainly encourage Doe to get this sorted out quickly. If not, this will be trouble for him, it could be trouble for the region. I know that boy," that's what he called him, "I know that boy Taylor. He came here to Sierra Leone. He tried to launch his coup from our country, but I denied him that privilege. We put him in jail" because he had come from the States where he had been in jail for a while. Then he got out of jail and then he floated around and went to different places. He said, "So, obviously he got the approval of the Ivorians to launch this incursion to begin his coup from the Ivory Coast" which is what he did. I did my job and we left it and we concerned ourselves with things Sierra Leonean and as we did so we watched the war. Taylor made inroads into Liberia in taking town after town. As he did so reports of atrocities and that sort of thing would surface and he moved closer and closer. We didn't bother too much about Liberia. We watched very carefully as events unfolded there.

Ambassador Jim Bishop was in Liberia at the time and was preparing to conclude his work there and then the new ambassador Peter de Vos was to replace him. I don't remember exactly the timing, but it was sometime in 1990 before the summer of 1990 that Peter de Vos was nominated and approved for Liberia. Bishop came out and Pete de Vos came through Sierra Leone and was getting ready to go to Liberia via a very small, chartered plane. That was the only way you could get in and out at that point because the war had grown in such intensity that there were no longer commercial flights in and out of Liberia. You could only get in by a small, chartered plane.

I'll never forget this particular incident. Pete de Vos was already to go. He had spent a few days with us. We were sending cables back and forth. We were observing this situation that was growing in intensity as the fighting grew closer and closer to the capital city. We then began to talk about possible evacuations and things like that, but no evacuation had been made at that point. Pete was all set to go. We rented the plane for him to go to Monrovia. We took him out with an embassy car. Just before he got on the plane we got a telegram that said you cannot go to Liberia until you have been sworn into office. We thought my God how are we going to do this because we needed to get him there as quickly as possible. We got him on the radio because we got the driver on the radio and we put all of our heads together and I said, well, we're going to have to do this swearing in via two-way radio. We spoke to Pete and we said, do you have a bible with you? He said, I don't travel with a bible. We said, do you have anything that could substitute for a bible? He said, well, I have my address book. We said, take that address book out and put your hand on the address book, raise your right hand. I think he got the pilot on the plane to hold the address book for him and he put his hand on the address book and then the consular officer, Allen Latimer, I said, Allen, here's the oath you've got to get him to repeat it over the phone and then we can sign it and certify it and send it out to him and he can sign it and he'll have his copy in the works and that's how we did it. It was a riot. An officer in a holding pattern

in Sierra Leone at the time, Charles Gurney, wrote a cable on this that became a classic that described how Pete de Vos was out in the middle of this field. There was a man passing with goats and looking at him with his hand on this address book and his other hand in the air, you know, listening to the radio saying, I, Peter de Vos, do solemnly swear and on and on. It turned out well and he went on to Liberia.

Now, the intensity of the fighting just continued to accelerate. The government forces appeared to be losing and Charles Taylor's forces made headway and they headed straight for the capital city. They were held off and didn't quite make it to the presidential palace. Now, we're up to about May of 1990. I was going on R&R (Rest & Recuperation travel). I wanted that R&R very badly for several reasons. My daughter was graduating. She was going to her prom and we needed a break as well. We needed to also get her situated in the States for university and things like that. This was a very important time for us. We arrived in The Hague where we had made arrangements for a very nice house and the house came with a car. It was a house-sitting arrangement that was just the most perfect one I have ever run into and it came with a car and everything that you could possibly ask for. Since we had been in The Hague, we had lots of friends there and we arrived and that night we were with our friends and we had wonderful food and wine and caviar in the works. It was a night made in heaven. We couldn't have asked for better. Good conversation, good jokes, I mean it was just wonderful. Lovely home, car, what more could you ask for? Daughter happy. So, my wife and I arrived home and it was about 2:00 in the morning and the phone rang and it was Deputy Assistant Secretary Irvin Hicks. He says, "Johnny, I'm calling because the situation in Liberia is looking pretty bad. It looks like we may have to evacuate and if we do we're thinking of doing it through Sierra Leone although Sierra Leone has very little in the way of infrastructure to support this kind of thing. I know why you went to The Hague and we know why you're there and we understand that. We're not asking you to leave now. But if the situation gets much worse, we may have to ask you to return." I thanked him very much and we went to bed.

The next night we went somewhere else and had another one of those great nights, another great night in The Hague and we returned home and once again the phone rang at 2:00 in the morning and it was Irv Hicks once more and he said, "Johnny, I'm sorry, but you've got to get back to post. The situation is just getting too bad and we have already sent military people to Sierra Leone and you've got to get back there and you've got to keep them under control." I was upset because then we were into June and my wife's birthday was on June 3rd so a day later on her birthday, June 3rd I returned to Sierra Leone. As our plane hit the ground and as it was taxiing in, I could see part of our problem already. The military people had already strung out at the airport all of their tents and equipment and that sort of thing and that was not what we wanted. We wanted a less visible footprint than that. That was the first thing I had to do was to get that sorted out. We got it sorted out in very quick order.

Q: How did you sort it out?

YOUNG: By speaking to the head person there and also to their leader in Europe in EUCOM (U.S. European Command).

Q: What kind of troops were these?

YOUNG: These were Marines.

Q: Were they off one of our carriers?

YOUNG: That came later on. These were flown in. That came later on. So, in June the decision was made that we would evacuate Liberia and we would evacuate through Sierra Leone. We had tried two evacuations. We had tried one evacuation out of the Ivory Coast with several planes, but found that the government of the Ivory Coast was very unhelpful.

Q: At the time, you mentioned that Sierra Leone had not helped Taylor, but the Ivory Coast did. The Ivory Coast had such close ties with the French. Did you feel that the French were meddling? I mean was that the impression?

YOUNG: We learned that later on. Not initially, we didn't. We learned later on that Charles Taylor had business relationships with French President Mitterrand's son, but that didn't come until later. We decided to evacuate. As I said, I returned. I went to the president and asked for permission for our planes to land and to evacuate people through Sierra Leone and he said, you have it, do whatever you have to do. With that over the next months we evacuated 2,400 people, 40 different nationalities and in one of the longest naval evacuations at the time. I want to go back to the evacuation and I want to highlight a particular incident that occurred. When a decision was made to evacuate, the Defense Department said that they were going to come in with ships behind our embassy in Liberia. They would just come right in onto the shore behind the embassy and take people out that way. Ambassador de Vos said you can't do that, that's impossible because the government had put these huge boulders all along the beach as a breakwater. They had done that years before any fighting so it wasn't an immediate measure that was taken. Defense said no, we have it all under control. We'll take care of it. Ambassador de Vos said again, no you can't do it. They said yes. They had this back and forth and de Vos finally told them, he said, "Okay, if you come in that way the moment you set foot on Liberian soil I relinquish my responsibility as ambassador and turn the responsibility for the Americans and for this mission over to you." That got their attention and they backed off and then they thought about a different approach. That different approach entailed the use of helicopters.

They decided that they could use the basketball court of the embassy compound as a helicopter pad. They could position the helicopters in Sierra Leone, Huey 53s and then send them over and take out the people that way. The big question was how do you secure helicopters in the middle of a war zone because there was a war going on all around the city in Monrovia. What we did was we got the word out very clearly that we were going to evacuate, that it was going to be by helicopters and that the helicopters would be carrying sharp shooters and that anyone who fired on these helicopters, the fire would be returned with the intent to kill. That was obviously believed because in all of those flights we didn't lose a single person because not one of those helicopters was fired on. It worked very well. I could watch the helicopters as they came in, I watched them from the ambassador's residence and saw them land and take off. People would come in. They would be discharged and then they would be sent on commercial flights to wherever they were going. We did I think 400 Lebanese alone. Its amazing when you have this kind of problem. You find people from everywhere. We even had one Iraqi. If you keep in mind

this was 1990 when Saddam was a big problem then, so we didn't know what to do with this Iraqi. In the end we did the right thing. We evacuated him. We brought him to Sierra Leone and put him on a plane and he went on his own, which I think was the right thing to do.

Q: Did you get, then this must have been essentially an administrative problem for you making sure that the right people got on the right planes and all. How did you do that?

YOUNG: We put everybody in the mission to work. We had a little bit of TDY (temporary duty) help, consular people had sent in some additional people as well. We managed. We worked it out with the local airlines. In some cases they had chartered flights. For example with the Lebanese they took a whole planeload out.

Before the evacuation, and shortly after Pete de Vos arrived in Liberia, the first peace talks to ever take place in trying to resolve the Liberian problem occurred at the American Embassy in Freetown where we had people from the Charles Taylor faction. We had people from civil society, basically from the churches and the chamber of commerce and people from the Liberian government as well. Those talks didn't succeed because Taylor really didn't empower his people to decide anything. Taylor, despite what he was saying at that time, that he really didn't want to govern Liberia, really didn't empower his people to do anything, so the talks in the end didn't go anywhere.

Q: Okay, well, we'll pick this up the next time and we're talking about the evacuation from Liberia and what you were doing, but what were you getting, first I'll ask you the next time, what were you getting about Charles Taylor and his crew, you know, what were your impressions and what were you hearing about them. Then we haven't talked much about your dealings with the Sierra Leone government except that you were getting much cooperation, but we'll come back to that. Great.

YOUNG: Yes. Okay, good.

Q: Today is the 21st of December, 2005. Johnny, talk a bit about what were you getting sort of at the time and the problem about Charles Taylor.

YOUNG: We weren't getting lots of information from Charles Taylor because he was making his push from up by the Ivorian border and moving closer and closer to the capital city. It was clear that what he had said initially about not wanting to assume power was not to be believed because it was clear that his goal was really to take over the presidency. His troops were very efficient. We were beginning to get reports of atrocities in villages. It was beginning to surface that he was ruthless, that the would take over villages and also exploit them economically for whatever resources could be found in those villages that his troops subdued and he just continued his press onto the capital city.

In Freetown, we just continued to monitor the situation and to help in whatever way we could. I related to you earlier about the evacuation of Liberia in 1990. That was quite an exercise for us, but in the meantime with the government of Sierra Leone we continued to have a normal bilateral relationship. The government was trying to reform itself. We were pressing them on

reforming the economy. We were pressing them in terms of making it possible to have multiparty elections at some point. We were pressing them on human rights as well although the human rights problems there really stemmed from actions that had been taken by the previous president, Siaka Stevens. President Momoh was not accused of any human rights abuses; it's just that he never released from prison those persons that had been incarcerated by Siaka Stevens. The press was relatively free. We didn't have many problems there in terms of the press. The biggest problem was really one of the corruption. The country was deteriorating rapidly. It had no resources. The money that was coming in from the diamonds and from other resources was basically being squandered by the various people who could get their hands on the funds. As I said our relationship was normal. The government was helpful and it continued to plod along. They would come to us and plead for food assistance. I would go to our government and ask for aid. We turned our backs on Sierra Leone at that point. We knew the situation was bad. Infrastructurally it was bad, economically it was bad, politically a one party state, but still stable, not too many problems in terms of human rights, but we turned our backs on it. We said we didn't want to help. We pulled out the AID mission. That happened before I arrived there and we didn't want anything to do with it. We said, well, it's a new world now. The Berlin Wall has fallen. The Cold War is over. The former Soviet Union has disappeared and we have a new paradigm now and we're only going to help a certain number of countries that are clearly democratic.

Q: What about saying okay, we got Liberia and we have a responsibility, but you Brits have got Sierra Leone, that's your problem? Was there any of that attitude?

YOUNG: No. The British were very helpful. The British remained considerably more loyal to Sierra Leone than we did. I mean it was a former British colony, so I guess there's a greater natural inclination for them to do that. They didn't abandon the country. They did continue to help and they were very concerned and I think they would have done more if we had indicated that we were willing to do more.

Now, I must add something that will indicate the extent to which the government of Sierra Leone was very helpful to us. Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, we put out the word to get cooperation from partners to form a coalition. That word went all over the world and our ambassadors all over the world went in to their host governments and attempted to get them to sign on to this coalition. I went to the government of Sierra Leone and I asked President Momoh. I explained to him what we wanted to do. I told him it would be good if Sierra Leone could be seen as contributing to this effort and he says, okay, I'll see what I can do. What he did was he put together a 26 man medical team and sent them to Iraq as part of the coalition effort. He and two other black African countries were the only sub-Saharan countries to do anything whatsoever for the coalition. The three were Senegal, Niger and Sierra Leone. No one else in all of Africa lifted a finger to do anything. They gave some lip service and that was about it, but nothing. Now, we know 26 persons is not enormous, but it really was significant symbolically and it was very important and it wasn't forgotten and I'll explain later on how it wasn't forgotten. That's indicative of the kind of support that we got from that government, but despite that, we kept our distance from helping Sierra Leone because there were other places that were sexier and more attractive at that time. This was a little small country and we figured oh, well, no big deal to us. War had not broken out in Sierra Leone yet. The war was going on next door in

Liberia, so, you know, we never thought in terms of, well, let's try to help this country and maybe we can make it stronger so that this situation would not spill over from Liberia. We weren't thinking in that way at all. We were just thinking one country at a time.

Q: Was anybody explicitly spelling this out for you?

YOUNG: That was my job.

Q: I know, but I mean when you're back in Washington.

YOUNG: They just weren't interested.

Q: It was more a matter of indifference as opposed to somebody saying, look we've got priorities and you're not on them.

YOUNG: That was the story. I mean that was it plain and simple that it's a new ball game now and Sierra Leone doesn't figure into our priorities, despite what was going on at the time next door, not in Sierra Leone itself.

Q: Did you get any feel about the attitude of the African bureau and it's not just the African bureau, but I'm talking about the NSC and the White House and all towards sub-Saharan Africa at the time?

YOUNG: Well, I was after aid. I was after plain and simple food. That's what I wanted for that country. That's what they needed at that time. They needed military assistance as well because their military was in pretty bad shape although we continued with our military assistance program which paid off very handsomely and I will cite an example later on of how I think that paid off quite nicely. We continued to provide some assistance there because we thought that the military in Sierra Leone was fairly good relative to what was in the region. They were disciplined; well trained, not well equipped, but as good as could be expected under the circumstances. As I said, I wanted food. They were starving and couldn't get any help from AID, couldn't get any help from the State Department. At one point I went into the Department of Agriculture and I sought out a fellow I had met in The Hague. He was the AG attaché in The Hague, Bud Anderson, a wonderful man. He had then become the administrator for the food and agricultural service and I went to him and said, can you help me. Can we get a shipment of PL480 rice or grain of some kind, food, so that we can have it delivered to Sierra Leone, monetize it and then put the money in development projects. He says, I'll see what I can do. In the end he came through and I think we had a shipment of about five or six million dollars worth of rice and we did this and that staved off the hunger for a while and the desperation as well for a while, but things just continued to get worse. That was the last that the U.S. government provided any food of any kind during my time there.

I'd like to make a couple of other points about the war. At one point when the situation was getting so bad and we feared for the lives of American citizens in Liberia, we brought in the Marine amphibious ready group. It had I think about six ships. They were anchored off of Sierra Leone, close to Sierra Leone and Liberia with 5,000 Marines onboard so that if need be they

could go in and evacuate. That wasn't necessary because in the end the evacuation was carried out by helicopter, but that group remained off the coast of Sierra Leone and Liberia for months until it finally was directed elsewhere. I could only think that if we had employed that group then to go in and put an end to this fighting, which they could have done easily, very easily, we would have saved that country. We would have saved the world so much suffering, not only in Liberia, but as well in Sierra Leone. There was no will whatsoever to do that, just the thought of it was anathema to the folks in Washington. They didn't want to hear anything about any kind of American intervention. This was an internal matter in Liberia and by God the Liberians were going to sort it out and we weren't going to get involved.

Q: Doe and the way he came in, with the slaughter of the cabinet and all that, had left such a bad taste in peoples' mouths. The name of Doe was sort of anathema anyway, this was a problem because whatever we did would have been essentially in support of Doe.

YOUNG: It would have been, but there are various types of devils.

Q: Yes, I know.

YOUNG: When you look back on Charles Taylor versus what Doe did it's like night and day. I never thought that I'd live to say that, but that is an absolute fact. As horrible as Doe was and as many bad things as he did, his evil was not at all comparable to the atrocities and the evils committed by Charles Taylor. Anyhow, I wanted to make that point about the Marine amphibious ready group being there, being prepared and having all of those resources available, but as I said there was absolutely no will whatsoever to introduce that force into Liberia, to end that problem there.

Q: Could they do any R&Rs in Sierra Leone or not or in groups?

YOUNG: They could have, but no they did serve as a supply center. Supplies, for example, for the military who were stationed in Sierra Leone would be affected through from Europe to the MARG and then from the MARG to Sierra Leone.

Q: MARG being?

YOUNG: The Marine Amphibious Ready Group. Yes. Particularly, mail and food and things like that because we had all of these helicopters based in Freetown and the men who took care of those had to be fed and they got their mail and so on. We had military people and we had our embassy in Monrovia that also received supplies and other equipment that way as well.

I remember the embassy in Monrovia needed a new generator. The generator was purchased and was flown to the MARG. Then the helicopter was supposed to pick it up and fly it from the MARG to Monrovia. The helicopter picked up this, I think it was like a 15,000 pound generator. I mean a real behemoth and lifted it up, up, up and then the helicopter tilted slightly to the side, a little bit more to the side and dropped the generator which sank to the bottom of the sea. It was quite a loss, but unfortunately these things do happen. The pilot was subsequently court-martialed and all of those kinds of things, which is what the military do in situations like that.

So, we had this evacuation. We took out 2,400 people from over 40 different nationalities. They were taken out by Huey 53s I think they're called, those big helicopters. Those helicopters would land at a facility near a big hotel in Freetown, disgorge its passengers and then the passengers would then be taken to buses and what have you and then they had to go over the channel to get their planes to leave Sierra Leone. One of the funny things that occurred was among the children who lived near this helipad. Across the street from the helipad there was a fence and these kids would sit on this fence and they found that as the helicopter passed overhead the downdraft was so powerful it would blow them all over. It would knock them all off the fence. They found this the greatest game. They would just sit on this fence and wait for the helicopters to pass over and then they'd all get rolled over, just like ducks. It was really cute. They would just wait there and wait there. They thought that was just the funniest game. I thought that was cute, too. One of those images I think I will always remember.

In 1991, about March, things had quieted down; the big part of the evacuation was over. The group that had come into to do the evacuation left Sierra Leone and we had smaller commercial planes to go back and forth at that point. The airport in Liberia was not open, but there were small craft, aircraft that would go in and take people out. Once in a while I'd get a call from Ambassador de Vos. Johnny, you've got to help me get this man out. It was somebody in the government who was considered a destabilizing person to have around so we would get him out and get him to Europe or the States or whatever the case may be. We had several cases like that.

I'll never forget one of them. Pete called and said, oh, you've got to help me get this guy out and we got him out and he was one of the worst killers going. If he had stayed there he would have been a really destabilizing force, so we got him out. I remember looking at him and saying to myself, my God, he really doesn't look like a killer. He looks just as normal as anybody else. I remember the DCM at that time, Gary Maybarduk, it was 1990.

Q: DCM where?

YOUNG: In Freetown. We had worked so hard on Liberia. It was almost to the detriment of our bilateral relationship. There was so little that we could do with it in terms of any kind of support from Washington, we just did the best we could. We had our self-help projects and things like that. We tried to give some support to civil society -- projects that would encourage democracy, the press, and little community groups to help themselves with various little projects to improve health and sanitation and water. That was very useful. We had a very active Peace Corps program and that worked very nicely. Our efforts really were on Liberia and my deputy and I looked at each other one morning and said, wow, its at last quiet. We were feeling very good. Then we got a report in I think it was March of 1991. We heard that rebels had crossed over into Sierra Leone from Liberia. Initially we said, oh my God, but we didn't think that it would really get worse. We thought that the government forces would be able to put it down and that would be the end of it. Well, that wasn't the end of it because the government forces were so badly equipped. Although they were not too badly trained, they just didn't have equipment. The rebels that came over were much better equipped, very disciplined and undisciplined both, and they began to make inroads into Sierra Leone.

Q: Were these Charles Taylor types?

YOUNG: Definitely. I left out a key development that occurred prior to this point and I'd like to go back to that. The economic community of West Africa, ECOWAS, became involved in trying to bring about peace to Liberia and trying to bring an end to the problem there. They had put together a peace force. It was stationed in Sierra Leone and it agreed to go into Liberia and try to bring about peace. They would try to do it militarily. These forces were made up of Guineans and Nigerians and I don't recall some of the other groups from Africa, but they were headed by a Nigerian and subsequently a Guinean. It was basically between the Nigerians and the Guineans as to who headed up this group and they went in. They were based in Sierra Leone and they went in and they stopped Charles Taylor's forces from advancing further into Monrovia. Taylor was just about at the presidential palace, almost had the prize in his hands when this economic community of West African force went in and stopped him. He was furious, absolutely furious. He made it known that he resented President Momoh's allowing these forces to come into Liberia and to basically have stopped him. He said that he was going to overthrow the government of Sierra Leone and he was going to get back at them. He made that public, it was clear, that was at that time. Anyhow, ECOWAS went in and ECOWAS kept him from assuming power. That's to be kept in mind because later on his forces do exactly what he said he wanted them to do at that point.

Anyhow these rebels entered Sierra Leone, crossed over from Liberia. They began to take over points held by the Sierra Leone military. The fighting went on. It increased as the months went by. The military officers who were trying to stave off the rebels complained to the government that they didn't have supplies, they didn't have medicines, they didn't have food and on and on and the government ignored them. I wouldn't say the government ignored, but the government basically didn't respond sufficiently to their pleas for assistance and this is key. Anyhow we monitored the situation. We asked Washington for help for this government. The help wasn't forthcoming. The Sierra Leone forces struggled as best they could to deal with this problem. It was like a festering sore that basically was sort of staunched, but would just open up from time to time. That went on for some months.

Then, at the end of the quick Gulf War two things happened that gave Sierra Leone recognition for what it had done in becoming a part of the coalition. First, we got word from the military that they had something like sixty 40-foot containers of meals ready to eat. MREs. I said I'll take them and this would be a nice way to say thank you to this little country that helped us during the Gulf War. So they shipped the 60 containers to Sierra Leone. We arranged to have those MREs distributed to churches and it was a big success. That was number one, thank you.

Number two was in March of 1992. We got word that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, wanted to visit the three African countries that had contributed to the coalition effort. This was going to be his first trip ever to Africa. Powell wanted to visit the three countries that had contributed to the coalition effort and thank them personally for their support. Those countries were Senegal, Niger and Sierra Leone. He was also going to make a stop in Nigeria, but the stop in Nigeria was to encourage the government there to reform itself and to change its ways. He went first to Senegal. You may not recall, but Senegal lost an entire planeload of its soldiers during the Gulf effort. One of their planes went down with their soldiers

and they lost everyone. I think it was 90 some soldiers. It was quite a tragedy. Anyhow he went to Senegal, had a good visit there, then he came to Sierra Leone where he was welcomed like the king of England. The Sierra Leoneans were just absolutely ecstatic that he came. He had a terrific visit. The government loved him. The people loved him. He liked the people. He liked the country. We showed him some things that he wasn't aware of. One was an island where slaves were basically kept, captured and kept on that island before they were shipped to the New World. That New World in terms of Sierra Leone meant they were shipped basically to the United States or to Cuba or to the United States via Cuba. In fact it was from this island that the ship the Amistad left.

Q: Oh, yes, the famous mutiny and takeover.

YOUNG: That's right. A Sierra Leonean by the name of Sengbe Pieh who led the mutiny on the Amistad. That was when it left Cuba for the United States and, if you recall, John Adams came out of retirement and argued their case. Really one of the first civil rights cases before the supreme court and he won. The mutineers were set free and it really was a great moment I think in American history. Anyhow, we showed them that island. We showed them other things and he was prepared then to move on to the next phase of his trip to Niger when there was a report of an attempted coup in Niger. He canceled the Niger trip and stayed with us an extra two days. We just had a wonderful time with him. One of the things that we did was to arrange for a dinner, just a very private dinner at the residence. We had Denny Bray and Art Lewis. Art Lewis had been the American ambassador to Sierra Leone prior to Cynthia Perry. He also happened to be the first cousin of Colin Powell. So it was a very nice evening. We wanted to do a Jamaican meal for him because he has Jamaican ancestry. We found all of the ingredients and we wanted to prepare this one Jamaican specialty called Ackee, salt fish and Ackee. We got the salt fish and we found an Ackee tree.

Q: How do you spell that?

YOUNG: A-C-K-E-E, I think, Ackee. Now, this Ackee tree is very interesting. It produces a fruit that looks like an opened avocado, that's what it looks like inside. We had a friend there. She was Jamaican and she knew how to make this dish. We asked her to make it for us. She said yes, I'll do it, but you have to get the Ackee. She told us where this tree was and we went there. Now, this tree, this Ackee, you have to allow it to open by itself naturally. You can't force it open. If you force it open and eat it you die instantly. It's a deadly poison. The Sierra Leoneans don't touch it at all. They don't bother with it one way or the other. While I was observing, while this fellow was collecting these Ackees that had opened up naturally and had fallen to the ground this little Sierra Leonean man came over. In Creole he asked what are you doing with this fruit from this tree. Her fellow said, we're going to cook them. He says oh you are, are you? He says yes. He says when. Oh, we're going to cook them tonight. This little Sierra Leonean fellow said, well, you'll have some dead people later on this evening because they know this tree as being just a deadly poison. But it is not poisonous if you eat it the proper way, allowing it to open naturally and then you scoop the fruit out. It looks like scrambled eggs when it's cooked. We had Ackee and salt fish and the rice with peas and jerk chicken and just a wonderful evening of relaxation and good conversation. It was really very, very special.

Q: I take it no one died.

YOUNG: And no one died.

Q: If I would have heard the story I think I would have thought twice about serving it.

YOUNG: Yes, I know, but that was Colin Powell's trip to Africa and our first time meeting him. I'll tell you something else he did that indicated to me that this is a very special man. We had had a photo op for the diplomatic corps and for other VIPs with Powell because he was such a well-known celebrity. He had gotten us through the Gulf War and of course was known all over the world. I remember asking him why didn't he retire. I asked him, "Why didn't you retire and make your money the way Schwarzkopf did?" He says, "I'm a military man. I am committed to my profession. I'm committed to the government. I plan to serve my full term. I'm going to retire in a couple of years. If there's money to make, I'll make it. If not, I won't worry about it." I thought that was wonderful.

Then, after this photo op for the VIPs and the members of the diplomatic corps, I got a call from the woman who ran the British Council. This is equivalent to our United States Information Office. She was a single parent and she asked me if I would ask the good general if she could come over with her children and take a couple of pictures. I said, well, I'll ask him. I asked him and he said, sure, have them come over. They came over to the residence and we introduced each other and we began to take pictures. She had a little girl eight years old and a boy about 12. They took pictures with General Powell and I thought it was all over. He said, just a minute and he took off his jacket with all of the medals on the side. He took it and he put it around the shoulders of the little girl and he said, now isn't that better, let's take some more pictures. That's a really sweet, touching, personal thing. There are not many people who would do that who would be that thoughtful and kind. I said this is a really special great guy.

Q: Now, did the question of the Sierra Leone military and of the Taylor incursion come up when he was there?

YOUNG: It didn't. I mean he met with the military. The military fellow described their problem in the north as dealing with some rebels who had come over from Sierra Leone, but it was never regarded at that point as a major threat to the country. I mean if we thought it was a threat to the country we wouldn't have even allowed Powell to come in. It seemed to be just a local problem way out in the north or west somewhere, and the government figured it had it contained at that point. That was in March of 1992. So, Powell left. We had a very successful visit. It couldn't have been better, really.

Then in April of 1992, for Easter, my wife and I decided to visit some of our former posts in West Africa. We went to Guinea and Senegal and the Gambia. We had a very nice time, just loved it. We returned home on the 26th of April. Before going to bed that night we were talking about the trip and about our good fortune and being in Sierra Leone and how well things had gone. We said, you know, we've been very lucky. This has been a fascinating assignment in a poor country, wonderful people, but we've been blessed. We haven't had any coups. The government has been helpful and we've been very lucky. We kissed each other and went to bed.

The 29th of April, 1992, I went to the office as usual. We were beginning our work and it must have been around 9:00 or so. I think we were getting ready for country team meeting. We heard what sounded like gun shots. Someone said, oh, what's that? We heard it again. I went over to the window and looked down on the road below and saw a motorbike going around this big tree called the cotton tree that was in front of the circle on which the embassy was located. I said, oh, that's the backfire from this motorcycle going around the cotton tree. Then we heard it again and with greater intensity and greater thunder. Then I looked down the street and could see the fire spewing from the barrels of these big guns that were mounted on trucks. I screamed to everyone hit the floor and get under your desks and that's what we did. It was clear immediately that there was an insurrection underway. I got on the phone immediately to call the president. I got him and he said, oh don't worry, these are just young military boys discontented, don't worry about the situation. We have it under control. It's okay. So, we called our people right away, told them don't move, stay where you are. Try to get to a protected area in your residences and what have you. My secretary, a woman of incredible skill and talent, but even more noteworthy is her calm. Her name is Lupe. She called my wife and in the calmest way possible said to her, "Mrs. Young, this is Lupe. I'm calling because we seem to be experiencing a little bit of problems at the moment. There seems to be some gun fire in the street." I mean just calm like that. She said, "I just want you to take it easy and try to protect yourself and go to a safe area." My wife says, "Well, where are you calling from?" "I'm under my desk at the moment on the floor. The ambassador told us all to hit the floor." But I mean just calm like that and then my wife called the other wives in the area and had them all come over to the residence so they were all congregated there at the residence.

For the next several days we remained at the residence and it goes to show you, you never know how things will work out. The DCM happened to be sick on that occasion and I had changed DCMs at that point. The new DCM was Frank Urbancic. Frank was sick that day and when this incident occurred he couldn't get to the embassy. We had to carry on without him. The next couple of days we were trapped in the embassy. We couldn't go anywhere. We heard gun shots all night long, fighting all night long. During the day I continued to call the president. He continued to give me assurances that everything was okay, but when I began to call and call and couldn't get an answer I knew that it was over. That he had fled and that someone else had taken control of the government. Then later on it came over the radio that that in fact had happened. I then got a call from the man who was the head of the ministry of the interior, a very feared fellow. He was in hiding. He was calling me to see if he could seek refuge in the embassy. I wanted to let him in to save his life, but I realized that that could possibly pose a risk for us because the folks who were leading this effort were after him. I cabled Washington for guidance on what to do and they said, you know, don't take him in. I didn't and unfortunately later on they found him and shot him.

A couple of things happened during that first night. One was my secretary slept on the sofa and then I had a love seat. The DCM's secretary slept on the love seat and I slept on a chair and put my feet on a hassock or hammock, hassock. All night long we heard the rat a tat tat and boom boom of machine guns. The DCM's secretary was a woman who had come into the Foreign Service rather late after raising eight children and her name was Jenny Leon Gariro and Jenny had had one previous assignment. I think it was in India somewhere and she came to us in Sierra Leone. She had an incredible wit. There we were at 2:00 in the morning a small lull in the sound

of gunfire and she says out loud, "This is what I always dreamed about in joining the Foreign Service, sleeping with the ambassador." We had such a good laugh and it was such a nice way to break the tension of the moment.

Anyhow the next day things were still very tense. I think it might have been on the third day, I put the word out that we wanted to meet the new head of the government, whoever that is. Kiki Munshi the public affairs officer went out and put the word out that this was what the American ambassador wanted. We got word back that they would be prepared to do it and we agreed on the time. The venue was going to be at the embassy and we also invited the other Western embassies as well. We invited all of the embassies that wanted to come. That took place I think about like 5:00 or 6:00 on the 3rd day. The new leader was a fellow named Strasser. He was a young fellow, 20 some years old. He had been one of our IMET graduates, International Military Educational and Training graduates. I think that had a very good positive impact on him in terms of what I said to him. He came in with his folks at 5:00 and I had the people from the embassy there. I had the other embassies there. They explained to us that they really had no intention of taking over the government, but the government wouldn't pay any attention to their pleas for assistance. They came to town to basically address the government, but when the government wouldn't pay any attention to them, they decided they would just take it over. It was almost really by accident that this happened. If President Momoh and his group had paid attention to these fellows perhaps this wouldn't have occurred, but it did. I told them we were very sorry that there had to be a change in government as a result of fighting and the killing of people. I pleaded with them not to take any retaliation or retaliatory measures against those persons suspected of being involved in this. I begged them, pleaded with them in the presence of these other diplomats. I think it had a positive impact. I told him that we were thinking of possibly evacuating. I wasn't sure, but if that happened we were doing it because we thought it was in the best interest of our people to do so. Then they left.

We subsequently had a country team meeting to discuss what we should do. We decided that we would evacuate, that the situation was too unstable and too unpenetrable at that point, so we decided that we would evacuate. They hadn't decided who was going to be at the leadership of the government. We thought that this could be the beginning of further tensions within this group. We decided we would evacuate. The Department agreed and we got the word out. We managed to get all the volunteers in, all the missionaries, anybody who wanted to go, we got them out. We did it within 48 hours.

Q: Where did they go?

YOUNG: They went to Senegal.

Q: By driving?

YOUNG: No, by plane. By plane and at the time of the coup, something occurred. We had a medical team in town. They were looking at eyes and teeth and mouths and everything else. One of these military medical teams. In fact when it happened the military team wanted to pull out and leave us there. I spoke to the head of the European command or EUCOM and told them we can't have this. If we're going to be evacuated, we all have to go together. He gave the order to

keep the military there and we would all leave together. He would send in whatever additional resources were needed to take out the other Americans as well, but the military, they were ready to pull out and leave us all there. I was shocked that they would basically put their tail between their legs and take off. We did it on a first come, first serve basis and they helped us. The new government regretted that we did that, but I told them we had no choice. Our first concern was the safety of our nationals and that's what we had to do.

I made some decisions also that were not in accord with the emergency evacuation plan in terms of who would stay and who would leave and that sort of thing. For example, I kept the doctor, the Peace Corps doctor. All of the other Peace Corps folks including the director and the other associate directors, they all left. I kept the GSO, but not the admin officer and I kept the public affairs officer, Kiki Munshi. That's the way it went. We managed to do, we just did everything. We all flipped around and did all kinds of jobs. We had the Peace Corps doctor doing political reporting and on and on. I mean we just did what had to be done. Just a couple of days after the coup the DCM was able to get in.

Q: I have a question on this. What was developing, in the first place, did you feel that the government of Momoh was sort of oblivious to the military problems I mean essentially that was it just not responsible, how did you find it?

YOUNG: I just think that they were strapped for cash. They were strapped for supplies and they didn't give them the attention they needed. I mean they were people who had been wounded in the fighting to try and keep these rebels at bay, that hadn't been treated, couldn't be treated because the government had nothing to treat them with. Some of the ones who came on this journey to put their petitions before the government, they were still wrapped up in bandages and what have you from wounds that they had incurred in fighting the rebels. The government just was not serious about listening to what was coming from its military people.

Q: Was there such a thing as a presidential guard as part of the army?

YOUNG: Yes, they had that.

Q: Were they supporting the president?

YOUNG: They were loyal to the president, definitely, yes.

Q: Did capitalism ever appear at all?

YOUNG: At this point it didn't. This was not, at this point it was not. Just before the coup I remember there were reports beginning to surface of atrocities in the area where the rebels had been fighting the government forces. A Peace Corps volunteer came to us one day and said oh, ambassador, you know I saw something I've never seen before. I saw a child soldier and he had a machine gun. I was scared to death with this little boy and a machine gun.

It wasn't too far from Freetown where he saw this. This was the first time anyone had seen a child soldier in Sierra Leone, the first time. That was the beginning of something that would

really manifest itself quite a bit in Sierra Leone in the coming years as well as the atrocities. The Sierra Leoneans were a very peaceful, gentle people. They never engaged in atrocities and pillaging and burning villages and all of these kinds of things. They were poor, but just very nice folks. The first signs of these kinds of problems were seen before the coup occurred.

Q: When you say atrocities, I think later we heard about children with ____.

YOUNG: That's right, yes, not only children, I mean adults, babies, it was awful.

Q: What was motivating this?

YOUNG: This came from Charles Taylor. These are the kinds of tactics. The man who was leading the rebel forces at that time was a fellow by the name of Foday Sankoh. No one had heard of this fellow, no one knew him. They knew that there had been a Foday Sankoh who was a military man and had been put in jail. No one knew where he was or what he had done, but he had obviously gone over to Liberia and lined up with Taylor and then had crossed back over. Sierra Leone had no history whatsoever of the kinds of atrocities that occurred basically for the next decade while that war was underway.

Q: What developed, I mean your people left. They went to.

YOUNG: Senegal and then from Senegal they went home, went to the States or wherever they were going.

Q: What happened at the time you left what happened?

YOUNG: Until the time I transferred?

Q: Yes.

YOUNG: Oh, well, we continued our work with the new government trying to establish some kind of rapport. That was the only alternative. The new government was young and confused. Despite promises that it was going to be different and they were going to lead the country in a new direction, it became apparent to us rather quickly that this was going to be more of the same. The first thing they did was confiscate all of the fancy Mercedes and BMWs that they could put their hands on. Then they took over the fanciest villas. Then there were shipments of liquor to the villas and the girls and on and on. It was the spoils of having taken over the government. It was clear that these were not serious people in terms of governing a nation. They were falling into the traps of what people often fall into when they get into a position of power. They want all of the things they think that go with power, the fancy house and the cars and the girls and the booze and the food and everything else. We could see that.

Some of them were Catholic. I went to mass one Sunday. Several of the top people in the new government pulled up in their BMWs. They hopped out in their military uniforms carrying their machine guns. We had a Catholic priest who had been there for 40 some years. He stopped in the middle of the mass and told them, "Get these guns out of this church. There is no place for guns

in this church." The fellows listened to him and they took the guns outside and he said, don't bring any guns into this church. Then he continued with the mass. After the mass I said, "Father, I'm amazed that you addressed those fellows the way that you did." He says, "Oh, sure, I know them all. I remember when they use to piss on the side of my cassock." He did. He knew them all from the time they were babies. It was clear that this was not a serious group and that this country was going to be in for trouble as it sorted itself out.

Q: Well, I mean obviously you were reporting back what you were seeing.

YOUNG: Yes.

Q: What was the response from Washington?

YOUNG: Oh, the response in Washington wasn't too enthusiastic. They basically wanted stability. They wanted us to encourage the government to do the right thing, to hold elections as soon as possible. Don't embark on any programs of killing. It's the standard stuff that you get. Let's have elections as quick as possible and when you turn over the government to civilian rule and those kinds of things. It was the standard.

Q: What was the feeling, I mean sort of going into it sounds like a bordello gone wild or something like that, delivered your message.

YOUNG: They were beginning to learn quickly in terms of responding in a way that provided positive answers. They said they planned for transition to democratic governance and those kinds of things and what they were going to do and on and on. They weren't going to tolerate corruption and this and that. I met with a group of Lebanese businessmen and the Lebanese business people in Sierra Leone were quite a force to be reckoned with. I mean they controlled a substantial part of that economy. They said, oh, yes, we met with so and so and so the new president and the new minister of the economy and on and on and you know, they refused our offer of assistance. Assistance really meant bribes and the head of them said, well, that's okay. Give us two months, we'll have them just where we want them. They were right.

Anyhow, things were calm for the following month. They were calm the next month and then I began to press to try and get the evacuation order lifted so that people could return. I was leaving in July and I wanted my wife back so that we could say farewell together and we could leave together. There was resistance to this in Washington because at the time I think there was a 90-day rule or something like that. They weren't going to look at you until 90 days had passed and then they would make a decision if they should lift it or not. Anyhow in our case they lifted it after I think 30 days and my wife was able to come back and we were able to conclude our assignment there and then move on to Washington. Before I left I received a telegram from Ed Perkins who was the Director General of the Foreign Service. He said, "Johnny, I have a key position in my office that I will be filling and I've looked around at people for this position and I've decided you are the perfect man for it, to be the director of Career Development and Assignments." I sent him a message back saying thanks very much, but no thanks. The last time I was in Washington in personnel I developed high blood pressure and haven't gotten rid of it since. I don't want to go to Washington; I really want to stay in the field. He cabled back and

said, no, I want you for this job and I said, no thank you. Then I tried to get the support of my friends in high places like Mary Ryan and Ambassador Hicks and a few others to weigh it on my behalf with the Director General and they said, Johnny, forget it. He wants you for this job, you should do it and that's that. That's how I ended up as the Director of Career Development and Assignments. Perkins called me up and we spoke and he said, "Johnny, you take this job. I assure you I'll take care of you." That was that. I did transfer to Washington. Before I had even gotten to Washington Perkins was transferred out of the job and moved to the United Nations and Genta Hawkins Holmes was his replacement as the Director General of the Foreign Service.

MARY A. WRIGHT
Deputy Chief of Mission
Freetown (1996-1998)

Mary A. Wright was born in Oklahoma in 1946. After graduating from the University of Arkansas in 1968 she began a career in the military which lasted nearly a decade. Her Foreign Service career began in 1987 and has included posts in Nicaragua, Grenada, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Mongolia. She resigned from the Foreign Service in 2003 due to personal disagreement with American policies. She was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on May 11, 2003.

Q: Every war you learn. At least the military goes through and learns; I'm not sure…This is one of the things that in a certain way these oral histories are the only thing that really takes a look at what the State Department did before and have people comment on it – at least in a record – and it's being done unofficially.

WRIGHT: Which is really surprising. Coming from a military background, one of the things I've always been urging the State Department to do is to compile lessons-learned after every incident. They're starting to do some now with the evacuations we have done. I was in charge of the evacuation in 1997 from Sierra Leone. We did a rather extensive after-action report there of the things that went right, as well as the things that went wrong. But I'm not too sure the Department learned much from it. It seems like we're relearning the same lessons, evacuation after evacuation.

Q: Well, now, how did the Sierra Leone thing come about?

WRIGHT: I went to Sierra Leone through a connection from Somalia. One of the people that I worked with in Somalia was John Hirsch, who had been brought there by Ambassador Bob Oakley for a two-month tour of duty in late 1992. A few years later John subsequently was named as the ambassador to Sierra Leone. When his first deputy chief of mission was ready to move on to his next assignment, Ambassador Hirsch got in touch with me to see if I would become the DCM. At the time I was still an FS-03 and to be able to move up into an -01 position was quite good so even though West Africa was not one of the places that I really had any interest in, it sounded like a good career move.

Q: So you went to Sierra Leone when?

WRIGHT: In 1996.

Q: How long were you there?

WRIGHT: For two years. My assignment was for two years. I was actually in-country only about fourteen months because we had to be evacuated because of terrible atrocities committed by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).

Q: When you went there in '96 what was the situation? Could you talk a little bit about Sierra Leone at that time?

WRIGHT: Sierra Leone had for decades been ruled by Shieka Stevens– I think they called him a kleptocrat – one of the dictators of West Africa that had stole the country blind. Anyway, Stevens had been deposed in a coup by junior army officers in the early '90s. These junior officers ruled the country for about four years – and I mean really junior; they were in their mid-twenties. The head of state of Sierra Leone was a twenty-five-year-old named Valentine Strasser. During this time though, rebel activities started first against the dictator and then against the military junta. The international community put pressure on the military junta, these junior fellows, to turn over power, to permit an election, so that there would no longer be a military junta.

These guys were tempted with offers of scholarships in Europe and the United States. At some point they succumbed to the pressure of the international community and allowed elections to take place. The security environment in Sierra Leone meant the elections only happened in about forty-five percent of the territory in Sierra Leone. The rest of the territory was under siege by the Revolutionary United Front which was a group of Sierra Leonean and Liberians funded by Charles Taylor of Liberia, Muammar Qadhafi of Libya, and Blaise Campare of Guinea Bissau. Despite the election not being able to be held throughout the country, the election took place.

Q: What year was this?

WRIGHT: That was in early 1996 before I arrived there. The person that won the election was Tejan Kabbah, who was a retired United Nations official. He had served thirty years with the UN and his last job was as the head of the political division of all the United Nations. He was a very senior UN diplomat, very well respected, who had come back to Sierra Leone hoping to just to retire to his home country. He said he never intended to go into Sierra Leonean politics but got Shanghaied into it. After his election in 1996, there was a quiet period of about four or five months when international figures attempted to broker a peace with the rebel group.

Q: Had you arrived by this time?

WRIGHT: Just as I arrived the Revolutionary United Front really started strong, strong operations against the government forces. At this time there were some very interesting things

going on. In 1994 the military junta hired South African mercenaries to assist their poorly trained and poorly equipped military with logistical and armed helicopter support. This mercenary group was called "Executive Outcomes", quite a name for mercenaries. Executive Outcomes had worked in several other countries and had a colorful background.

Q: These are basically white mercenaries, right?

WRIGHT: Yes, they were white mercenaries that were highly trained and very experienced. They brought in helicopters and started making some progress against the rebel forces, pushing them back into the outer areas of Sierra Leone. As that was happening, and the international community was developing aid programs for Sierra Leone. There was an elected government now and areas in the country that were secure enough that help could be brought for education and health and infrastructure development. That help also consisted of payments to the national treasury through the IMF (International Monetary Fund) to help the national budget. But as the role of Executive Outcomes became larger and larger and the amount of money that the national government was paying to the mercenary group grew larger, over a period of months the IMF started questioning whether the IMF's money was being used to pay for mercenaries. Of course using IMF money to pay mercenaries is prohibited.

It turned out that some of the IMF money was being used to pay the Executive Outcome contract because there was not enough revenue generated by the government of Sierra Leone. Pressure was put on the Kabbah government to insure that IMF funds were not being used for payments to Executive Outcomes, or payments to the Sierra Leone military itself. Kabbah said, "I don't have enough nation-generated revenues and if you force me stop using IMF funds, then I'm going to have to make cutbacks in the military." We all knew that the military's numbers were quite inflated. The military claimed they had 30,000 soldiers on active duty. Their payroll reflected they were paying 30,000 and were providing food to 30,000 families. We knew that the military's numbers weren't right, that there were some scams going on within the military, and that the military itself was taking money for soldiers that didn't exist. Sierra Leone had a ghost army.

We put pressure on the Kabbah government to reduce the size of the military and to come up with the right numbers in terms of pay and to not support a ghost army. Kabbah came back to us, "That's easy for you to say, but I'm the new guy in Sierra Leone. I've been away for thirty years, returned and then was elected as president of this country. I've got a military that is used to getting paid for 30,000 people. It's going to be really, really tough for me to reduce the size of the military in my first months in office, but I'll try." The military of course didn't like the reduction in their money making scheme. It was a real dilemma for Kabbah on how hard he could push the military to acknowledge that indeed there weren't as many soldiers on the rolls as they claimed. Predictably there was dissension within the military and rumors of possible coup attempts against Kabbah. One coup attempt was made in August, 1996. Army Major Johnny Paul Koroma actually charged and convicted of leading this coup attempt. He and his group were put in the Pademba Road prison in downtown Freetown, about one-half mile from the Government House. In '96 the government also reduced the amount that it was paying Executive Outcomes, meaning EO could do a fewer number of military operations against the RUF. They were just getting paid less and so they did less. In May '97 all of this resulted in the RUF making

great advances onto Freetown and controlling greater and greater parts of the country. The RUF were committing extremely brutal atrocities to the folks out in the countryside – all sorts of terrible brutalities like people being burned alive inside buildings and thatched huts and a certain amount of chopping off of arms and legs.

Q: Yes, it came very much to everybody's notice.

WRIGHT: Yes, the atrocities were known to the international community. But the most terrible atrocities occurred in 1998 but they started in 1997.

Q: What was the purpose of this?

WRIGHT: It was to intimidate the local population to not support the Kabbah government. It was pure, brutal terror racked on a population. It was also a recruiting mechanism – forced recruitment of children into the RUF. The RUF would force young kids to kill their parents, then take the kids with them and over a period of a year and a half or two years, indoctrinate them into the ways of the RUF. Later on, as we were able to bring some of the children out of the RUF clutches and place them into NGO-run child-soldier camps. Kids 6, 7 and 8 years old carried weapons and killed. Some of the stories that these young kids told were just horrendous, as stories of child soldiers from other parts of the world are too.

Q: While this was going on, your ambassador and you, what were you doing? What were our concerns?

WRIGHT: We had very good relationships with Tejan Kabbah and most of his cabinet. Kabbah had "strong-armed" a few other senior UN officials from Sierra Leone to come back to Sierra Leone and help out the country, including James Jonah, a well-respected 30 year UN diplomat. We worked very closely with them. That said, in many ways, to be quite honest, the suggestions that we had for them had two aspects. First, the international community could not have its money used to support the military. Second, if country has no other way to pay for its military or to hire mercenaries to keep the evil guys out of town, you're really undercutting the government's ability to defend itself by not letting your money be used.

Q: Could you translate that? Were you telling Washington that okay, we have a policy but the policy doesn't work in this setting?

WRIGHT: Yes, indeed we were. We were graphically laying out the options that were available. The option the international community was forcing on the Kabbah government was putting the country's security at greater risk. But as so often happens, the pleas from the field are not necessarily heard or analyzed or given weight in Washington. Admittedly, sometimes there are bigger things that are happening in the world and the attention of the bureau may be in a different area. I think that's what initially was happening for Sierra Leone, that we really weren't getting the type of attention that we needed in order to get the bureaucracy to respond.

Q: Well, it's one of the smallest African countries, isn't it?

WRIGHT: Yes.

Q: It's essentially two riverbanks, isn't it?

WRIGHT: No, it's larger than that. It's not like the Gambia or someplace like that. It's a bigger area, but only four million people in that larger area.

Q: How about the AF bureau? I guess Susan Rice was the assistant secretary at that time, or was it somebody else?

WRIGHT: She had not come in yet. The assistant secretary for African affairs was George Moose. He stayed in that job until late '97.

Q: Was the attention essentially more or less on South Africa still? What was happening that seemed to steal stuff away from you?

WRIGHT: Well, about anything could've stolen attention away from us. Sierra Leone was just not on anybody's radar screen. Peace negotiations were going on in Liberia next door. Those negotiations had higher visibility than the fledgling democratic government in Sierra Leone even though they were right next door. A great deal of effort from the U.S. government was expended in those negotiations.

Q: What did Sierra Leone have? Diamonds and…

WRIGHT: Yes. The whole issue of conflict diamonds arose during this period. We at the embassy were maintaining that the purpose of the rebel group, the Revolutionary United Front, was to gain control of the diamond fields and to be able to move diamonds out of Sierra Leone through Liberia or through Guinea Bissau. If they had control of the government, they would have less to contend with, but they didn't need control of the government to get the diamond fields. The three nations in the region were getting big, big returns from supporting the RUF in their share of the diamonds from the RUF controlled area of Sierra Leone. Diamonds fueled the agenda of the RUF, not concern for the people of Sierra Leone.

Q: Were we getting information out of the enemy area?

WRIGHT: Not good information, no. One of the real problems that we had was the lack of intelligence assets to help us figure out what was going on with the RUF. We were continually told by the agency that that collecting intelligence on the RUF was not one of their missions. So we were in the dark about what was really going on out in the countryside until we would hear after the fact of big villages being overrun. But there was nothing that we could provide to the government would be helpful to fight the RUF. Neither was the agency looking for the sources of the RUF's support on the international scene. That just wasn't one of their concerns.

Q: What were sort of our security concerns there? Were the forces hovering too close to be comfortable?

WRIGHT: Initially they were not; they were pretty far out of Freetown, the capital. However, they were close enough that we could travel only on the peninsula that Freetown was on, which had about a forty-mile radius. The rest of the country was off-limits for us.

Q: So how did things play out when you were there from that?

WRIGHT: Remarkably, despite its reduced payments, Executive Outcomes was able to put substantial pressure on the RUF. The RUF leadership, headed by a weird character named of Foday Sankoh, a former photographer who received rebel training in Libya, decided that he would negotiate with the government. For a period of three or four months negotiations were held in Cote d'Ivoire. The negotiations failed and all of a sudden things really started going downhill fast. The rebel forces were moving closer into Freetown. We were wondering how in the world this could be happening when these peace negotiations were going on and Sierra Leone military forces had the rebels on the run. Yet the rebels kept coming closer and closer to Freetown. We suspected there must be some collusion between the Sierra Leone military and the rebels because there was no way that the rebel forces could be moving as fast as they were unless the military was letting them do so.

On the twenty-seventh or -fifth or -first of May of 1997 on a Sunday morning all hell broke loose in Freetown. There was gunfire, mortars, all sorts of gunfire. The RUF had gotten forces into Freetown and had opened the doors of the Pademba Road prison and released Johnny Paul Koroma, one of the former coup leaders, and his group. There was much gunfire in downtown Freetown.

Over the next four or five days we met with Johnny Paul Koroma who became the spokesperson for the RUF. As it turned out, he became the spokesperson for the Sierra Leone military because the military was in collusion with the RUF. Some of the most senior military officers had been in collusion with the RUF for a long time.

We tried to talk Koroma out of staying in power. At the time I was the charge d'affaires of the U.S. Embassy. Our ambassador, John Hirsch, had left the country three days before on an R&R (Rest & Recuperation Leave). We were able to set up a meeting with Koroma and with some of the military who were throwing away their military uniforms and putting on RUF clothes. The British High Commissioner and the U.N. special envoy and I met with the group of fifteen RUF and military to try to talk them out of maintaining power. We emphasized that the international community would never recognize their power grab and that they were just going to be in big trouble for doing this. That approach did not work although at one stage we thought we had a couple of the leaders convinced. We were using some of the arguments that had been made to the military junta several years earlier, that there were places that these guys could go to get a better education, to get ahead in life but not in Sierra Leone. But the temptation of control of the diamond fields won out.

The RUF was very brutal in its taking of Freetown. Lots of people were killed, assaulted and beaten up. Because of their collusion with the RUF, the military made no effort to control the violence. The RUF thugs were doing whatever they wanted. There was a contingent of Nigerian soldiers in Freetown who tried desperately to keep a stronghold on one part of the peninsula.

They were running out of ammunition very quickly and said they weren't going to be able to hold out against the RUF. With this information the decision was made in Washington that we would drawdown our U.S. personnel at the embassy. Initially we were only going to send out non-emergency personnel. Ultimately though, we ended up closing the whole embassy and all U.S. personnel left. The level of violence and the number of international community people that had been attacked and the number of rapes of international women were all great sources of concern. The decisions were being made in terms of getting people out. Our embassy recommendation to Washington was to get the families out. We hoped that Washington would charter an aircraft to come in very quickly. The British did bring in a plane and I think the French may have brought in a plane. But the decision of Washington was that we would not have a plane but that we would have a U.S. naval ship that was bobbing around off the coast of the Congo waiting for the Congo to blow up, and to come up to Freetown to evacuate us. We ended up waiting three days for that ship to get up to Sierra Leone. In the meantime though, I went ahead and got some spaces on the British aircraft so that we could get our family members out. The level of gunfire and the violence that was going on was something that we couldn't protect against. Had the rebels decided to come over our walls into our compounds, we would not have been able to get out.

Q: Did you have Marines?

WRIGHT: We had a 5 person Marines Security Guard detachment. Two of the Marines were stuck in the embassy for 3 days. One had actually been kidnaped by the RUF. On the morning the coup started, one of the Marines was coming down from the Marine House to the embassy to relieve the Marine in the embassy. As he passed the Pademba Road prison, the RUF freed all the prisoners. They stopped our embassy car, forced the Marine out of the car and made him walk along the side of car as protection for those that were inside. He was out of communication with us for about three hours, which was really the most frightening incident. We knew he left the Marine House but he didn't arrive at the embassy. So where was he? He and the embassy driver eventually were released and they came to the embassy. The RUF made our driver drive our car on various trips around Freetown to deliver RUF and military and pick up others.

Q: How were communications? This was in '97, I guess, wasn't it?

WRIGHT: Yes.

Q: Had e-mail developed to such an extent? Were you able to keep in pretty good touch with Washington?

WRIGHT: Personal e-mail was just beginning. A few of our embassy officers had computers at home. Thank goodness because we use them a lot. But remarkably the coup makers did not destroy the international telephone and communications system. In fact, we think they forgot to disable it. Usually if you're going to have a coup you seize the communications facilities and knock them off so that you control everything but the RUF didn't. We were able to keep a direct line through the international phone service with Washington virtually the whole time. We also set up a satellite radio (INMARSAT) at the ambassador's residence. His residence was in a different compound than the one I lived in. Our communications officer lived adjacent to the

Ambassador's compound. He got the radio from the ambassador's house to have backup communications. I was in a completely different compound. It was too dangerous to move back and forth to that compound. I and our security officer wanted everybody to stay where they were. We couldn't consolidate everyone because we didn't have enough space in either one of the places to house everyone. We had people in four locations. Two Marines were at the chancery. Half of our embassy staff in one residential compound and the other half at a second compound. We also had two AID (Agency for International Development) contractors that were living down in a hotel that was down on the peninsula. On the first day we also had a team of U.S. Special Forces training Sierra Leonean military at a training base outside of Freetown.

Washington's decision was that we would wait for the U.S.S. Kersarge to come up from the Congo to pull us out of there. But, because of the deteriorating security environment, I sent all of the families out on a British charter flight, leaving the officers for the ship. I knew there would be many American citizens and citizens from other nations who would want to be evacuated. I needed our officers to help with the evacuation.

Initially, we were going to just have essential personnel – five Foreign Service officers plus Marines were going to stay in Sierra Leone. About midnight before we were going to begin the evacuation of non-emergency personnel at 6 am the next morning, Washington said that they had been getting indications that there might be some kidnapping attempts of members of the international community. They made the decision to close the embassy down and get everybody out. When we told everybody that the decision now was that we would all depart, we had to totally change our plans.

First we notified the Marines in the embassy to begin destroying classified documents. Because the embassy had been the backdrop of much of the fighting for the Government House two blocks away, ninety windows in the chancery had been blown out. The Marines had to crawl through the glass on the floor in the dark to get to the areas where we had classified materials. Some of our safes were old and temperamental. The Marines had a big challenge getting some of the safes open so they could destroy the classified materials. They kept us updated on their progress and we knew they didn't have enough time to destroy everything that should have been. We gave them priority areas and then told them to do what they could by six am and then prepare to be picked up from the chancery.

Back at the residential areas, our personnel were going through traumatic times. It's one thing if you know that you're going to have some of your American colleagues staying behind and keeping watch over your possessions and your animals, but when the decision is that everybody is leaving and you're closing the embassy down, that is really, really traumatic. It provided a fascinating glimpse into human psychology and how different personalities accept such traumatic events.

We had some people that handled it very well and others who didn't cope well. They became fixated on certain things, some of which were so strange, but others that were kind of predictable – about animals. If you're leaving your pets behind, you immediately wonder who's going to take care of them. You wonder if somebody going to kill them and eat them. Trying to calm people down and to organize how to keep all of the animals cared for and alive was a challenge

since we would be leaving in six hours. We decided to get each family's household local staff and have them come in to look after the animals. We had each family get their dog food or cat food out. We consolidated it so that the Sierra Leonean staff would know where all the pet food was. For so many people keeping the pets alive was their main focus.

Q: Where was the mercenary force? Had they disappeared?

WRIGHT: Some of the Executive Outcomes staff had flown the president out to Guinea in Guinea with one of the helicopters. They did not have the resources to really mount a major counterattack in Freetown. Some of their people had been trapped in outlying areas. They were fighting for their own survival.

Q: How did the evacuation work?

WRIGHT: We were later told the evacuation ended up being the largest evacuation since Vietnam. It was a three-day operation. Voice of America and the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) had been announcing to that any American citizen that wanted to be evacuated needed to meet at the Mammy Yoko Hotel on Friday morning and to bring their passports and identification documents. Well, of course when any announcement like that goes out, a lot of people decide if the Americans are evacuating, then we had better get out too. When the announcements were being made we didn't realize that we would be closing the embassy. We were saying that we would evacuate American citizens that wanted to leave the country and that the Embassy was evacuating its non-emergency personnel.

On Friday morning at 6:00 AM when we started the evacuation there were about five thousand people that had shown up at the Mammy Yoko Hotel. Many Sierra Leonean wanted to get out of Freetown and other West Africans who had been living in Sierra Leone who had no base of support when the rebels took over. We also started getting requests from other nationalities, Western European and Middle Eastern embassy groups, saying that they would like their nationals to be evacuated. We kept relaying this information back to Washington and Washington would also inform us that, "We've been contacted by [so-and-so] embassy here in Washington and they want their personnel brought out."

At that point it was to be a one-day evacuation, so I said to Washington, "Give me a little guidance on this. Who does Washington want to be pulled out first? Is there a priority list?" I knew that American citizens would be the first on the list, but how do you decide who comes next, particularly when the captain of the USS Kersarge was saying that the maximum evacuees that the ship could hold was 700. How do you determine what to do? Washington, "It's your choice. Go ahead and make decisions." *[laughs]*

On Thursday about twelve hours before the ship got off the coast of Sierra Leone, a Marine advance team helicoptered in to start working directly with us. We had been in telephone radio contact with the ship as it was steaming up from the Congo. I, as the Charge d'Affaires, and our security officer Jeff Breed were coordinating with the Marine force to give them the lay of the land, the political dynamics, and the security dynamics. We gave them our plan for handling the processing of evacuees, making up manifests, lists of names, nationalities and passport numbers.

We described the area we had determined would be the best evacuation site, which was the helicopter pads that were next to the Mammy Yoko Hotel. These areas were identified on our established Non-Combatant Evacuation Operation (NEO) plan. But it turned out later to be a combatant evacuation.

On Friday, the Marines in their helicopters landed and started a process that ultimately ended up with us taking out 900 people by the end of the day. As we kept going through the crowds and pulling out American citizens and citizens of other nationalities whose countries had requested that we take them out, there were more and more and more people being identified that didn't have any type of support base in Sierra Leone. There were thirty Italian tourists that happened to be in Freetown and lots of others that really needed to get out of unpredictable and dangerous Freetown. We went through the crowds endless times to pull out American citizens others were had identified were to go. Finally about four o'clock I was satisfied we had gotten all the people that had been identified to us that needed to go. So off we went. I was on the last helicopter out of the Mammy Yoko Hotel. We knew that there were some Americans that were still in Freetown, but they said they did not want to be evacuated. They were willing to take their chances with whatever developed. I knew that and I told Washington there still are some Americans in Freetown but they didn't want to go.

We got everybody on board the Kersarge and continuing to process evacuees. Our initial processing method at the Mammy Yoko hotel did not work fast enough. There were too many people that needed to get out and it was taking too long to fully process them on land before we put them on helicopters to the ship. The Marines said, "We can't stay here all day. We need to get this thing moving faster. You must expedite your processing. The paperwork is taking way too much time." A State Department regional consular "fly away team" had been flown to the ship while the ship was on its way up from the Congo. We then moved the processing operation on board the ship rather than at the hotel, which really speeded it up. By four o'clock, we had processed everyone we thought we were going to evacuate.

When Washington told us that we would be evacuated by military ship, we said, "Where are we going to be evacuated to? Where are you taking us on this ship? To Senegal? To Dakar? Or down to the Ivory Coast? You know, someplace where they've got enough hotels, big enough airports to get people moving fast. The response back from Washington was: "No, we're taking you to Conakry, Guinea." We said, "*Guinea, t* he country next door to Sierra Leone. Conakry, Guinea?" For those of us who had been to Conakry, we'd just as soon stay in Freetown with the fighting going on. We don't want to go to Conakry. There's nothing in Conakry. It's a decrepit old town that has a small number of hotels. Nobody wants to go to Guinea. Take us someplace else, please. "Nope, you're going to Conakry." Well, as it turned out, with the numbers of people that we brought out – 900 people – that totally overloaded Conakry. We were in touch with Washington during evacuation day saying, "The numbers of people that we're now putting on board this ship, you're going to have to find lots of hotels."

Q: This was the second and third days too?

WRIGHT: No, this was still the first day. Nine hundred people on the first day. We were calling Washington and saying, "You have got to get some charter aircraft into Conakry because there is

not enough hotel space in the city." Of course our embassy in Conakry was saying the same thing: "What do you mean you're bringing in 900 people here? There's no space for that number."

Then as we were steaming to Conakry in the evening Washington called back to say, "You forgot some Americans." I said, "I know there are some Americans that didn't want to go out on this evacuation, but we didn't leave any American behind that was at the evacuation site. Any American who wanted to leave, we got. I know because I personally went out in that crowd of five thousand people and looked at every passport. Our staff had thoroughly canvassed the crowd. There was an American embassy eye that looked at every passport. Washington said, "We've now been notified that there were some Americans that got to the evacuation site after you left." I said, "That's a different story. If they hadn't arrived in the course of this whole day and with three days notice on the radio, what do you want us to do?" And they said, "Well, it turns out that we've gotten an inquiry from the White House about this because the nanny for Vice President Gore's kids is Sierra Leonean. The nanny's kids are visiting their grandmother in Freetown. The three kids did not get to the evacuation site. We said, "Well, that's a problem for sure but does that mean that you want us to go back and get three kids? Are they American citizens? [Are they this?] [Are they that?]" Well, of course those were not the right questions to ask. And then Washington said, "And you forgot the orphans." I said, "The orphans?" There's an American missionary ran an orphanage. We had lots of contact with her at the embassy because she was trying to get Sierra Leonean orphans adopted by Americans. (end of tape)

She brought twenty orphans to the evacuation site. We told her, "These are Sierra Leonean kids, they're not American kids. While we certainly sympathize with the plight of the orphans, they're better off staying here. You don't have legal authority to take them out of the country. They don't have passports. There's no documentation on them. Even if you had a Sierra Leonean court order giving you custody of them, you don't know where you are taking them." Our greatest concern was that there was no legal document to say these kids could leave the country. The American was not the legal guardian of them. She ran an orphanage but she wasn't their legal guardian. She got on the phone to some of her U.S. congressional friends and great pressure was put on the State Department by certain congresspersons that these kids ought to be taken out of Sierra Leone. So the instructions back from Washington were that you go back – and go back right now – and pick up the Americans left behind – the Sierra Leonean that belonged to the nanny's family and the orphans.

By that time it was later in the evening. We've got nine hundred people on board that we're trying to get into Conakry. I met with the captain of the ship and the Marine commander and we had a discussed what was possible at this hour. We had helicopter pilots that had been flying all day. We had crew receiving folks on board. The ship was maxed out on toilet facilities. We needed to get people off the ship. The sailors on board had already given up their bunks because we knew that we weren't going to be able to fly all of the evacuees off and get them into Conakry tonight. Some were going to have to stay overnight on the ship. So both the Marine commander and the captain of the ship said, "It is physically impossible for us to go back to Freetown tonight." They said, "If people are under siege and it is truly a matter of life and death, then we will reevaluate a decision." But they said, "Right now things are as quiet as they have been in the last few days in Freetown and we recommend that we don't go back tonight." They

said, “As soon as we get these nine hundred flown off the ship into Conakry, we can turn back around and we’ll be off Freetown in the morning. We can pick up the remainder first thing in the morning.”

So we called back to Washington and said, “Our decision is that because there is no imminent danger, because everyone is very tired from today’s big evacuation and the safety considerations for the people that have to do these evacuations, we’ve decided that we want to evacuate the remaining people first thing in the morning.” Well, the folks in Washington didn’t like that answer but we just stuck to our guns. We said, “We are here, we see what’s going on and we are not going to go back in there. But we’ll be there first thing in the morning. What you all in Washington can do for us is to make sure that all of those people that you want to have taken out are down at the hotel first thing in the morning. We’ll start coming in there at daybreak and we’ll take out everybody that you want us to.” So that’s what happened.

We continued during the night to offload people by helicopter in Guinea. Our little embassy in Conakry was overwhelmed. Ambassador Tibor Nagy and his team did a terrific job. The whole mission mobilized to get hotel rooms for our embassy staff that would be staying a few days until Washington made the decision on what we should do. Charter planes started coming in to Conakry to take people out. It was a very tough on our embassy staff but they got the job done.

The next morning at daybreak we were offshore in Sierra Leone. We went ashore again and not only did we have the eighteen orphans, by that time a couple of other Americans had shown up who had arrived from upcountry- from outside of the Freetown area. They had seen enough of the RUF atrocities and wanted to be evacuated. Other nationalities had started arriving, too, from different towns. They had come through the rebel lines and gotten down there. And then there were various government officials who started appearing in disguise at the hotel with terrible tales of what was happening to them. I knew what would happen to them if the RUF got them, so I decided we’d evacuate them for their own safety. We evacuated three hundred people that morning including all the kids of Vice President Gore’s nanny.

So off we went back to Guinea with our new load of three hundred people and some of the earlier 900 that we had not been able to get to Conakry before turning the ship around. In the meantime there were still thousands of Sierra Leonean and other West Africans that were at the hotel saying, “We need to get out of here. Things are really getting worse and worse in Freetown. We are afraid the rebels are going to come down into this area and just wipe us all out.” The rebels were noted for really brutal, brutal activity – chopping people’s arms and legs off.

On Saturday, the second day of the evacuation, the ship never actually got to Conakry. We got close enough to start ferrying people off and by that time I had sent all of our embassy staff ashore and help the embassy in Conakry with all of the processing there. I had stayed on board and Ambassador Hirsch arrived back from his R&R. He was just aghast that this terrible thing had happened while he was away from his post. He was so distraught that he hadn’t been there to lead his mission, as anyone who’s in that leadership position would feel. He had flown back from his R&R and had gotten to Guinea and came on board the ship to thank the ship’s crew for all their help.

While he was on board and the rest of our embassy were in Conakry, we got information from Sierra Leone that the rebel forces were attacking the Mammy Yoko hotel. There were still some Americans, including the manager of the hotel who had still decided not to leave. There were diplomatic missions that had decided not to leave. The British High Commission had decided that it would not close but would send out its non-essential people. The British high commissioner, military attaché and military training assistance officer were still in Freetown. All of a sudden the RUF started firing on the hotel. A helicopter gunship of the Sierra Leonean military stood off the hotel and started firing rockets into the hotel. Rebels fired mortars into the hotel. The hotel was on fire. Eight hundred people had gathered in the basement of the hotel to try to get away from all this firing. The British military attaché and British military training team were at the hotel and were trying to mount a defense against this rebel attack. The remaining part of the Nigerian military training team was there, a small unit of about fifty people.

The American hotel manager called the State Department. The operations center patched him through to us on the ship so that he could describe what was going on. He said, "We've got eight hundred people in the basement of the hotel. We've got people that are wounded; we've got Nigerian soldiers that have been killed and their bodies have been brought down here. It's horribly hot. We have no water. Things are really, really bad and they're going to get worse. Please come back and help us." With the descriptions he was giving to us, Marine operations personnel started figuring out what they could do to come back in to help defend that hotel and prevent a huge loss of life. Because the defense would definitely require combat operations to have control of the perimeter of the hotel, the plans had to be cleared through the Pentagon. The first step though was to get authorization to turn the ship back around and start steaming back to Sierra Leone while all the plans were being finalized. The next step would be for Washington to approve a combat operation to go into the hotel area, bringing not just Marines with handheld weapons but to bring in armored personnel carriers and other combat equipment. On the first two days the Marines had brought in shooters that protected the perimeter of the hotel while helicopters were coming in to pull people out. But this time we needed to push the rebels back and have such a large presence that the rebels would not continue to fire on the hotel. That would allow us to get the people out of the hotel and get them to safety.

With all of this going on at the hotel, the remaining diplomatic missions who before had said, "We've seen coups before in West Africa, we've seen violence, it's not a problem. You Americans are being chickens about this whole thing in closing your embassy. In fact, by your closing it you're making it worse. Your actions mean that more people will want to leave rather than stay and try to sort this out here." And I believe there is some truth to those observations. In fact, those were the words I had used with Washington in my attempt to have a small stay behind presence at our Embassy.

When the rebels started hitting the hotel hard, everyone decided it was time to get out. So we steamed back toward Freetown. Planning continued through the night with how the Marines and our U.S. Army Special Forces team that was still on board were going approach this mission. All this time we were in contact with the hotel. Remarkably e the hotel manager had been able to drop a telephone line from his office on the first floor down to the basement. The dropline held and we were able to keep in touch with him all through the night. He vividly described the noise of the weapons, heat in the basement – the people that were wounded, the people that had died,

those passing out from the heat and the lack of water and lack of food – it was just heart-rending to hear what they were going through.

By three in the morning we had gotten approval for the plans to go back and take the hotel. By five o'clock, truly at the crack of dawn, Marines and Army personnel were getting into hovercraft, into helicopters and into harrier jets that were providing an "airborne cap" over Freetown. It was like out of the movies! When you got into that helicopter and as the sun was rising, you saw all hovercraft leaving the back of the ship and the big rooster tails of water coming up. The hovercraft were carrying armored personnel carriers and lots of firepower with them. Seeing the hovercraft hit the beach and Marines emerging from the armored personnel carriers and creating a concertina barrier that would provide safety on the beach. This time we weren't landing on the helicopter pads inside the hotel complex, we were landing on the road that was outside the complex. The road was next to the beach in an area they secured with the concertina wire. This would provide an area where we could identify anyone coming up to that area. If the person wasn't identified to our satisfaction then they were in big trouble.

Anyway, we told the people that would be coming out of the hotel – and hopefully the rebels were not going to be shooting directly at them – to come down onto the beach and turn left on the beach and come down toward the helicopters. Since I had sent all of our embassy staff onshore in Guinea, Ambassador Hirsch and I were the only ones left from the embassy onboard that ship. The captain of the ship had said that he didn't want to send more helicopters into Guinea to pick up more of our embassy staff; he just wanted to turn the ship around and head straight for Sierra Leone. So it ended up that I was the only State Department person there to identify passports and to make the decision on whom would be evacuated. The numbers of people we knew were in great, great danger were astronomical. Trying to sort out which of those should be evacuated, the prioritization of that whole thing was just a nightmare. By the time it was all over though, and the Navy relaxed a lot of its regulations on that particular day because they had seen what was going on. He pulled out the stops to let us have the opportunity to evacuate as many people as we felt appropriate. They no longer required that every passenger had to have a life vest and helmet when you boarded the helicopters. Previously passengers had to have this gear on and only fifty people could get on board the helicopter. It took time to stage all that. Well, this time there were no helmets and no life vest. It was getting them on and gets them seated – and even seating them on the floor the helicopter. And this time no one could take any luggage at all. Before, everyone could take one small suitcase with them; this time they said, "Nobody takes anything."

So you had people that were jettisoning suitcases because we couldn't get people out if everybody took one suitcase. So they were desperately rummaging through their suitcases to get their identity documents and the possessions that you really need to have when you're being evacuated. It was stressful enough just trying to cram stuff into one small little suitcase when you had a few minutes at home, but there on the beach when the word was, "You can't take that Samsonite luggage," all these poor people were going, "Oh, my god," and they'd strip down and get all this stuff and try to put it in a little bag and their suitcase would just be left there. Then when other embassies' officers were coming to the beach for this marathon evacuation, they ended up just leaving their cars on the beach. God knows whatever happened to the cars and luggage. I think they became rebel-mobiles very quickly after we left. The Egyptian ambassador

and his family arrived in a Mercedes – and there must've been 30 people in that Mercedes – I have never seen so many people come out of a car in my life. *[laughs]* And then of course we were putting on board the Nigerians that had been wounded and a British military officer who had been wounded in the shootout that day. It was a real mess. But by the end of the day we ended up getting 1,400 people out.

Q: Good God.

WRIGHT: "Good God" is right. The captain of the ship was great! Before we went ashore I said, "Give me an idea – what is the maximum that we can put on the ship before we sink this thing?" and he said, "You won't ever sink it but the problem is the support facilities," the toilets, the food and all that stuff. And he said, "1,100 at the most, but just keep in touch with me minute by minute and tell me what you're seeing and what we've got to do and we'll do what we have to." It ended up we brought out 1,400 people in a period of about six hours. And then the poor little embassy in Guinea, and the other embassies in Guinea, who thought that they had seen the worst the world could ever throw at them with the nine hundred the first day and the three hundred the second day, and then all of a sudden we call them to say, "You ain't seen nothing yet." *[laughs]*

Later, I came in for some criticism by various folks in Washington because I had authorized such a great number of people to be evacuated to Guinea. I've learned since that in other operations whoever had been in charge had been very strict about only Americans being evacuated and they had come in for worldwide criticism for not helping more people in danger. But I felt very comfortable with doing what I felt I needed to do. I wanted to do the right thing, something that one day, or one year or five years later I would be proud of and not having second thoughts. I know taking all those people out was definitely the right thing to do. Bureaucratically it was certainly very complicated later on but we saved a lot of lives doing it.

Q: What happened in Sierra Leone after you all left? Did you find out? What did the rebel forces do?

WRIGHT: Well, the RUF tore up the city pretty badly. They really wrecked havoc on it and the atrocities that they committed on the civilian population in Freetown were horrible. Subsequently hundreds of thousands more left Freetown and went into Guinea and Liberia. There were over a million and a quarter people that were living in Freetown to start with and the population went down to about – I think they were estimating maybe 800,000. The refugee camps in Liberia and Guinea were huge from that exodus.

One of the most tragic aspects of the evacuation was leaving behind your Foreign Service National (FSN) force. You leave and you've left your good, loyal employees behind. During the first day some of the FSNs asked if they could be evacuated with us. I put that request to Washington and they said the FSNs could not to the United States, but could be evacuated as far as Guinea. But what they in Guinea, how the survive; they would have to figure out what. Washington's recommendation was that they stay in Sierra Leone. The USG would continue to pay them in Sierra Leone – but they should stay in Sierra Leone. We had about twenty-five FSNs who decided that they would go to Guinea with us on the ship. Later on we had another twenty-five that made their own way out to Conakry. We had to fight hard to keep them on the payroll in

Guinea. We ended up having these employees work with the embassy in Conakry. For those that stayed behind in Freetown, trying to figure out a mechanism to get them paid, of actually getting money in their hands, was really, really complicated.

We ended up using Lebanese merchants who stayed in Freetown. They somehow ride out all the emergencies. They've got their connections with everybody. So we would transfer money to a Lebanese bank account in London and then the Lebanese merchant in Sierra Leone would provide Sierra Leonean money to our embassy staff. For the ten months we were out of Sierra Leone, our staff was paid. They were so loyal and it wasn't just because of the money. They were loyal, good people who all of our compounds. They were never looted any possession. During the time they packed up fifteen families' household goods. Unbeknownst to the rebels as to what was going on, they packed up all the families' possessions, crated them up, and at a certain point, about six months afterwards they called us in Washington and said, "We think we have figured out a way that we can get all the household goods out of Sierra Leone. We think we can broker some deals with rebels on the highway all the way to Guinea. If you will authorize us to try it, we'll get it done. And we'll drive out all the four-wheel drive vehicles and we'll take all the pets out to Guinea." Of the seven pets that had been left behind, only one of them had unfortunately died. But six pets would be coming out on this convoy.

By this time our American embassy staff had been broken up and sent on other assignments. We had made the assessment two months after leaving Sierra Leone that there was no way that we were going to be going back into Sierra Leone quickly. Ambassador Hirsch and I thought our staff should get other assignments and get on with their lives. We contacted our former staff members who were then all over the world to say, "The FSNs think they can get our household goods out of Sierra Leone. Do you want to authorize them to try it? If you don't want your stuff on the convoy we'll leave it packed up in the residence. But this is your one opportunity to get your possession until things settle down in Sierra Leone so that we can reopen the embassy. We just don't know when that'll be." So everybody said, "Yes, let's give it a shot," and so those FSNs, those brave, courageous folks, got some tractor trailer trucks and moved our household goods. Thirty-eight checkpoints they had to go through in Sierra Leone and in Guinea, paying off the rebels at the checkpoints all the way along. They got everything into Guinea without incident. From all of the reports we got back from our folks, 99.9 percent of the stuff was there. There was virtually nothing missing and virtually no damage other than one crate that apparently got water in it somewhere. But it was just a remarkable, remarkable performance by our FSNs.

Q: You were just saying that what happened was eventually the Nigerians did what?

WRIGHT: A West African security force called ECOMOG was formed of primarily Nigerian army personnel. They came back into Sierra Leone and beat back the rebels in March and April of 1998. In May of '98 Ambassador Hirsch and I reopened the embassy and started bringing in personnel. I left for a new assignment in August of '98. The embassy then closed again in December of '98 because of more trouble with rebels coming back into Freetown. It's been closed two other times since.

LEON WEINTRAUB
Deputy Director, West African Affairs
Washington, DC (2000-2002)

Mr. Weintraub was born and raised in New York City, educated at Hunter College, Brooklyn College and the Universities of Pittsburgh and Wisconsin. After service in Liberia with the Peace Corps he entered government service, first with the Navy Department and then with the State Department Foreign Service. His service in Washington and abroad involved him with a variety of countries and issues including African Affairs, International Organizations, Narcotics and Peace-Keeping operations in Africa. His foreign posts were Bogotá, Tel Aviv, Lagos, Quito and Geneva. Mr. Weintraub was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005.

Q: Well, you were in AF/W from when to when?

WEINTRAUB: Well, earlier I first had served at the embassy in Lagos from 1982 to 1984. Then I had been a country desk officer for Nigeria from ’90 to ’92 so now this was a little bit of a homecoming eight years later to come back as the deputy office director.

Q: Who was the assistant secretary for African affairs when you got there?

WEINTRAUB: When I got there it was kind of near the end of the Clinton, second Clinton administration. The assistant secretary at that time was Susan Rice, and she was replaced after the next presidential election in 2000 by Walter Kansteiner.

Q: Alright. Well, in the first place, how did you find the African bureau? Had it changed? New administration coming in, was there much impact there or not?

WEINTRAUB: Well no, I don’t think so. I think, to be quite frank, the way I would interpret it, most of the issues in the Africa bureau, particularly in AF/W and AF/C as well, I think there are few issues that rise to the attention of the secretary, much less the White House. So I think for the most part the African specialists, and that includes a political appointee if there is one as the assistant secretary of African affairs, can fairly much chart the course as they see fit, as long as obviously it stays within well defined parameters established by the president and the secretary. But there’s just -- I think it’s just so rare that any issues in the region do rise to the highest levels that -- so I think as a matter of fact I don’t think I saw that much difference in AF/W, how Nigeria was handled in the year 2000 as it was when I was a desk officer eight years earlier. That country is always the 800 pound gorilla in the region, so to speak. It’s got the population, it’s got the land, it’s got the petroleum wealth, and it far outweighs the influence of any of the countries or most of the countries in the region put together, as a matter of fact. So that was unchanged also.

Q: How long were you there?

WEINTRAUB: I was there for two years.

Q: Two years.

WEINTRAUB: It was a two year Washington tour.

Q: What- well, let's talk about Nigeria first. What was the situation there and what were our concerns?

WEINTRAUB: Well, since the time I had served as a desk officer and again more recently, Nigeria had once again made a transition from military rule to civilian rule. The Babangida government was in power when I was there as a desk officer but now it was following the elections of '99, and the current leader of Nigeria was, and still is, President Obasanjo. He had been recently elected, so Nigeria was then as now under a democratically elected government. If anything, though, corruption and the scams had gotten worse, the allegations of drug smuggling had gotten worse. At the same time, we were heavily involved with Nigeria and other members of the regional or I should say the sub-regional organization known as ECOWAS, the Economic Community of West African States, E-C-O-W-A-S.

We were very eager for the Nigerian military, with others in ECOWAS, to play a stabilizing role in Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Liberian civil war had somehow ground itself down, ground itself to a halt. The country was not stable by any means, but for the most part there was a government headed by Mr. Taylor, following a contested election-

Q: This is Charles Taylor.

WEINTRAUB: Right. This is Charles Taylor. We had serious problems with the elections, but he was the president. At the same time, now there was a new undercurrent of rebels advancing in the country and Sierra Leone was in awful shape, terrible shape. The so-called RUF, R-U-F, Revolutionary United Front -- these were the people who had a reputation for hacking off the arms, limbs, legs, feet of children, of opponents in Sierra Leone, many of the fighters being so-called "child soldiers," probably under the influence of drugs. Who knows what they were involved in in order to get their resources to purchase arms, whether it was smuggling of drugs, or smuggling of diamonds, but Sierra Leone was in awful shape, terrible shape; Liberia was not much better. There was a government in place in Sierra Leone, but under challenge by a revolutionary movement and we were trying to get the Ghanaians, the Nigerians, Senegalese, perhaps Malians, to get their troops trained to serve under a peacekeeping force in the region. So we were very heavily involved in a military way.

As a result, in AF/W, we had something we had not had earlier, something I didn't remember from when I was a desk officer. We had a military adviser in the bureau, a U.S. military officer assigned to State Department as a liaison because we had a lot of military training programs, military "supply and equip" or "train and equip" programs in a number of countries in the region. So we were heavily involved with Nigeria. We were building training facilities in Nigeria, not bases for our military personnel, but for Nigerian and perhaps other ECOWAS forces. Most of the training was done by contractors, which typically meant the use of retired officers out of the military for a few years. This was a big effort; we were spending a lot of money, and it was

subject to all the typical hassles of working with the Nigerians in that region -- making sure our supplies were getting out of customs, that the subcontractors in Nigeria were performing the work up to specs, that the land to be used for training facilities had been appropriately acquired from village authorities or tribal governments or local governments. And as I probably mentioned earlier, things in Nigeria are never easy. There's always a suspicion someone's always taking you. There's always a suspicion that there's a lot of money moving around in ways that we didn't want it to be moving. It's hard to put your finger on these thoughts or suspicions, but given that environment it's tough.

Q: Well were you seeing, I mean, Nigeria did have this oil wealth that was coming.

WEINTRAUB: And it still does.

Q: Did you see much affect on the infrastructure for the people of Nigeria?

WEINTRAUB: Surprisingly much less than one would have thought. The conventional wisdom about Nigeria -- the corruption, and the public works that should have been done with all the petroleum wealth -- the conventional wisdom about Nigeria often compared it to another country in similar conditions, Indonesia, also a member of OPEC, another major oil producer. Indonesia is also very heavily populated and also pretty much regarded as rife with corruption. And I had heard from some people that the major difference was that in Indonesia, due to a variety of corrupt practices, prices were maybe inflated by 50 or 60 percent on all public work projects for bridges and roads and public communications facilities; the price was inflated but the work got done. It got done but it got done in a corrupt manner at absurd prices and a lot of people skimmed off the top. In Nigeria, by contrast, the prices were similarly inflated but the work just never got done. Projects were started, the contractors were advanced the money, maybe they worked for a month or two and then suddenly you couldn't find them anymore. And this was typically the story of how I saw a lot of the petroleum wealth evaporating; either that or just going out of the country. When I had been an officer at the embassy in Lagos in the middle '80s and there was a coup, for the first eight months or so after the coup the biggest thing was to find all the money in the Swiss and the London bank accounts that the previous politicians had smuggled away there. So one did not hear a great many success stories about Lagos finally having a good road system, or a drinking water system, or a sewer system, or electrical grid, or whatever it was. The stories just went on and on much as they have gone on before.

Q: Well had they moved the capital yet?

WEINTRAUB: Yes, shortly before I came to AF/W, the capital -- this was a very long-term project -- finally had moved from Lagos on the coast, the original colonial capital, to Abuja, roughly in the central location of the country. The Nigerians had built a new and "artificial" capital much as a Brasilia was built, and much as Washington, D.C., in fact, was originally built. But even as an embassy officer in Lagos in the middle '80s, this already was a plan underway, but it had taken 15 years, perhaps, until it came to fruition. The embassy where I had served had become the consulate in Lagos. It was still a large installation, still a large facility, because in fact the greatest share of the commercial life of the country was still there. As for Abuja, at first the embassy sent people up for long weekends and then gradually more and more people stayed

for longer periods of time. It took a while for schools to be built. It took a while for housing to be built. But, yes, at this time Abuja was becoming a capital in fact as well as in name.

Q: Was there any move to almost say the corruption is so bad in Nigeria on these projects that we're going almost to write it off and say what's the point?

WEINTRAUB: Well, one important thing to recall is that Nigeria had the manpower, had the military strength, and they had earlier helped out at the height of the Liberian civil war. At the same time, however, their troops also left that country a little bit under a cloud, amidst allegations of stealing everything that wasn't nailed down, of abusing people in Liberia when they came as peacekeepers in that country's civil war. So everybody was aware this was the bargain you got. But the Nigerians, a country of over 100 million people -- there's no doubt about it -- had the numbers of troops that were required. They certainly were not the most disciplined of military forces, not the best trained, not the best equipped -- so when we sent them into Sierra Leone, we had to equip and train these people. When combined with others from Ghana, from Senegal, this was the force that was used, although at a certain time the British eventually sent their own force into Sierra Leone when we were there.

There had been various incidents of UN peacekeepers being kidnapped and held by the rebels and at one point some of those abducted were British and the British figured they'd had enough of this. So they sent their own troops into Sierra Leone, not under a UN mandate, not under an OAU mandate, not under an ECOWAS mandate, but their own troops under orders from London, and they got their fellows out. But they had a restricted kind of mandate, of course, and they were not to engage in broader peacekeeping efforts. But yes, there was- everybody knew what the Nigerians were, what the situation was like -- but, you know, these were the resources that we had available. Obviously there was never any consideration of the U.S. sending in our own troops. As it is after much pleading and cajoling with the Pentagon, I think we were able to get I don't think any more than a half dozen, active duty troops in as advisors in the Sierra Leone ministry of defense, helping them to put together some improved planning and operational procedures. But we weren't going to put in the kind of manpower that was really needed, and nobody else was either. I don't think the Nigerians were overly eager to do it either, but they recognized that the instability was only going to get worse in the region. They assumed a certain amount of responsibility, but they also had no doubt that it was to handled by the U.S. in terms of a financial assistance package that would include training and other material that we handed out. In those terms, things worked out well for them. But it was always a challenge, always a challenge to work with the Nigerians.

Q: But now, when you were there, how were, well in the first place, in peacekeeping troops, how about the Ghanaian troops and the troops from Ghana and from Senegal, because I think of those two as having quite respectable military.

WEINTRAUB: Yes, I believe they were somewhat better prepared than the Nigerians, more disciplined and more trained, but still we had to equip them, and from what I understand they performed somewhat better on the job. But they were considerably smaller in quantity than the Nigerians and it was always nice to hear, always nice to hear that some of the ECOWAS troop contingents were doing well. As a matter of fact, I'm just reading a book that Canadian General

Romeo Dallaire wrote about his experience as head of the UN peacekeeping force in Rwanda in 1994 and he had very high regard for Ghanaian peacekeeping troops that were there. His book kind of slams some of the others -- I think the Bangladeshis don't come out too well, but he had high regard for the Ghanaian troops in Rwanda. So I think that, yes, I think that they did well. I know in setting up the training program for West African troops, which we had also set up in Senegal, in Mali, and in Niger, the Nigerians always had more problems: Which was the land to be used for the training facility? What was the United States going to do and pay for? What was the Nigerian contribution going to be? You know, there was always debate on what was the U.S. going to provide and what was the local government going to provide. And these negotiations started as force agreements, negotiations on what the host government would provide, and they were always much more involved and protracted with the Nigerians. I remember the negotiations with the Senegalese and the Ghanaians were always wrapped up earlier than the ones with the Nigerians.

Q: How did we view the president of Nigeria at the time you were there?

WEINTRAUB: Well, I guess there were two schools of thought. One was that- (end side one, tape seven)

One view was that he was no different than any other. He said the right words but he lived off corruption as much as anyone else. And the other view saw him, in fact, as someone who -- given serious constraints on how much he could do -- nevertheless was sincerely a committed individual who wanted to bring about democratization and clean government to Nigeria, at least by Nigerian standards. This was the man who had earlier assumed the power of military leader of Nigeria in the '70s after one of the other military leaders was assassinated, Murtala Mohammad. And in the late '70s he voluntarily stepped down. I mean, this was after Nigeria had had a military government for over a decade. In the late '70s he voluntarily stepped down, and there was an election in '79. He retired to his farm in order to be a chicken farmer. And said okay, I'm out of politics now. This was something practically unheard of anywhere in the third world where there had been a military coup.

Well, that second republic lasted from 1979 to 1983. Another military government took over on December 31, 1983, following elections in August that year that were heavily criticized for being unfair if not downright fraudulent. That military regime, in one form or another, lasted to the late 1990s. Its various leaders – both the military leaders themselves and the former elected officials who worked with them during that period -- were seen by many as so tainted by allegations of corruption that nobody could trust them or wanted to trust them. Obasanjo, by contrast, during his time out of office, the '80s and '90s, had gathered a reputation as somewhat of an elder statesman, one of the few African leaders who stepped down -- even though he in fact had been a military leader, nevertheless he stepped down voluntarily. So he had gathered about himself an aura of the elder statesman. He had served on a number of committees for the United Nations, been an envoy or two for the secretary general of the United Nations. He had been invited to attend meetings with Jimmy Carter, and other NGOs. He had a persona as one of the wise men of the continent and the elder statesman, as I said. So he had a nice, kind of a clean reputation going into those elections in 1999. So I kind saw him as operating in a tough environment but he himself wanted to do the right thing; given the environment of Nigeria he was the best of the lot,

he was the best that we could hope for the future of Nigeria.

Q: Well we had had two running sores in your part of the world. You mentioned before, Liberia and Sierra Leone. What was your involvement, what was happening there?

WEINTRAUB: Well, actually I was fairly heavily involved. There was a term we used in the office, the countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and a little bit of Cote d'Ivoire; they were called the "arc of crisis," or the countries in crisis, kind of a subdivision of AF/W, if you will. And actually in fact that was my major mandate within the office -- not so much Nigeria, Niger, and other countries in the region, but the focus on that mess there, because there were hundreds of thousands of refugees from both Liberia and Sierra Leone, first in each other's country, but also in Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire. And these are countries that could barely feed themselves, much less take care of scores if not hundreds of thousands of refugees. Obviously there was a lot of help, material resources from the UN High Commission for Refugees. But in those kind of environments, when the refugees might be in a camp, you have an environment where strangers in your country, refugee unfortunates who have been ejected from their own country or fled from their own country, are housed in a camp and sheltered and fed by an international aid organization while you're in a village just down the road and you have to struggle just to feed your family.

I'm talking about some kind of a traditional agricultural system. This does not exactly engender feelings of hospitality toward these poor refugees, so there was a degree of instability, and not exactly the most welcoming environment for these refugees. Obviously, they would have preferred to have been back in their own country, but their own countries were going through horrific civil wars. So we had active refugee programs, with U.S. embassy refugee officers stationed in the area, and we had a program to handle – where some of these people could be accepted into the United States. We also had to deal with people who had fled the fighting. We had large numbers of Liberians in Sierra Leone, Sierra Leoneans who were in the United States, people all mixed up everywhere. Some of them could apply for asylum if they ever got to the United States, and every year, I think it was, or every two years, their status had to be reviewed. That inevitably meant there was a lobbying group in Washington on their behalf, as the majority of these people wanted to stay in the United States. In this way, this fighting in that area also became a domestic issue in the United States, as well as a local problem where the conflict was located. That entire area was very unstable.

With the Liberians, we would often speak with elements in the U.S. of the rebel movement that was trying to overthrow Charles Taylor, this so-called LURD, L-U-R-D, Liberians United for Reconstruction and Development. This was an underground movement, and there were some Liberians in the United States who alleged that they were the official representatives of the LURD. They wanted to open a dialogue with us, and they would come in to the Department to speak to us. We would listen to them and hear what they had to say, but we certainly didn't use them as a conduit to get messages to anyone in the field. We worked through our ambassador in Monrovia or Freetown, as might be appropriate. Sometimes those ambassadors fielded phone calls from people alleging to be members or leaders of the LURD in the field; it was hard to know -- sometimes they were, sometimes they weren't. So there was a lot going on, it was a real hornet's nest of confusion in both Monrovia and in Freetown. I mean, in either country you

couldn't go much out of town, the country was unstable to such a degree. The LURD was trying to press further and further into Monrovia, just as Charles Taylor had done in the early '90s when he eventually overthrew that government. There was a government in Sierra Leone, but they didn't have control over a lot of the country.

We were also trying to set up a new diamond trading regime to eliminate the smuggling of diamonds; apparently there was a lot of intelligence that diamonds were being smuggled out of Sierra Leone, used for arms and in fact maybe even used to fund some of the terrorism in the Middle East. So it was high profile activity. We worked a lot with countries like Belgium, where you have a big diamond market in Antwerp, to try and develop some kind of a diamond trading regime. The aim of the new regime would be to create a market where the only diamonds from Sierra Leone that the Antwerp diamond exchange would accept would be those that came through the official government diamond exchange, in order to eliminate the illicit trade in diamonds. Supposedly Charles Taylor, in order to fund his activities —he obviously didn't have much of a tax base in the country -- was granting concessions to logging companies, allowing them to just destroy a lot of old growth lumber in Liberia and ship it out. Taylor allegedly got a percentage of everything, and apparently this was leading to massive erosion and depletion of resources; there was no replanting, it was kind of a clear cutting of forest.

So we were also trying to work with NGOs, a lot of the environmental NGOS, conservationist NGOs, to try and document who was involved. Taylor was also suspected of being involved in illicit diamond trading. Also, Liberia had a large shipping industry; Liberia for many years was known as a flag of convenience for the shipping industry and apparently we felt that Taylor also was milking that legitimate business in a way that was inappropriate to get resources. So we were trying to develop some kind of regime to get the Liberian government to agree to monitor its income from the shipping industry, from the licensing and shipping industry. So there were a lot of things going on, and all the while we were paying attention to the growing numbers of refugees in Guinea, in Cote d'Ivoire. Those governments had a tough job of it to handle those people.

Q: Well during the time you were there, this is 2000 to 2002, was there any evacuation of our embassy?

WEINTRAUB: No, that had been done several times in the past, but not during the period I was in that office during those two years.

Q: I know, I mean, this went on so-

WEINTRAUB: Episodically throughout the '90s it had happened in both of the embassies. In Monrovia, Liberia, and Freetown, Sierra Leone, both of those posts had been evacuated, from Liberia to Sierra Leone, Sierra Leone to Liberia, both of them to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire or to Dakar Senegal, or to Conakry, Guinea. Throughout the '90s there were several episodes of that nature, but both of them, of course, were high security posts, with no dependents.

Q: Did we sort of keep a helicopter carrier and a Marine contingent close by or?

WEINTRAUB: Oh sure, for a time and on an intermittent basis, but that was always a struggle. This was, I mean, particularly after September 11, 2001. This was not a high profile area for the military. I mean, it was my allegation that when a lot of this mess first occurred in the early '90s, before Charles Taylor consolidated his rule, if we would have had a helicopter carrier off the coast there, we could have put down that civil war in no time. But the U.S. government had decided not to intervene, and to take a hands-off policy. We did have, at one point, when it was convenient for the military, we had a unit there, a military unit just over the horizon, so to speak. The Liberians knew it was there, I guess occasionally helicopters would be seen; occasionally they might have brought in some supplies for the embassy. But this was - and obviously it was available for evacuation if need be. But it wasn't used for that purpose on our watch when I was there.

Q: How about dealing with Charles Taylor? I think he was under indictment in the United States, wasn't he? I mean, this was-

WEINTRAUB: He'd been an escaped felon from the United States, I think in the state of Massachusetts. The conviction was for some kind of embezzlement, I'm not sure what it was, but he was an escaped criminal. There was an indictment out for him, so obviously he would never have received an invitation from any level of government in the United States. As a matter of fact, I really wanted to get a trip back to Liberia to see a place where I served in the Peace Corps so many years earlier. But our bilateral relations were such that we weren't interested in sending a visitor even at the level I was to Liberia.

Q: Was there a feeling that if the forces against Taylor succeeded this would be better or were they all-

WEINTRAUB: That's a good point, that's a good point you raise. You know, some people were saying, after Taylor, then what? What do you replace that guy with? I mean, there was a lot of consideration given to this train of thought. I know there were some high profile visits, I think shortly before I came into the office, of Reverend Jackson -

Q: Jesse Jackson.

WEINTRAUB: Jesse Jackson had gone to Liberia. He paid a visit to the Liberians. Supposedly we were engaged in the negotiations that eventually cleared the way for the elections that Charles Taylor apparently fraudulently won. So there was kind of a kind of a sour feeling in the building that he was a rotten apple; perhaps in inadvertent ways we may have even contributed to his being there. We just didn't want to be involved - so it was just a negative approach to do anything with Charles Taylor. At the same time, we could not say with any confidence that there was any legitimate movement that would have been prepared to replace him. So as far as I know we certainly didn't do anything behind the scenes to bring about his downfall from government. But, you know, it did happen eventually, shortly after I left, and he fled to his current exile in Nigeria. So, it wasn't just for the use of terminology that the area was called the arc of crisis. Both Liberia and Sierra Leone were in a constant state of disruption.

Q: Well, what about Cote d'Ivoire while you were onboard?

WEINTRAUB: Well, when I was onboard it was still reasonably stable. The founding president, Felix Houphouet-Boigny, had died a number of years ago; there were some problems with the elected government in power which was strongly favored by a different ethnic group than the Houphouet-Boigny government had been composed of for many years. Through no fault of its own, and also owing to the fact that there had been an electoral commission that we felt did not do a proper job -- of vetting candidates for election, of deciding who would be allowed to vote and who would not be allowed to vote -- the election that resulted in the government of President Gbagbo coming into power was in fact an uncontestedly flawed election. But it wasn't Gbagbo's fault, he didn't set the rules. It wasn't like he gerrymandered anything or he had his own electoral commission; it was a separate body before him that did that. But since it was obviously not considered to be a free and fair election, we were restricted by the amount of assistance we could offer them and what we could do with that government. Nevertheless he was governing in a reasonably democratic fashion. But those who had lost that election were obviously in no mood to be conciliatory because they felt they had been frozen out unfairly, as in fact they had been. So it was not the most stable of situations.

At this time, through this period, we had announced this new initiative, the African Growth and Opportunity Act, or AGOA, and we hoped the government of Cote d'Ivoire would be able to take advantage of it. It would allow the United States to open our markets, to get a lot of imports from Cote d'Ivoire -- typically in the light manufacturing area, in textiles and everything of this nature. So, as a matter of fact, in January of 2002, I was a member of a fairly good-sized delegation that went to Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire for three to four days. We had the African specialist from the office of USTR, the U.S. Trade Representative. We had our deputy assistant secretary for African Affairs from the State Department=. We had a senior official from the Department of Commerce, some other official from the Department of Labor. We also had people from the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor. We had a sizeable group of about eight people, I guess, and we were trying to see if we could nudge the Ivorians, if you will, over the hump, over the last of the remaining barriers that were keeping them from the potential gains available under AGOA. These barriers, or conditions, concerned, among other things, free operations of labor unions, what kind of a code they had in encouraging fair investor conditions, would the legal system be respected in case of there were breaches of contract or commercial disputes, and so on.

So this delegation went there in January 2002, and things were on track, but obviously this entire process was subject to negotiations, and eventual approval by the Senate, and the parliament in Cote d'Ivoire. I left that office in the summer of 2002, and things were somewhat on track, but I think it was in October or maybe November of that year, when a strong rebel movement emerged and I believe the country is still somewhat divided along a roughly horizontal line running roughly halfway through the country. The government itself was in control of the southern half of the country, where the government and population were predominantly Christian or pagan/ animists and the northern half was led by a predominantly Muslim movement. This was not exclusively so, but these two camps did have those general characteristics for the most part. And that's been going off and on since -- there seems to be skirmishes every so often. I don't follow it actively, but every once in awhile something's in the newspaper about that. And so it's kind of a rough stalemate there. And that country had been for many years the stability, the anchor of

stability in the region. For many years there had been large French investments in Cote d'Ivoire. There had not been a coup in Cote d'Ivoire all through the period of independence from 1960, while there had been coups in Ghana, in Nigeria, in Liberia, in Sierra Leone, in Guinea, in other countries, in Mali.

Q: Lots of French there.

WEINTRAUB: Yes, there were lots of French living there, many of them providing good expertise. In fact, they were probably getting fairly high subsidies from the French government to support -- probably underwrite -- the national budgets in support of the school system, the military; there were French armed forces stationed in several of the countries there. But even that system broke down eventually. You know, it was very unfortunate; this was our one, so to speak, anchor of stability. Just when Liberia or Sierra Leone are emerging, if you will, from their long nightmare of civil war, then we've got one starting in Cote d'Ivoire but at least it wasn't at the same time in Cote d'Ivoire as it was in Nigeria or somewhere else. So that was really sad and unfortunate.

Q: Well of your area, and maybe somebody else was more involved, but I take it Senegal was, again, a relatively peaceful place.

WEINTRAUB: Relatively stable. There had been a peaceful transfer of power. The founding president, Leopold Senghor, had eventually stepped down. There had been competitive elections and Senegal, I think, was just about the only country in the region where there had been a peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another. This hadn't happened for all the off-and-on elections in Nigeria; there'd never been a time when the party in power stepped down and a different political party took over. That had yet to happen in Nigeria; it still hasn't happened. In Senegal, Leopold Senghor was re-elected again the last time. But Senegal did have a peaceful change of power and they were contributing to the military forces that were being used in Sierra Leone or in Liberia.

In Mali, it was the same thing. The president of Mali at the time, I think, was also president of the Organization of African Unity. He had a visit to the White House, as his country was considered a regional anchor of stability, a democratically elected government, again after military rule. He had started to liberalize the economy, to open up free markets, and had taken some steps to loosen government control over the economy. So Mali, for awhile, was definitely in our good graces; I think it still is.

Niger was just struggling. It had a civilian elected government but not much in the way of resources at all. Not much.

Q: Chad was sort of in the same?

WEINTRAUB: Well, Chad again was AF/C, Central Africa.

Q: Oh, I see.

WEINTRAUB: Benin and Togo, also part of AF/W, were doing okay, but were kind of insignificant in the region, given their small size, population, and lack of significant resources. Burkina Faso, what used to be called Upper Volta -- we were fairly certain was in bed with Mr. Taylor. And in fact, it may have supported the movement which eventually broke out in Cote d'Ivoire. We had our suspicions for many years about the government in Burkina Faso. And then there was the country of Mauritania, kind of a strange addition to the AF/W region.

Q: Yes, I would think it would go to North Africa.

WEINTRAUB: It sits well-

Q: Basically more, at least the rulers are-

WEINTRAUB: It is definitely more Arab, yes. And, in fact, like a number of other countries, it is called the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. But I guess the Africa Bureau wanted to hold on to as much as they could rather than give it up to the Near East Bureau.

Q: So it could have been one of these tribal battles.

WEINTRAUB: Yes. In fact, the southern half of the country is predominantly black African but I guess the elite class has long been Arab. Most of the people are Muslims, in fact. And Mauritania has been somewhat of an oddity in that at one point, I'm not sure just when, but at one point they broke the Arab embargo and recognized Israel. So this was considered a feather in their cap and the U.S. liked that. So they would get a little higher profile on the Hill when it come time to give them an aid budget, and they might get a little more resources than they might otherwise get. And they didn't have a knee jerk reaction to follow the Arab line and the Third World line on a number of issues. But I think in the last year they suffered a military coup as well. But all told, not a great deal happens in these countries that affects you personally or that we need to be involved about. But they each have an American ambassador that needs to be tended to and needs to think that the sun rises and sets on his or her embassy and country.

There were some refugee crises – actually, a number of various refugee crises with refugees escaping ships. I remember there was one where there was a refugee ship in waters off the West African coast; no one knew where it was for awhile. And then finally it was found. So I mean, there was more than enough to keep us busy considering what was going on elsewhere in South Africa, in Zaire, the aftermath of Rwanda, Angola and Mozambique, the civil war in southern Sudan, the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. I mean, we didn't have a lot of good news for the assistant secretary of state.

Q: Well then, you left that pleasure spot and where did you go? This would be your last story.

WEINTRAUB: Well, I have to admit, for those of us who have served in Africa, we think of ourselves as a special group. You know, it takes something to serve there. As much as I enjoyed working with the people in the region, the embassies of the region, I think the Africa bureau has a lot of people who do a lot of assignments in Africa. But, from one perspective, it got to be discouraging because there was hardly ever any good news coming out. So as much as I thought

about upping for another tour, another assignment, and really getting a solid lock on what was happening, it just was very discouraging. So looking around then, and as you know, as people are bidding for their assignments, the bureaus of course are looking for people to fill assignments, someone had advised me about an opening of something I wouldn't have considered otherwise in the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, what people affectionately refer to as "drugs and thugs," the INL Bureau.

This was in the year 2002. Eight or nine months after 9/11, we had obviously gone into Afghanistan not much later after that -- I forget exactly when we went in, October maybe, and by this time we had brought about a certain amount of stability, we had an interim government in Afghanistan at the time under Mr. Karzai. And we were preparing to ramp up significantly the resources against drugs in Afghanistan. Afghanistan had been a traditional supplier of poppy, opium poppy for opium for heroin; most of it in fact had supplied the markets of Europe but it's a fungible kind of a commodity, so whatever wasn't used in Europe could come here. I think most of our heroin came from the Golden Triangle.

THOMAS N. HULL III
Ambassador
Sierra Leone (2004-2007)

Ambassador Hull was born in New York and raised in Massachusetts. He was educated at Dickenson College and Columbia University. After service in the Peace Corps in Sierra Leone, Mr. Hull joined the United States Information Service Foreign Service, serving both in Washington, DC and abroad. His foreign posts include Kinshasa, Brazzaville, Pretoria, Ouagadougou, Mogadishu, Prague, Lagos and Addis Ababa, where he was Deputy Chief of Mission. In 2004 he was named United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone, where he served until 2007. Ambassador Hull was interviewed by Daniel F. Whitman in 2010.

Q: However, you became Ambassador.

HULL: I did become an Ambassador and that was partly because of strong support from Ambassador Nagy. I was never very much of a self promoter and being from USIA, it was always seen as being unseemly in USIA to go out begging for jobs the way our State Department colleagues had shamelessly done in our view. So it wasn't the sort of thing I would do. When I was the Director of Africa for USIA, if a USIA officer came to me to plead his case for a position in Africa the instinctive reaction in my mind would be what is wrong with this person that he cannot let the personnel process take its course and would emerge as the best candidate. But there were some USIA officers like that who I could name but won't name at the moment. But nevertheless in general in the State Department you were expected to be a self promoter. You were expected to go out and lobby on your own behalf for jobs, which was the death knell of getting an assignment USIA, but it was the path to take in the State Department.

So you know, I had been told that I had been strongly recommended to the Assistant Secretary of

State at the time, Kansteiner, for an ambassadorship. I had been considered before on panels but I think mostly as a token candidate because AF had other candidates they wanted for jobs. But it was clear that my chances would be very good for an ambassadorship. Finally when it was getting close to decision time, I decided that I would bite the bullet, but rather than be so presumptuous as to call the Assistant Secretary of State, I just sent him an E-Mail saying that I hope I am not being too presumptuous, but I have all these qualifications and experience in Africa, and I would really like to be a chief of mission, and by the way I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Sierra Leone, and I thrive on tough assignments, so I would appreciate having the toughest assignment you can give me. The very next day he came back and said, "Well how would you like to be Ambassador to Sierra Leone?" which is what I was angling for anyway even though I could have had something else.

Q: I see.

HULL: I didn't specify but I said, it would be presumptuous of me to suggest a specific country, but I would welcome a tough assignment.

Q: Ah very artful.

HULL: I assumed that if he were going to give me something, he would give me Sierra Leone where I had made clear I had experience. Then shortly thereafter he came out to Ethiopia and Ambassador Nagy assigned me to escort Kansteiner around the country. We hit it off.

Q: I am sorry you were still what at that time?

HULL: DCM. Nagy was still there.

So before it had actually been paneled, but he had indicated informally that I would be his candidate for Sierra Leone. When I traveled with him, he saw the way I interacted with my staff. Rather than steal the thunder of, for example, the AID people, I rather stood in the background and let the other people do what they do and take credit for what they do. I think that sat very well with him and cemented his support. Then there was just the matter of going through the process, because it was not the sort of situation where somebody else might be trying to stab me in the back and maneuver in to get the Sierra Leone assignment.

Q: Right. It wasn't France after all.

HULL: Also Larry Andre who had been, I guess, regional environmental officer in Addis Ababa had become DCM in Freetown with my strong recommendation to Ambassador Chavez. So I had some communication. I couldn't, of course, say I am going to be the next Ambassador to Sierra Leone, but I was able to strike up some dialogue with the Embassy in Freetown and get a sense of what was going on there, which I appreciated. But of course until the White House actually announces that you are going to be the candidate, you have to pretend you know nothing.

Q: Kansteiner, I think people remember him as a real gentleman, as a person who was not a

screamer, and was sensitive to staff morale.

HULL: I think he looks very good in comparison to some other Assistant Secretaries whom we have had. He was seen as a bit narrow. Of course he was appointed by a Republican administration. Not to say that made him narrow but that he had his well-defined priorities, private sector development, environmental protection.

Q: He was a businessman.

HULL: He was a businessman. He had four or five priorities, and that was where the focus was, probably less diffuse than it was under some other Assistant Secretaries of State. So you may or may not have agreed with his precise priorities, but remember this is also the era when the Millennium Challenge Corporation was being created, PEPFAR was being created. All these things were coming out of the administration. AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act), which had been created before the administration really, but was a priority adopted by the administration.

Q: Was he a hard charger?

HULL: Well, I did not work that closely with him. I believe he was. That was my impression, but I never worked directly with him sufficiently to really comment.

Q: OK, so let's get to the fun part, your confirmation.

HULL: My confirmation was interesting only in the sense that anybody who has been through this process knows that it can take a very long time for a nomination to rise to the level where it can be announced to the world by the White House. One of the most important parts of it is that it has to be signed off on by the President. In my case it had been quite awhile, and I had submitted all the paperwork and so forth, but there were a number of new Ambassadors who had not been signed off on by the President, I assume because the President had higher priorities. But then on the 100th anniversary of the flight at Kitty Hawk when America first flew, the event got rained out. So the President had some down time in North Carolina on that trip, so that is when he signed off on these ambassadorial nominations. It then had to further work itself through the White House personnel process, but it was eventually announced. But then there was always the question of when would the Senate be able to schedule confirmation hearings.

Q: Where were you during all of this?

HULL: I was in Addis. I was functioning as DCM, so this is all taking place at long distance. I assume that it is more automated nowadays, but then it meant filling out hard copies of all sorts of documents and then sending them back to Washington, and finding the time to do that. But then on top of that we just didn't know when the Senate was going to schedule hearings. We had an inspection going on in Addis. The Ambassador was counting on me a lot, I think, in the inspection because I was a point of continuity from the previous Ambassador and had been Chargé during the interregnum period. But in the middle of the inspection it was like can you be in Washington in four days for a hearing? So suddenly I had to get to Washington, have the

remarks that I was going to make, that I wrote, prepared and cleared.

Q: And be an expert on Sierra Leone.

HULL: And be an expert on Sierra Leone. Fortunately I had followed the country over the years and everything else, and I was at a hearing with two other ambassadorial nominees going to Congo and Cote D'Ivoire. So the hearing was small, chaired by Senator Feingold with Senator Alexander from Tennessee, who was previously Secretary of Education. It was a very benign friendly hearing. So basically it was do that, go back to post. The inspection was finished by the time I got back, so I wasn't able to be there for the exit briefing. So my job was to pack out and leave. I think even before I left post I was confirmed as Ambassador to Sierra Leone, so I really had no further role there in Ethiopia.

Q: So then voila, you were confirmed.

HULL: Yes, I was confirmed as Ambassador. But then you have to be attested to by the President. The President, actually I should take it back a step. Let me just say that once you are confirmed by the United States Senate, you then have to be attested to by the President, which is just a formality. He signs the papers saying he nominated you in the first place. But after the confirmation the President, just like he signs a bill into law he also has to sign off after the Senate confirmation. Then technically you are the Ambassador. You don't have to be sworn in. In fact you don't have to be sworn into any federal position. It is just a formality. As long as the Senate has confirmed, the President has attested, it is only a formality that you be sworn in.

Q: Actually the Constitution says that people appointed by the President, it is in there some place.

HULL: In any case I was told you don't have to be sworn in; you can go directly out to post if you want.

Q: But you still need the agrément.

HULL: No, the agrément came earlier. That is before, once the President has signed off to nominate you, you are then proposed to the host government. So before the White house can announce the nomination you have to have that agrément from the government you are being assigned to. Mine came very quickly. It came when Larry Andre who worked for me in Addis was actually chargé d'affaires. The request came into the embassy and Larry very efficiently took it over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Director General of Foreign Affairs. And you may recall in the Peace Corps I taught a little Roman Catholic school in a very small village. This was a school with four or five teachers and a couple of hundred students out in a very rural area, where the most prominent family was the family of the Minister of Education, Mr. Wurie. Many years later when it came time for Larry Andre to get agrément, and he want to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the director general's name was Amaru Wurie. As it turned out he had actually gone to the little primary school where I taught in the Peace Corps and graduated from that primary school. So he was thrilled to have somebody who actually had lived in his little village where he grow up and taught at the very school, a Roman Catholic school, where he as a

Muslim had been sent. This was a real thrill for him. This actually stood me in very good ground because the Wuries at the time had many positions. The Minister of Education was the son of the Minister of Education when I was a Peace Corps Volunteer. The head of the national airline which didn't fly but collected fees was a Wurie. The Wuries were strategically placed throughout the government including Ambassador Wurie who was the Director General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So Agrément came just like that, very quickly. It had to be passed on by the cabinet interestingly enough, not just the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but Mr. Wurie made sure that it went very quickly. So we had the Agrément; we had the confirmation hearings; we had the confirmation by the senate; we had attestation by the President after which you can then schedule your swearing in. I was fortuitous in having Secretary of State Powell who took a personal interest that no matter how large or small an embassy was he wanted to do the swearing in.

Q: I was present.

HULL: So it was a terrific event. I really enjoyed it because there were so many people from my career and my life who were there, that it was a wonderful event. The Secretary of State was very gracious. I was very pleased that just by coincidence, my FSN Adamseged, who was my driver in Addis Ababa, had got to be there at that event. Later on the Secretary commented to an undersecretary or deputy secretary, somebody who got back to me, and told me the Secretary was deeply pleased because the only swearing in he had been at where there was an FSN who was present and acknowledged by the new ambassador and credit given to the FSN. So this is something that Secretary Powell particularly noted. So off I went almost immediately to Sierra Leone because Ambassador Chavez had left to take up the directorship of the African Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University.

Q: I am sorry, what year are we here?

HULL: We are in 2004. I was sworn in August, 2004 and almost immediately within days went out to post. Larry Andre who had been chargé d'affaires was in the process of transferring out also. We had like a 24-48 hour overlap over a weekend. The embassy is yours.

Q: You went to Freetown?

HULL: But a nice thing about this I had been back to Freetown periodically, not very often but once a decade or so after being a Peace Corps Volunteer. There were a couple of FSNs who had been there those many years. One in particular was the senior FSN for USIS, which had their employees throughout the civil war. Although the Americans evacuated the post, the FSNs came to the embassy every day and did their work, carried on the public diplomacy work. It is a very remarkable story. Periodically an American would come to the country and they would get paid, but it was a very inspiring story of commitment and courage on the part of our FSNs.

Q: What work could they do?

HULL: There was still reporting of what was going on in the media if it still functioned. I think there still might have been some exchanges taking place. I am not sure. It is amazing, but they carried on very loyally. James Taylor our librarian there. The lady who retired when I was

ambassador whose name is escaping me, I think her name was Elizabeth. I am trying to remember. We had a number of people, Sierra Leonians who had the names of movie stars. I am trying to remember. There is James Taylor, the singer, who is also the FSN. I am trying to remember if she was Elizabeth Taylor. She was something that resonated. In any case I had known some of these FSNs a little bit when I was area director and visited the post, and previously when I had been in the country and passed by and introduced myself. So they remembered. So they knew a little bit of what they were getting. I got there, and it was timely for me to get there because everybody else was leaving. Everybody else was on vacation or in a period of transfer or what have you.

My tenure as ambassador was a period of flux for the embassy. We had been at the same location basically since the embassy had opened. Which was in the heart of Freetown under the historic cotton tree that had been there since the establishment of the colony by the liberated slaves. That is where they sort of did their equivalent of the Mayflower Compact. They did it there, so a very historic symbolic location of the embassy, but it was no longer a secure location. Therefore the decision was made, was accelerated to move the embassy. Ambassador Chavez and Larry Andre were able to persuade General Williams the head of the Overseas Buildings Office (OBO) in the State Department to move Sierra Leone Freetown higher on the list of new embassies because he saw the vulnerability of the embassy there. One of the interesting things about my predecessor, he visited all 12 districts of Sierra Leone and got all around the country quite a bit. So one of the challenges to me was to do the same thing. But he had an advantage. In that immediate post war period the State Department had a helicopter at the embassy. So he could very easily get into his helicopter and fly around the country for the period of a year or two that they had the helicopter; whereas, I had to drive over some very rough roads. One advantage was General Williams, the head of OBO was visiting in Conakry, and would say "I can't get to Freetown. The Ambassador said, "I will send a helicopter for you." So he was able to divert down to Freetown and see the need for a new embassy. So much of my time was working with OBO on construction of the $65 million American Embassy complex, on a poorly selected location because it was on the ridge of a steep hill. It wasn't the steepness that was the problem but the fact that there was no water there. Since there is no municipal water in Freetown, even the Ambassador's residence was serviced while I was there with untreated water delivered by water trucks. This was a constant problem we had. We did a lot of drilling for water, but there was no water to be found. Ultimately there was a jury-rigged solution, but it has really not been a very satisfactory one.

Q: The water has to be delivered.

HULL: Oh yeah, by water truck. And the same thing, and of course this was supposed to be an embassy that had its own water treatment plant and everything else, all these fancy things, but they just couldn't function in an environment like Sierra Leone. Also it was designed to be the embassy that was self reliant for electricity because there was absolutely no electricity in Freetown, a major capital, except for that produced by private generators. So our embassy had enough generator power that it could power a good percentage of Freetown as well as our embassy. But two of those generators are back-up generators. So the infrastructure in Freetown is very weak. The one thing that happened, as in most of Africa, was the cellular phone revolution that made so much more possible in the country, but the general infrastructure was just horrible. It is one of the situations that you often read about how African countries are worse off today in

many cases than they were at the time of independence. That is certainly true of the infrastructure in Sierra Leone, in spite of the fact they had a major hydro-electric project going on since the early 80's. It had never reached fruition, run by an Italian company, because of enormous corruption. Since then, in the last couple of years under the new president, it has started to come on line finally.

Q: Cell phones. I guess the time you were there must have been the time of the very rapid rise in the use of them, '04, '05, '06.

HULL: Sure, and that of course was, as in many African countries, because they took business away from the parastatal telephone company. Still, they got parliament to pass a bill saying that all international calls had to be through the state telephone company so that they could take their piece of the action, but in point of fact they did not have the capacity technologically to do this.

Q: Were there several cell phone companies competing?

HULL: Oh yes there were.

Q: And each of them had their own repeater towers.

HULL: Yes. Some were more developed than others. Celtel, Mo Ibrahim's company was the most advanced, but there were a number of these operations trying to tie together Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Manu River area offering different comparative advantage. But there were major issues. There was probably a fair amount of corruption in the ministry responsible for telephones, giving out more telephone contracts than they should have. Corruption was rife in the government as it had been for a number of years and they had a number of different types of corruption issues.

But just to go back to where we started, I guess my lasting legacy in Sierra Leone is the $65 million embassy with my name on the plaque in the front of the building. We will see how long it lasts, but certainly it is so solidly constructed it will physically be there for a very long time.

Q: It does seem odd. I have had people outside the State Department say $65 million for a building in a country that has been at times unstable.

HULL: Well not only that, well all the more reason to have a secure embassy. However, a $65 million cost was far more than the aid we were giving the country over a period of years. But we have a responsibility to protect our employees. Certainly it was appreciated by the new government because the construction was in the post civil war period in Sierra Leone that ended officially in early 2002. That is when the post war period began. The government saw this as a vote of confidence in the future stability of Sierra Leone. So although it was $65 million, it did generate employment of Sierra Leonians and it was seen as a positive gesture towards Sierra Leone.

Q: Did the embassy take advantage of that perception and further it. Was that part of the presentation of the NEC?

HULL: Well I am not sure, because I wasn't there at the time it was presented to the government. But I didn't have to sell it. The only complaints were you could have done something else with the money, but then again you wouldn't have had the money to do something else with. They always hoped there would be more employment generated by it, but we did employ a few hundred Sierra Leonians in the project.

Q: In other U.S. similar projects the Chinese model of bringing in labor from the outside is sometimes the case.

HULL: It is certainly the case because it is contracted to an American company so they would bring in, first of all the American labor as supervisors, but they also brought in a construction company subcontracted from Turkey. There were sometimes problems with the relationships between the Turks and the Sierra Leonians, communication issues, treatment issues, and so forth. But I think there was begrudging recognition by the Sierra Leonians that they did not have the skills that the Turks brought to the job, so there was a skills transfer from the Turks to the Sierra Leonians as they learned the jobs, but there were difficult relationships between the Turkish subcontractors and the…

Q: Likewise in Yaoundé exactly the same thing. So outside of the embassy what was Sierra Leone going through at that time?

HULL: Well it was recovering from the war. The immediate post war period was another Ambassador, mainly Ambassador Chavez. He did an excellent job. He had been an Ambassador in Malawi. He had been a Peace Corps volunteer, so he knew his way around Africa dealing with Africa. But I think West Africa is often quite different for a variety of reasons than other parts of Africa. Each region of Africa has some distinctive characteristics. Certainly in Sierra Leone, he had seen corruption in Malawi, but he had never seen corruption on the scale that you had in Sierra Leone. In point of fact, the corruption in Sierra Leone was only limited by the fact that there were very few resources to be corrupt with. So they were not as extremely corrupt enriching themselves as other places, but corruption permeated society, the more as time progressed. Ambassador Chavez became more publicly outrageously offended by the corruption in the country and he was very outspoken on it, to the extent that it made him highly unpopular. It was the correct thing to do but it is not necessarily…

Q: Did the majority of the population or was it members of government?

HULL: Well members of government in particular, but since it pervaded society there were very mixed feelings. There were a lot of people who said bully for you, thank you for pointing it out, but also, I know it is hard to deal with specifics. Well show us the corruption. What corruption are you talking about? Of course everybody knew this. We were particularly outraged, we the U.S. Government, because we had given funds particularly to the Electoral Commission and to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, wanting the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to publish their report and the Electoral Commission to reform themselves and prepare for elections. The money was misspent and couldn't be accounted for by the Electoral Commission. The money was withdrawn from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Although they did

eventually publish the report in Ghana, there were all sorts of allegations that it was being tampered with in Ghana in terms of the final outcome, mainly because it pointed to abuses by the Nigerians, and the Nigerians did not want those abuses to appear in print. Therefore, they were allegedly subverting publication. In point of fact criticisms remained in the report of the Nigerians, so I don't think it was actually tampered with, so I don't think it actually was, but that was the rumor. It did eventually get published, and it may have been just the simple inefficiencies of West Africa at work as well.

Q: We have a time limit, but on the corruption issue, so you moved into your position. Your predecessor was very much in your face on this issue.

HULL: They were all very relieved to see me because they assumed that because I had been a Peace Corps Volunteer there, that I understood the country better and therefore I might be more tolerant of corruption. I think it was more my approach was a bit different. I have numerous articles headlined about talks and speeches I gave on corruption and human rights critical to Sierra Leone. What they appreciated from the outset when I gave my first remarks and I gave my Letters of Credence were accepted by President Kabbah, on corruption for example. I said "Hey I understand why corruption occurs because civil servants are not paid a living wage, but that does not excuse you for being corrupt in Sierra Leone, and we expect Sierra Leone to perform to international standards of good governance." So they were much more tolerant of my criticism if I could show that I had some understanding of the situation, but nevertheless, there needed to be reform.

Q: Do you feel that during your tour of duty there, that corruption changed in any way?

HULL: Well yes. See, there was an anti-corruption commission in the country, and it is important to remember that the United States was not the major donor in the country, it was the United Nations and the British government. The British funded the Anti-Corruption Commission and they had a very stalwart Anti-Corruption Commissioner. But the system was flawed. Before there could be an indictment, the indictment had to be approved by the Attorney General who was also the Minister of Justice. So there was somebody in the Government that had to approve the indictment, and he presented roadblock after roadblock to the indictment. And also the Government was in an outrage and an uproar when the Anti-Corruption Commissioner sent his investigators, and there were British investigators there as well as Sierra Leonean investigators, with their own warrant to the home of the Minister of Fisheries, and discovered lots of television sets and furniture. Jut things that did not meet the quantities of their homes. So that created such a brouhaha that the head of the Anti-Corruption Commission had to resign. A new Corruption Commissioner was appointed who had been a former brother-in-law of the President. Not very much happened in terms of the Anti-Corruption Commission as a consequence, although certainly I would complain to the President as did others, that the Anti-Corruption Commission had to be given teeth and the law should be changed so that the Attorney General would not be an obstacle to indictments. There would be special courts for corruption. There were some corruption cases and convictions but they were little fish. The people of Sierra Leone were expecting what they called the big fish to be caught by this ACC. The British threatened to withdraw their money, and we think they may even have suspended it. But to get to the end of my ambassadorship and beyond, ultimately with a change of government in Sierra Leone in 2007

the law was changed, and now that obstacle has been removed, and the current Anti-Corruption Commissioner has real teeth, so there is progress being made. Part of it too, the new President of the country today is showing an intolerance for corruption.

One thing I learned in Africa over the years is corruption begins at the top. If the President of a country indicates that he is going to be very tolerant of corruption, as for example arap Moi was in Kenya, it will quickly pervade the whole government, and even in many countries there has been an expectation that you can pay a civil servant low wages because through extortion, embezzlement or whatever, they will be able to supplement their incomes. Sierra Leone is beginning to show less and less tolerance for that. But in my period it was very frustrating because in the first instance we had an excellent person in charge who was not going to accept obstacles to corruption, but was frustrated and eventually forced to resign. Then a token person was put in charge of that issue. So that was a significant problem.

Q: We are running out of time but you talked about giving teeth to the anti-corruption effort, and your efforts to convince. Whom did you have to convince, the President?

HULL: Well I would often go to the President because I knew that if the President put pressure on parliament, laws would get passed. I think one of my notable achievements was Anti-Trafficking in Persons legislation which was stalled in parliament. Parliament was going out of session before the elections of 2007. I said, "Look Mr. President, your international credibility depends upon these laws that have to be reformed. There are also laws pertaining to the status of women and the inheritance rights." The president himself was sensitive to the fact that if he himself died before his wife did, instead of what actually happened, his wife would not have had inheritance rights. It would have gone to his family. Because President Kabbah had a career in the United Nations and the UNDP he was sensitive to many of these issues, but he was also more tolerant than he should have been. It would take pressure, and I would go to the president and I was able to pressure him. I was not the only one doing this. The British High Commissioner, the head of the United Nations were doing the same thing, putting pressure on the President to get laws through the parliament. Although the current constitution of Sierra Leone is a blend of American and British models of government, there is a separation of powers between the President and the legislature. There is no Prime Minister. That does exist but in point of fact the President has sufficient influence. Certainly in the case of President Kabbah, he had sufficient influence to get them to take a vote.

Q: Is it usually the President of Sierra Leone that proposes legislation?

HULL: Legislation has to be proposed through a ministry of government. One of the reforms we were trying to work with Members of Parliament to create was the ability of members to introduce their own bills for consideration in parliament. But if you wanted a bill to become a law it had to be approved first by a ministry. Sometimes legislation would be stuck in those ministries, and we would have to go to the President and say we have to unstick this.

Q: And he had the capacity to do that.

HULL: Well they were his ministers.

Q: Right. Thanks Ambassador.

HULL: So in Sierra Leone there were many appropriate initiatives being taken in the style of good governance, they types of things we would expect, but many of them were not implemented fully. So they gave the appearance of reform without actual reform, the Anti-Corruption Commission was one of those at the time. Another one we had to push along was the Human Rights Council. The country at our urging and of the urging of other governments created in principle a Human Rights Council, but that took a very long time to appoint people to the Human Rights Council. Then funding was always an issue. So I recall that members of the Human Rights Council never got paid for their services. It undercut the organization, so there were a lot of efforts at reform. A lot of them were pushed along by my predecessor in Freetown, by other Ambassadors, western Ambassadors in Freetown, and by the United Nations. I really cannot speak highly enough of the superb work done by the United Nations peace keeping organization UNAMSIL, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone. It was succeeded; it was wrapped up and the peace keepers withdrawn.

Q: Was the war…

HULL: The war ended in 2002, but even before that the UN had moved in. UNMMSL had a very checkered history. There was a famous incident of some of these UN peace keepers, I think Bangladeshis and Indians maybe, simply surrendering themselves and their weapons to the rebels when asked to do so because they really did not have a clear mandate from the UN in New York as to how they should act in such a situation. That was part of what precipitated the eventual intervention of the British SAS troops who in a matter of days had the rebels fleeing for the hills and abandoning their weapons and the war was essentially over and the UN could be effective. Also they brought in a very good Pakistani general, General Akram, who was a no nonsense officer who did a superb job in shaping up the military operation in Sierra Leone and guaranteeing the peace.

Q: The UN operation.

HULL: The UN operation. And also a very good special representative of the Secretary General and SRSG in charge of the operation, Ambassador Mwakawago, who was a former Tanzanian government minister who was appointed as SRSG. The deputy SRSGs were superb. The one who left shortly before I came to Sierra Leone, Alan Doss, is now running the peace keeping operation in the Congo after having run the peace keeping operation in Liberia. His successor, Victor D'Angelo from Portugal was also superb and continued on after Mwakawago left as the Executive Representative of the Secretary General (ERSG) in charge of the peace building mission, UNIOSIL standing for the United Nations Office in Sierra Leone. This was a peace building mission which was something new that the UN had created. They had not done this before. There is also a similar operation in Burundi, BINUB, but this is a new approach by the UN in recognition of the fact that too often they have declared victory and walked away without leaving very much sustainable behind nor a sustainable coordination effort.

The United Nations was critically important to the democratization, to the success of the

elections in Sierra Leone. So I worked very closely with the UN. We met regularly, first the SRSG and later the ERSG with myself. We coordinated with the British, the French, the Germans, the Chinese, the Nigerians and so forth. So we had a very compatible group of Ambassadors who could sit around and find common direction even if we all couldn't contribute in the same way. For example, in most countries, when you have an election situation, an election basket is created into which countries can make donations but the United States can never do so, because of our own aid restrictions. Nevertheless we could coordinate by agreement with the others saying we are going to do this before the elections. For example, in Sierra Leone we were able to use USAID funds to support the training and implementation of indigenous election observers in the country, while another donor funded through the UN basket, international observers for the election. So we worked with the others to make sure that things functioned smoothly. But it took all of us together as a team to achieve success. I think each of us individually could take satisfaction from the success that was achieved in Sierra Leone in terms of very genuinely free and fair elections.

The critical moment came when the election commission was in limbo. Prior to the local elections in 2004, just before I arrived the election commissioners were fired; new ones were put into office, but they really lacked direction and they needed leadership. And they needed a Chairman of the National Elections Commission. I, and I am sure some of the other ambassadors under President Kabbah, I said to President Kabbah, "You need a person of integrity who is apolitical in this position or you will not have a credible election in this country, and by the way it would be best if you would appoint a woman, because women are not seen as a political threat to any of the male leaders of this country and therefore can be more acceptable to everyone." In point of fact very shortly thereafter, he did what I was hinting at, to appoint Christiana Thorpe as the National Electoral Commissioner. She was a former nun, a no-nonsense woman who had been very prominent in education in the country, had directed a civil society NGO for education that coordinated with teachers throughout the country. So again another good example of somebody from civil society coming in and making a contribution. She came in and she fired everybody in the electoral commission so that all that was left were the other four commissioners and herself. The other four commissioners, the men were pretty useless. But what she did was she started hiring people and going out and finding uncorrupted people to staff the National Electoral Commission to make it truly independent and largely proceeded to ignore her fellow commissioners except when they were exceeding the bounds of what their positions were politically.

Q: But she is directly in charge of them.

HULL: Oh well theoretically yes, but some of them had political connections and so forth, but they were marginalized. She hired some people away from the Embassy, some of our good FSNs. But we could hardly object since we were supporting the Electoral Commission. I must say with support from the UN, from the British, from the Americans and others, support from NGOs like Search for Common Ground, they did a superb job of preparing this election. When Christiana Thorpe was in a position where it appeared the government would not support her or the government would drag its feet to delay the election or whatever, the rest of us would step in and wag our fingers at the powers that be and say no you can't do this if you are going to have credible elections. We are very fortunate that President Kabbah had a career in the UN

development program, the UNDP, so he understood the international importance of respecting internationally accepted standards for elections. So as they went forward, when push came to shove, the President always came down on the side of what would be the acceptable international standard for an election. He might not have liked it, but he swallowed hard and did it. Sierra Leone's credibility was on the line, and when they ultimately did have the election it was very credible. They had to have a run-off election which took place after I had departed the country.

Another key element was the UN was doing police training following a period when the British had done it on their own. But it meant the UN was pretty much embedded with the police, and because the head of the UN police operation was a Deputy Police Chief from Austin, Texas, we were able to have direct influence on how that was executed even though he ostensibly worked for the UN with a Nigerian deputy. Whenever there was a threat that the police would somehow disrupt a demonstration or political rally, the international community was always there to give some backbone to, particularly, the deputy police commissioners. They called them Inspector Generals so it would have been Deputy Inspector Generals. These were actually fairly professional people. The head of the police who was actually a bit political, but he was somewhat neutralized by having this international involvement. And in the election you had this remarkable situations where the police would actually find people who were voting more than once or who had little signals to say I want to vote again for the Government and so forth. The police were actually arresting people supportive of the Government who were violating the election laws. So it was really truly an exceptional election that took place. Of course there must have been some irregularities. But any ballot box that was clearly stuffed was not counted. You couldn't have 100% control and one of the problems in Sierra Leone as in many places is that paramount chiefs, traditional leaders, would try to tell their people how to vote. One of the great challenges there was to say to people you don't have to vote the way the chief does. It is a secret ballot. But that was always a challenge. But there was sufficient support that overall we had a free and fair election, and consequently the opposition won the highest percentage of the vote. They did not have a majority. They did have a unique situation where the Government ruling party was split because of the manner in which their candidate was selected, which was the President railroading through, in an abruptly called convention, the nomination of his Vice President as the presidential candidate. The nephew of the first Prime Minister of the country was also a candidate and objected to that, and he had his own following. When it came time for the election, rather than endorse the candidate of his uncle's party, rather than endorse the party he had been loyal to his whole life, he aligned himself with the opposition party. So you did not have a strictly ethnic election because otherwise the parties tended to be aligned along geographic and ethnic grounds. This made the opposition party a blend of people from around the country. So a combination of all these factors that came into play and led to a genuinely honest election. And it led to a run off.

There was of course a temptation. This came after I left, but my parting words to the President and to others were you must respect the process and accept the results. After I left it took continued international pressure to make sure it happened and it did. I think the United States could take some credit and satisfaction for the type of election that was held. I think we have had a number of other elections in Africa such as in Ghana where we can be satisfied that you are beginning to see some reform in elections. But whether or not it is sustainable or whether it was a unique circumstance in Sierra Leone remains to be seen in future elections because you will not

have the same international attention, the same international assistance, the same National Electoral Commissioner probably, and you just won't have that focus. So who knows what happens the next time around, but if it is sustainable, it would be wonderful.

I would also point out something interesting. This applies to elections in Liberia and Sierra Leone which in Freetown we had funded by the Department of State, the military depot, a peace keeping depot where we kept vehicles and communications equipment and other such non-lethal materials which could be used to support peace keeping missions anywhere in Africa. But one of the ways we used this was to lend the vehicles to Electoral Commissions so they could get around the country and pick up ballot boxes and what have you. We did it in Liberia. The vehicles came back. Sometimes their engines had been traded out for crummy ones and their tires had been traded out for bald ones, but nevertheless we made the contribution to the election in Liberia. Then we in Sierra Leone likewise. It was the rainy season. Helicopters could not get around. The UN did not have the military helicopters; it was a peace building mission. Our vehicles were used around the country to deliver election materials and collect election materials. So even when we didn't have a lot of money to put into elections, we could contribute in a material way.

Q: The tight coordinated teamwork among the various embassies in the UN, what was the mechanism? How did this work?

HULL: Regular meetings and they would be called by mutual agreement by the head of the UN because all of our countries were members of the United Nations. So even if we might not want to go over to the Chinese Embassy, for example, we would all go to the UN and meet together. Usually we would do it at UN headquarters.

Q: Was that the venue?

HULL: That was always the venue. There was strong leadership on the part of Victor Angelo who is now the SRSG for the UN mission for Chad and the Central African Republic. He was a strong leader, and we all had a mutual respect for him, and we all had a mutual interest in having these elections work. Remarkably even the Chinese when push came to shove were willing to show their support for free and fair elections. I don't know if that was the Chinese Ambassador acting individually, or if he was reflecting instructions from Beijing. But in a continent where China is known for non-interference in the internal affairs of African countries, they more often than not certainly would have interpreted showing support in an election as possible interference in the internal affairs of the country. But one thing they all made clear is that we were supporting a process rather than supporting candidates for parties. So I give the Chinese some credit. They weren't very vocal about it, but they were vocal enough so the incumbents in Sierra Leone saw that even the Chinese as a Security Council member were supporting the process of open democratic elections.

Q: Also just anecdotally, when you did have your parting words with the President, was the press in the room at that time?

HULL: Yes. This is unusual. I made my farewell courtesy call on the President, but it was more

than a simple farewell with platitudes. I was using the occasion to impress on the President that the vital future of the country, the credibility of the country in the eyes of donors in the world, was to have credible, independent, transparent, open elections. To my surprise he had the press present, perhaps because he was thinking I would be speaking platitudes, but in point of fact it gave me a pulpit to make clear not only to the President but to the entire country that the position of the United States of America was that the process be respected regardless of the outcome.

Q: How tough was this pill for the President to swallow?

HULL: It wasn't so tough for the President. I think because of his UNDP background and the fact that he was also an African leader who was voluntarily stepping down from office after two terms and respecting his constitution. He was tired. He had been through a war. He had been in exile with his Government for a while. So he was pretty exhausted. He used to claim to me that he didn't have to be corrupt because he had a UNDP pension and also part of his late wife's UNDP pension. Therefore he was financially independent, although certainly there are all sorts of rumors about his having independent income.

Q: It is amazing how important the coincidence of who happens to be there at an important time.

HULL: Oh absolutely. Another one of the things I found interesting in West Africa and in that part of West Africa was you had a former UNDP person running Sierra Leone. You had a new president in Liberia who came from the UNDP. You had a prime minister who only lasted a year or so, in Guinea but he was from the UNDP. President Conteh grew tired of him and fired him shortly before he died, but nevertheless, the UNDP, the UN, was being an incubator for leadership in Africa, which I think is an interesting phenomenon that should be encouraged and watched, because it takes people out of the African political culture and puts them into an international political culture of sorts.

Q: And in this case there was a President who had a personal connection with the UNDP.

HULL: Right. He had worked with them for 20 years or whatever.

Q: Maybe with the various variables the widest, I guess that may be one.

HULL: And it was never certain that the ruling party would respect the outcome of the election if they lost. That is why there was always this pressure on, because there were rumors that there were elements of the party led by the Minister of Finance at the time that were going to maneuver to ensure that Vice President Berewa, the party's candidate, would win the election one way or another or that it be thrown into the courts and paralyzed. But that didn't happen. There were probably two key elements there, the police and the army, the security forces. Freetown itself was strongly for the opposition, and it was very clear that if the army intervened, attempted a coup, or tried to ensure that the ruling party stayed in power, that there would be a public uprising. It was not at all certain that the army would oppose that uprising. Of course, soldiers even though they might be soldiers, also have relatives. I am sure they had a lot of relatives who were supporting the opposition and the police as I said. And, the British had and still have an International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT) that is there for a period

of about eight years or so, but they were there at the time of the election, 120 soldiers, 100 from the UK, 3 from the United States and the rest scattered among other British Commonwealth countries mainly. They were there to train the military, which meant they had insight into the mood of the military, and likewise there was always the fear the British might call for their over horizon SAS troops to come in if the military acted inappropriately. So there were various factors there, but what was clear was the security forces were not going to intervene to influence the outcome of the election. That meant that even those within the ruling party who wanted, if necessary, to use force to retain power would be unable to do so.

Q: Some people say, and maybe it is a platitude that the Anglophone countries in West Africa seem to be more able to keep an electoral process, a free and fair election than the Francophone countries. We see what has happened in Guinea in the last year.

HULL: Well Guinea is unusual though because Guinea President Conté saw himself as not only president for life, but he took on the attitude that he was immortal so he made no preparation for his succession, and when people tried to raise that issue he would be dismissive of them, so you did so at your own peril. While there was some discussion within the army, a lot of military leaders were discredited because President Conté by the time he died, was very unpopular. Even though he had a son who was a major in the military, it wasn't clear at all that the military would accept him to be his successor. In the end it ended up Captain Camara who has been a brutal leader and has been shot. I am not sure where that stands at the moment, but last I heard he was in Ouagadougou.

Q: Ouagadougou, and his people claim that he is conscious and ready to come back. The medical reports say the injury is very grave.

HULL: But Guinea is a tinder box, and that is worrisome to both Sierra Leone and Liberia, two countries that border on Guinea. But so far it doesn't have spill over. So far I am pretty confident that the Liberians and Sierra Leonians can resist that problem, but it would certainly help the region if you could get civilian government restored in Guinea.

Q: Guinea, Togo, Cote D'Ivoire.

HULL: Cote D'Ivoire is apparently getting a bit better.

Q: Well in terms of transition.

HULL: No, but you are quite right. I think maybe because of the Anglo Saxon tradition of rule of law and what have you, even where the niceties of elections and rule of law are not observed, people know and understand that these are not being observed. People know electoral fraud and corrupt elections when they see them, Nigeria being a clear example of that. But by the same token I think people often feel helpless in the face of electoral fraud by a ruling party given the history of Africa since independence. But in Sierra Leone in this circumstance it was a very different, very exciting, very encouraging , but also qualified with a certainty that it could ever happen again.

Q: Wasn't Ellen Johnson Sirleaf's election at about the same time.

HULL: It was a year later. No, she was already in office.

Q: It is remarkable that these two basket cases, countries that seemed absolutely hopeless a short time before now stand as models.

HULL: Yeah, I think Liberia's election was less clear as to how corruption free it actually was. But be that as it may, George Weah was convinced that he should withdraw, even though I think he truly believes that he won the election. He was a popular person. I think the international community made it clear to him that they were recognizing Ellen Johnson Sirleaf as the winner. Now if you look at a better example, I think Ghana is where in successive elections they really proved they could hold a reasonably credible election. Certainly there is still corruption in Ghana. Nobody would pretend otherwise, but nevertheless they pulled it off very nicely.

Q: Something like five times in a row.

HULL: You can still find Anglophone exceptions like Gambia and also Nigeria.

Q: Nigeria, yeah, which is the elephant in the room.

HULL: Yeah it is a political basket case at the moment with the uncertainty over President Yar'Adua's health. But to go back to Sierra Leone, this was a point of great satisfaction in my ambassadorship that we could actually have successful elections. There was another highlight just to move on, the arrest of Charles Taylor, the former president of Liberia who was considered by most people to be responsible for the atrocities in Sierra Leone by his fueling of the war by exchanging weapons for diamonds. It is an interesting history because the head of the rebel movement, RUF, Foday Sanko and Charles Taylor linked up when they were both in liberation training camps in Libya sponsored by Qadhafi. They also had connections to the government of Burkina Faso through which weapons were funneled from Libya.

Taylor is on trial now. I believe that he will be convicted. I am personal friends with one of the judges and I know the other two. There is some resistance to finding an African head of state guilty of war crimes. There is a lot of discomfort there. One of the three judges in the trial is a woman from Uganda, and I think she is probably under some direct if not direct pressure to vote for his innocence. The judge from Northern Ireland I suspect will most certainly vote him guilty. The other judge is from one of the islands in the South Pacific. I forget which one. I think in the end he will probably vote for a guilty verdict. So far all of the people on trial have been convicted. These are the judgments that remain to be made.

The Special Court for Sierra Leone, as it is known, is a very interesting institution, one in which I was very much involved, worked very closely with the prosecutors. We had a succession of prosecutors beginning with one David Crane who had been the acting Inspector General of our Department of Defense. He was replaced by Mr. DaSilva, a British attorney who had a long involvement in Sierra Leone, and then finally by an American prosecutor who was our federal attorney for Northern Iowa and is now our Ambassador-at-Large for War Crimes the State

Department. He was recently confirmed and sworn in. So the prosecutors spoke to me about the evidence and their strategies in prosecuting these war crimes. Of course they looked for whatever help we may be able to provide them in terms of finding evidence, if possible. But the critical point was that most of the funding for this court came from the United States, tens of millions of dollars. The reason for that is each war crimes tribunal in Africa so far has been different. Each one has been sort of an experiment and a work in progress. The next one learns from the previous ones what worked and what didn't work. What didn't work for Rwanda, for example, was too many people indicted with trials taking too long and people not having satisfaction with the outcome. So, they limited it to fewer than 20 people to be indicted in Sierra Leone and only those with the greatest responsibility for crimes against humanity. Consequently they only indicted, I think it was, 13 people. One of whom, Foday Sanko, died in custody. Another one, Hinga Norman, died on trial. Hinga Norman had great sympathy because he was actually fighting on the side of the government against the rebels. He was the Minister of Defense in Sierra Leone Also a couple of them had simply disappeared and were presumed executed by Charles Taylor. There was a lot of digging up of graves and DNA and what have you in Liberia to try and verify this. I don't know if they actually did it or not. Sam Bockarie was one and there was another one. In any case those that remained have been prosecuted as I said, and all but those currently on trial have been convicted.

The Court itself was seen as a joint undertaking of the government of Sierra Leone and of the United Nations. But through voluntary contributions, not assessed contributions. So consequently one of the shortcomings of the Court was it was always trying to find financing, always having to come to Washington to plead for assistance from the State Department, and the State Department always saying can't you do these trials faster? The answer would be do you want credible justice or not? But it has been very expensive for the State Department to pay for this. It has been interesting watching the administrators and prosecutors of the court coming to Washington and lobbying on Capitol Hill for funding for the State Department to continue to support this war crimes trial, which is very important. One of the problems has been a certain percentage of the judges including Galaga King who is currently head of the court have been Sierra Leonean judges who have not been very interested in seeing a rapid outcome, a rapid conclusion to the tribunal. The United States has been pressuring for it to work itself out of business, but the Sierra Leonean judges have never had it so good, about $250,000 a year, getting cars and drivers, so as far as they are concerned they want to prolong this tribunal as long as possible.

But in any case, the United States was under heavy criticism because Charles Taylor was given refuge in Nigeria. There was a feeling that if only the United States acted, the Nigerians would hand over Charles Taylor, which wasn't the case because there was a lot of concern among African leaders about the idea of convicting a fellow African head of state, and Charles Taylor claimed that he never stepped down from the presidency but that he was simply in exile. There was a lot of concern about the precedent that would be set by an African head of state being put on trial, because many African leaders were saying there but for the grace of God go I. So there was a lot of pressure on President Obasanjo not to send Taylor to the Court and there was a gentleman's agreement that if he went into exile in Nigeria, that he would not be extradited to Liberia and in return for which he would not interfere in the politics of Liberia. But, in point of fact, he was actively participating from Calabar, where he was in exile, with folks in Liberia.

Ultimately, again to make a long story short, he was captured trying to flee with a lot of money in his car. He was probably urged to do so by the Nigerians because Obasanjo was going to Washington and needed to be rid of him. As you know there were late night meetings at the State Department where it was made clear to Obasanjo that he would not have his meeting the following morning with President Bush if Charles Taylor was not apprehended and extradited. There had been a lot of discussion over time as to how this would happen; what aircraft would be used, who would provide the aircraft. There was discussion with our Department of Justice over the aircraft. In the end he was put on a United Nations aircraft, but one of the preconditions of all of this was that he had to be arrested in Liberia. Whether or not he had to be arraigned there was unclear, but basically what they did was they flew the plane to Liberia. At that point the UN peace keepers had left Sierra Leone, so the question was how would you ensure his security> But the peace keeping force in Liberia, UNMIL, had a rapid deployment force so they had two or three helicopters. The flew him in, the people from the Special Court, the prosecutors what have you, met the plane officially accepted him from the Liberian government, effectively charged him on the tarmac, put him on the helicopters and the helicopters flew off to Sierra Leone. Then the question was what would happen when he landed, because there was a real fear that some of his people may have infiltrated into Sierra Leone. In Sierra Leone there was no fear that the Sierra Leonians would try to liberate him, but there was fear that his own people might have infiltrated. But we got him to the Special Court. Another interesting aspect was who would guard the Special Court to protect the facility against people coming, infiltrators coming in from Liberia to attack the Special Court and liberate him. It was very interesting because we now had a peace building operation in Sierra Leone that had no military component. So what ended up happening was Nepalese Ghurkas guarded the prison and they, the Nepalese were funded by and reported to UNMIL in Liberia. But in any case he was very secure there, but eventually the decision was made to send him to the ICC in The Hague and for the Special Court to lease the facilities of the ICC to detain and try Charles Taylor.

Q: Now the U.S. government, the United States is not a member of the ICC, so where does that put us?

HULL: Well I was going to get to that because that was an interesting dynamic of this whole thing. Before we sent Charles Taylor to the ICC facilities, we had to get the concurrence of the Bush administration that the Special Court of Sierra Leone could use money contributed by the U.S. government to lease the ICC facilities to hold and try Charles Taylor, which the Bush administration to its credit decided to do. There are many other complications because the ICC sits in the Netherlands. The government of the Netherlands insisted that before Charles Taylor could be sent there for trial, there had to be a commitment from a country to incarcerate him if he was convicted because the government of the Netherlands did not want to be left in a situation where he was convicted in the Netherlands and therefore they would be responsible for him. Two countries had already agreed in principle that they would incarcerate people convicted by the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Those countries as I recall were Sweden and Austria. But when it came to the actual possibility of them having to take Charles Taylor if he was convicted, their parliaments objected and said wait a minute. Our prime ministers or whomever could not make that commitment without parliamentary approval, and we don't know if we want to be using our taxpayers money to support these people for the rest of their lives in our prisons. So there was an impasse that looked like it was going to disrupt this whole thing. So in the end the British said,

they may have had a piece of legislation in Britain, but they said they would take him and hold him. In the meantime an interesting development, we established an FBI office in Sierra Leone. Congressman Wolfe put in some appropriation legislation that there had to be an FBI office open either in Liberia or Sierra Leone. Liberia at the time was in no condition to have an FBI office, so the FBI office was established in Sierra Leone largely out of concern that there might be a continuing problem of blood diamonds, as they were known, being used to fund conflict and atrocities in West Africa. But that office did become involved interestingly in the arrest of Charles Taylor's son, Chuckie Taylor, who was the first person put on trial under American legislation that allowed us to arrest and prosecute an American citizen involved in human rights violations overseas. Our FBI office did a tremendous job in finding the people who actually did torture with Chuckie Taylor being present and directing the torture. So it did pay off and Chuckie Taylor has been convicted and is in federal prison. So there is some progress and some satisfaction on that front.

Q: Taylor has a very expensive lawyer.

HULL: Being paid for by the United States Government because he has claimed to be indigent although we know he is hiding money somewhere. But consequently the Court has had to provide legal defense for him.

Q: At least on the radio this lawyer sounds very skilled. What is your guess of the outcome?

HULL: I don't know. I presume he will be found guilty, but you are right. He has a very skilled attorney. He went out and hired the best person he could find who is experienced in war crimes.

Q: Great qualifications.

HULL: But at any rate the person is being extremely well paid. And it is ironic that he is being paid by the American taxpayers to insure that Charles Taylor gets justice.

Q: So many ambiguities here. We are supporting a court which by policy we have refused to join.

HULL: Indirectly. The court itself has no jurisdiction in the matter. It is simply a matter of using their facilities. Nevertheless given our non-recognition of that court's authority it is ironic that we are doing that.

Q: The same court that has indicted President Bashir for genocide, and we have supported that action, although we don't support the court.

HULL: You know this whole business of war crimes is difficult because certainly we all feel that people should be indicted, leaders should be indicted, for crimes against humanity and war crimes, but it is often done with a political tin ear that can be counterproductive and result in many more people being killed. To me it is better to have sealed indictments and wait for the right time to release them. I think another good example is the Lord's Resistance Army and their leader, the so-called Reverend Kony, who was close to having a negotiated resolution of his

conflict with the Government of Uganda. And then he was indicted by the ICC, so he said, "Why should I have a negotiated settlement." Far better to have a settlement followed by the indictment.

Q: And he went back to war.

HULL: He went back to war. And the same with al-Bashir. He has nothing to lose now that he has been indicted. Certainly there is a lot of satisfaction that comes from indicting him, kind of judicial masturbation, but it doesn't accomplish much. I think people generally support the concept that it is the right thing to indict al-Bashir, but it probably wasn't the right timing to announce the indictment.

Q: How would a sealed indictment work actually?

HULL: You seal the indictment and you release it when you chose to do so. There could always be the rumor out there that there might be an indictment.

Q: So the accused can only guess whether there is an indictment.

HULL: Right, but there is one and it is just can be at the discretion of the prosecutor when to open that indictment to make it public.

Q: The other, I mean there are so many odd things about this. The President of the country where Taylor had taken refuge was pressured to get Taylor to the border where Nigeria would no longer…

HULL: Well I don't know that we, I don't think that we pressured him. I think that they saw the handwriting on the wall, and they basically said to him you better move because we don't know how much longer we can protect you.

Q: He was picked up by helicopter. This is kind of an extraordinary….

HULL: I think one could postulate that this might have been a set up because of what happened at the border. He wasn't able to pay off the border guards. The money in his trunk apparently disappeared which was a substantial amount of money. They fairly quickly picked him up, whisked him away and got him fairly quickly back to Liberia. So it would suggest to me that something was coordinated or there was a contingency plan to do this, but it just worked so well in a part of the world where things don't work very well. It suggests to me there could have been some prior decision by the Nigerian leadership that they were going to do this. But I can't say that for certain because there were very tense, as I understand this, negotiations late into the night. One of the unfortunate things in all of this was very poor coordination by the leadership of the African Bureau in the State Department and their embassies overseas. Not only with myself, but with the American Embassy in Liberia, the American Embassy in Nigeria. All this effort to extradite Charles Taylor was a very close hold being discussed in Washington, and by Washington with its allies. So when the three American Ambassadors in the countries I just cited really learned about what was going on was when I started inquiring from Freetown because our

Assistant Secretary of State for Africa was telling her counterpart in the Foreign Office in London about what was being planned, and the Foreign Office in London was telling the British High Commissioner, and then the British High Commissioner was discussing it with me. Of course, he said, you will know this because it is your government that is doing it. I was in the dark. I thought, well I am the only Ambassador in the dark, but by infoing other Ambassadors on my E-mails back to the Assistant Secretary of State, I quickly discovered that our Ambassadors in Nigeria and Liberia were equally in the dark as to what our Government was planning to do that affected the three countries that our Ambassadors were serving.

Q: Not to indict an individual but what does this tell us about the way the Africa Bureau was run at that time?

HULL: Well I think it maybe tells us something larger about how the State Department and the NSC and the White House were all operating in a world which they believed they controlled with out a need for coordination with overseas embassies.

Q: So the authority that you had derived from the President.

HULL: True, but so did theirs.

Q: And they were in Washington and you weren't.

HULL: And they were in Washington. So it was a very Washington centric operation. On a need to know basis, they felt that their ambassadors in the three countries involved did not have a need to know.

Q: Incredible.

HULL: It was very incredible. They were clearly very frustrated when I started asking questions based on what I had heard from the British High Commissioner, who had heard from the British Foreign Office who heard it from the State Department.

Q: That speaks for itself.

HULL: So that was certainly a frustration, but to perhaps move on to some of the other interesting things that went on.

There were a lot of less dramatic and less spectacular things than war crimes tribunals and elections that we did in the day to day operations of the embassy that I thought were useful contributions that we made. One of the things that we did because we established a new American Embassy building, we could restore consular services in Sierra Leone for the first time in a decade. Up until then Sierra Leoneans had to journey to Conakry, Guinea, where they were not very warmly welcomed by the people of Guinea to apply for visas at the American embassy where frankly there were sometimes poor judgments on visa decisions because they did not know the people they were interviewing or did not have the context for issuing visas. We even had a situation where Nancy Pelosi is calling me saying, "Why aren't visas being issued?" "Well

it is not my Embassy. It is the Embassy in Conakry that makes the decision on the Sierra Leone Refugee All Star music group." So it was a major success for us to restore consular services and a lot of good will toward me and toward the Embassy for doing that.

Q: Was it a coincidence that it was being set up at the same time?

HULL: Well the fact was that the State Department was not going to resume visa issuances for security reasons until there was a new facility. So that facilitated this decision, but it was a major point of tension and unpopularity for the American Embassy. Playwrights wrote plays about people having to stand in the hot sun in lines for hours to get visas for the United States, but at least they were able to get them in the past. But now they couldn't even get them. Or they would talk about schemes of people claiming to faint in line so they would be dragged inside the building and they could jump up and stand in the visa line. So this was something that was, when people talked about the American Government, their biggest complaint. "Why can't we get visas here in Sierra Leone?" So we were able to neutralize that problem by starting consular services. It was still for non-immigrant visas only, but it was a start toward broader visa services. People who won the visa lottery competition would have to go to Ghana for interviews. I mean the whole thing was crazy, but at least we started the resumption and largely neutralized that criticism.

One area of failure was my inability to get the Peace Corps back in the country, which had been another sign of confidence in Sierra Leone. We almost had them back. We had a Peace Corps re-entry team come after two prior assessment teams. We had a person designated to be the director, and then the money didn't materialize. But fortuitously this past year we have had the decision made, and the Peace Corps is returning in a few months in June to Sierra Leone. So even after I was Ambassador through my position on the Board of Directors of the Friends of Sierra Leone, I was able to continue to apply some pressure on this issue.

Q: I know that is a very personal thing for you.

HULL: Absolutely. And another thing. I have always been a fan of what were USIS libraries and are now American Libraries of one sort or another, information resource centers. One of the things I did because we were moving to a new building, I gave up the name that they had given it which was the Martin Luther King Library. Half of the old USIS libraries in Africa were probably called Martin Luther King library, and I thought there should be wider recognition of contributions of other African-Americans, so I renamed it the John Taylor Williams Library. John Taylor Williams in 1897 was the first African-American Consul General to Sierra Leone. So he was a person who actually had a direct African-American connection to the American Embassy in Sierra Leone. We recognized somebody who otherwise would not be recognized. That was a very interesting period. The McKinley-Roosevelt administration sent a number of African-Americans to be Consuls General in Africa. That ended sort of after Roosevelt was President. They sort of stopped doing that. But for that period that was being done, there were a dozen or fewer people who became Consul General.

Q: Was this generally known in Sierra Leone?

HULL: Well no. That is why we did it. We wanted to publicize the fact. One we had this diplomatic relationship, even thought it wasn't an independent country, we had this diplomatic relationship going back some time, and we had even sent an African-American to Sierra Leone. So I felt it was worth some recognition for something that would otherwise be obscured in the history of our relationship.

Q: Is the ISC now co-located.

HULL: It is co-located so it is hard to access. Being the Ambassador with a public diplomacy background, I did as much as I possibly could to facilitate public access. Unfortunately the Embassy is in a remote location, but it is not too bad of a walk from the university, maybe 20-25 minute walk from the university, so certainly it could be used, but not like they used to be when they were parts of an independent American cultural center. I know it is an ongoing problem for American public diplomacy around the world. So that was another thing.

Another thing was always fighting for an aid program for Sierra Leone. The AID office there was not a full fledged AID mission, but a subsidiary, if you will, of the USAID mission in Conakry, Guinea. That meant we had a contract American running the office with a few Sierra Leonians. That did not keep us from having an active program, but it was always a struggle for resources. Our focus was in three areas: reform of the diamond sector, decentralization of government through support for local elected councils, and agricultural development. So we were very active in all three areas. The least successful was probably in diamond reform. I sat on a board that in a sense oversaw the diamond reform or the reform of the diamond sector along with four or five Sierra Leonean ministers, the police commissioner, and so forth on the Sierra Leonean side. That included the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Mineral Resources and so on. Then on the American side it included the British, ourselves, the United Nations, the World Bank and other representatives. So we were trying to keep them honest and have reforms that would reduce smuggling, but it was a constant struggle.

Q: Who set those three priorities, was it AID?

HULL: They were set before I got to post, but they were sensible ones for the country and realistic given the resources we had. So those had been set before I got there, and I continued those priorities. For awhile we did well in the diamond sector, but on the whole I think it simply was not adequately funded or adequately supported. There were some very weak contract personnel in the end doing it. But much more encouraging, we made real progress in agriculture. Some excellent work with local councils. Tremendously interesting work of people having to go out and explain to people in villages about paramount chiefs, "No, the paramount chief does not designate who is going to be your representative on the council. You actually have an election and you can choose, and the chief has nothing to do with it." It was very interesting because in Africa in general you have this situation where you have traditional forms of government, and you have modern forms of government and how you make them work together is one of the challenges. But at least there was this recognition that the Government accepted in principle decentralization, bringing government to the people so that things like education would not be funded centrally but funds would go out to support activities through local government closer to the people. Now the real problem there when push came to shove was getting Government

ministries to actually release their money to local councils. This gave the local councils an opportunity to embezzle it instead of themselves. But that said, if we look at the principle rather than the practice, we were making progress. I am not sure since my departure how that has operated. We have had a change in personnel there of USAID people and what have you, so it is hard to know what kind of continuity and sustainability we truly have.

Q: Again it may be a generalization, but I think the Francophone countries tend to be more strictly centralized and that the Anglophone countries in general have regional authorities, I think.

HULL: Yes, well in Sierra Leone in theory you had those regional authorities, but over time they have become centralized. So after the war they needed to be decentralized to bring government closer to the people. Another AID funded activity but wasn't one of our core ones, was the Ambassador Girl's Scholarship Fund. Very exciting, more limited than we would have liked, but we got more girls going to school. When I launched that project, I told the President that I was going to be doing this. I wasn't going to do it in Freetown. I was going to go up country to a provincial or district capital to do it. The President said, "I want to do it with you." So the President came, the Minister of Education, a whole entourage. Of course they wanted some political credit for it. I mean they had their own motives. Nevertheless the President was a supporter of girl's education. That was a priority for his late wife, so in her memory he wanted to do this. So the President joined the AID director and myself in going to interestingly the teacher training college where my wife was a Peace Corps Volunteer, and we all announced it there. So it was an exciting event, and I must say a very successful program. My only regret was we didn't have more money. I forget how many scholarships we gave. It may have been four or five hundred.

Q: This was money enabling girls to pay the expenses.

HULL: And the school uniforms and the school materials and textbooks and so forth. Another good program that was related to our PL-480 food assistance program in the country which was administered as I recall through CARE International, was a program whereby girls went to school, because families gave priority to their sons. And also their logic was we need the girls at home to help their mothers cook and to work on the farms. CARE instituted a program whereby if girls went to school they would be given an allotment of food at the end of the school day to take home so the families would have food to eat, and they would benefit directly from girls going to school. So interesting things I thought happened there.

Another important aspect of what we worked on in AID was debt forgiveness. As we were in so many African countries. I was very much involved in what was known as the HIPC process, the Highly Indebted Poor Country process. We had many meetings with all the concerned Government ministers and all the international donor community and international financial institutions, with NGOs as observers and so forth working with the Government developing a poverty reduction strategy paper that was required to reach the HIPC debt relief completion point. I participated in a donor's meeting in London where we really pushed this forward. While we were there, Sierra Leone was successful in meeting that completion point. Therefore we were able to forgive $58 million in debt from Sierra Leone, mainly having derived from PL-480 food

in the past. So that was another important element.

Also, another very exciting thing I felt, in the Parliament of Sierra Leone we had a very good person who was Chairman of the Human Rights Committee. One of the things that happened in Sierra Leone as happens to most African countries, when the annual human rights report for the Department of State for the country was released, there would be all this hue and cry over who us? How can you criticize us? You have your own faults and so forth. But the head of the Human Rights Committee in Parliament took another approach in Sierra Leone. He said, "Lets take your human rights report and use it as the basis for an annual one day conference on human rights in Sierra Leone." So every year, this is something that started my first year as ambassador. I would go up to the Parliament and I would speak to the Members of the Parliamentary Committee and whatever other Members of Parliament were there, about the American human rights report and the situation with respect to human rights in Sierra Leone and why we came to the conclusions that we came to . We were not the only ones there. The media was invited, Government ministers, people from civil society, people from the police and everybody else who were concerned about human rights in the country. So this was actually a very exciting thing that went on. It got very controversial. I got to be outspoken in my criticism of traditional practices like female circumcision. A very interesting back and forth with men in particular supporting the traditional practice, the women being a little more mute, although in Sierra Leone a lot of the women did see it as a threat to their culture, as if there was a red badge of courage for having gone through this. But the fact that we would have this and it would be highly publicized in the media was something unique in Africa. I hadn't heard of any other country where the Parliament would take our human rights report as something positive and it led to a decision ultimately by my final year as Ambassador where the Parliament decided that it would require the Government of Sierra Leone to produce its own annual human rights report as well which they could compare with ours, because there were a lot of questions. I mean the President and other people would say this statistic doesn't look right or that doesn't look right. We would say that is fine, give us the correct information and we will incorporate that in the next report. So it is interesting . I think that it wasn't just a knee jerk reaction against the report. There was really thoughtful discussion of our annual human rights report.

Q: It sounds as if that came from an inspired individual.

HULL: Yes it did as these things often do. You had the right person in the right place. He has now stepped down from Parliament. I don't know if that is continuing or not. He was from a prominent political family. His wife's father had been a leader of the SLPP political party at the time that I was a Peace Corps volunteer. She had been the executive secretary or executive director of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and so forth in Sierra Leone. They were British educated, sophisticated, and recognized the importance of human rights. So that was something else positive.

As I had mentioned earlier I worked on a number of laws that needed to be implemented to have reform in Sierra Leone or at least had to be passed in order to eventually be implemented. I mentioned trafficking in persons. This was a sensitive area for the Government of Sierra Leone because Americans were accused of trafficking in orphans and children for adoptions. There were actually some investigations by prosecutors in the United States of some American

adoption agencies and their practices. There was deceit where it was not clear that the parents in the country, illiterate parents, were giving up their children and would never see them again. It all came to light interestingly. Some of the adoptive parents in the United States when they heard from the children that they still had living parents, they said, "Well let's take you back home to visit your parents." Of course when they came back these people went on the radio thinking they had done this wonderful thing of connecting their family with the Sierra Leonean family. They suddenly found themselves arrested for being involved in child trafficking. Nevertheless, we did get a trafficking persons law.

I was very outspoken in defense of freedom of the press in terms of efforts in the country. The country had criminal libel laws which were used to persecute journalists who may have slandered or libeled politicians or what have you with some legitimacy, but at the same time we felt that those laws were unacceptable. So I was very outspoken publicly, garnered some headlines to the dismay of the President who disagreed with me, calling for repeal of the libel laws. It did make me popular with the journalists, with the NGOs and people who supported all that. Unfortunately I was led to believe by some American people in the press who are involved in such issues that we didn't have any such laws in the United States, but in point of fact a number of our states do have criminal libel laws that can be applied against the press. Be that as it may I took the high road and said no modern democracy has this and neither should you.

Q: I think that some of the key cases were in New York State. The burden is on the prosecution to show that there is malice of intent. I think in most cases, it is true that it is determined by the states, but in most cases it is very hard to prosecute someone for libeling a public figure.

HULL: In an African country like Sierra Leone it is kind of easy.

Q: And in Europe and Canada.

HULL: So I was pretty outspoken in that particular aspect and at least got serious consideration for the repeal. They were not repealed while I was there, but the mere fact that the American Ambassador was using his bully pulpit to address the issue meant that the Government was not getting a free ride on this activity.

I was also very much involved in the preservation of Bunce Island. Bunce Island is a place I went to as a Peace Corps volunteer, and it had a profound effect on me. Bunce Island was one of those slave trade factories, as they called them, along the west African coast. More than any other one in Africa it had a strong connection to the United States. Most of the others were sending slaves mostly to the Caribbean, and they were sending Sierra Leoneans and people from up and down the coast from Guinea down to Liberia out of Bunce Island to the Caribbean to work on sugar plantations. Because of the rice culture in that part of Africa along what was known as the rice coast, large number of the slaves were sent to South Carolina and Georgia where they were instrumental in introducing modern rice technology that the Europeans did not have and made rice the first American export product. That was very important in the 1700's into the early 1800's. Before cotton, rice in the lowlands in the Carolinas and Georgia sustained slavery. What was significant about this particular island is that it is not only one end of a bridge which, through the horrible slave trade, people emigrated to the United States. Millions of people

can trace their heritage to this. But it had a special role in American History. It was the only place where a battle of the American Revolution was fought in Africa because the French attacked Bunce Island, because they were our allies in the war, and it was a British fortress. The place has a very cultural history, but it has another connection. A slave trader, dealer in South Carolina was a gentleman by the name of Henry Laurens. He worked in collaboration with Richard Oswald, a British gentleman, who actually owned Bunce Island. So he was in effect Oswald's agent in South Carolina, Charleston, to sell the slaves. When the American Civil War broke out, guess who became President of our Continental Congress, Henry Laurens. Somewhere along the line in this history the Continental Congress decided to send Henry Laurens to the Netherlands as our Ambassador to try to get Dutch support for us in the Revolutionary War.

So Laurens was then head of our Continental Congress, a supporter of the slave trade through his connection to Bunce Island in Sierra Leone He then gets sent to be our Ambassador to the Netherlands, but enroute his ship is captured by the British and he is thrown into the Tower of London. As it happened this fellow with whom he worked, Richard Oswald, was also a financial advisor to King George III and told him how to make his investments. So he was pleading for a special parole for this guy in the Tower of London. When it became time to actually negotiate a peace, the Treaty of Paris, between the United States and the British in Paris, who should be the negotiator for the British but the owner of Bunce Island in Sierra Leone, Richard Oswald. We sent who was it, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and who was it, Jefferson to negotiate? I don't know, the three of them. But there was a fourth, and do you know who the fourth was? Henry Laurens, our slave trader from Charleston who was the business partner of the British owner of Bunce Island. So what their contribution was when Henry Laurens was released was to ensure that the slave trade was protected through Bunce Island. And this eventually had influence on the way the American Constitution was developed in terms of the slave trade. So unlike other places where slaves were traded in the United States, this little island, where there are just ruins now in Sierra Leone, had some significance for our country beyond human beings being exported to the United States. So I am working very much with a Professor from James Madison University on raising money. We have been working on making this a World Cultural Heritage site because it is a fascinating place. You go there and the ruins are there. It is only about four miles long by about a mile wide. But the cannons are still half buried in the ground. You feel the solemnity and the horror of this place. In fact there was an article about this in the State Magazine because using DNA, we actually found a woman through tracing the records. I think they are in the New York Historical Society, we used some of the slave manifests, we were actually able to find a person in South Carolina to trace her ancestry all the way back to a young girl by the name of Priscilla who was put on a slave ship to South Carolina. So while I was there we had this big delegation including this descendant come back to Bunce Island. We had a major article in State Magazine about this visit. So that was another highlight of something that we had going on there as well.

We also resumed Fulbrighters teaching at the universities there, so there was a lot of work towards normalization. With respect to the university one of my priorities was the restoration of the John F. Kennedy Building at the Fourah Bay College, which was the first college in all of Africa to be established back I think it was 1827, by the London Missionary Society, a largely theological institution originally. But in the 1960's, as in many places in Africa, there was an

edifice established by AID in honor of our assassinated President. You will find a John F. Kennedy Hospital in Liberia and a John F. Kennedy Library at the University of Addis Ababa. If I can digress that is a very interesting one because Bobby Kennedy, the President's brother, laid the cornerstone but was subsequently assassinated. So to finally cut the ribbon on the building was Rose Kennedy. His mother came to Addis Ababa to open the building, and in the process also planted a Sequoia Tree on the grounds of the library. So I think that is probably the only Sequoia Tree growing on the African continent. So it is an interesting footnote.

Q: It is still a young one.

HULL: Yeah, it is a small one. It is tall but it is not all that tall. But that is just a fascinating footnote. This John F. Kennedy Building was there in Freetown. It was in very bad state of disrepair. The clock had been shot out by rebel soldiers using it for target practice. It was just a disgrace and it was named after President Kennedy. It had a personal connection to me because it was the first place where I went for training when I arrived in country as a Peace Corps Volunteer. It was at Fourah Bay College that I met my wife. So this particular building had some personal significance to me as well as some significance I felt for how our country appeared to Sierra Leonians. As it happened the entire university had been given an exterior facelift by the Chinese government which painted all the buildings, repaired all the windows, the exterior and so forth except for the John F. Kennedy Building which was seen as the American Building. Of course our Agency for International Development is no longer into capital intensive construction projects. So I promised the President I would find a way to restore this building. We had some experts sneak in if you will because it is not the kind of thing we would normally sanction. There might be asbestos tiles here from the 1960's and all sorts of complications. In the end because we had a very creative USAID contractor, we could put things like the Center for Gender Studies and the Center for Conflict Resolution Studies and so forth in the building. We were able to find ways to creatively use funds from USAID too. As I was leaving the country the project was being implemented and was soon finished to at least repaint the building and provide new desks and everything else and at least make the John F. Kennedy building look respectable once again. It was the most visible building in Freetown because it was the tallest. It sat on the mountaintop over Freetown. So looming over Freetown is this building, the John F. Kennedy building, the symbol of the United States.

Q: A greater result perhaps than the typical ambassador's Fund for Cultural Preservation which is of limited amount.

HULL: We did use that fund in Sierra Leone as well. As I was leaving we were also using it to preserve documents. There is a very difficult climate in Sierra Leone in terms of humidity and so forth. There are actually a lot of records for slave ships being kept, historical records in Sierra Leone, just all sorts of important documents that were at the university decaying. So we were trying to find money to preserve that. But we also used the money on Bunce Island. We got a preservation grant, a cultural preservation grant to do a cultural preservation study which was done by a leading anthropologist, architectural anthropologist who has written some superb books on El Amina Castle, which is his specialty, in Ghana. He came with a team from Syracuse University and did a study and a plan for us on how to preserve Bunce Island. It wasn't the first time it had been done. The U.S. Park Service had done it before the civil war. There has been

attention for a long time. But at least it gave us a fresh plan for moving forward.

Speaking of the Park Service, it reminds me of another interesting area we worked in was environmental protection particularly around Freetown where there had been so much deforestation. It meant that the watershed was disappearing for this growing city, and with all of the erosion that comes with deforestation, they simply weren't capturing water for the city. So we got the U.S. Forest Service to come out and start doing that, some planning with the Sierra Leonians on how to preserve the forest area which is ostensibly protected, but was being chopped down indiscriminately and used for charcoal.

Another good area was in our assistance for the military. I mentioned we had three military working on the British assistance team, but also we gave patrol boats to the navy, such as it was, of Sierra Leone so thy could intercept pirates, smugglers, illegal fishing and conduct some rescue missions. We had both the U.S. Navy and the Coast Guard involved to create some capability. We gave small patrol boats like our Coast Guard uses. It was in stark contrast to a larger patrol vessel that the Chinese gave at the same time. What was interesting was ours used outboard motors which were fairly fuel efficient. The Sierra Leonians could not afford the fuel to run the Chinese patrol boat. In both cases we had to provide extra money so they could have fuel both for the American boats and the Chinese. But for the Chinese it was a much larger investment. They were very frustrated with that contribution.

One other important aspect of military assistance. Because Sierra Leone was not a focus country to receive assistance through our PEPFAR program to combat HIV Aids, we got our money through the Department of Defense. For the Sierra Leone military to create awareness within their own military of HIV aids. But to be effective it meant you had to educate not only the military but the public at large. We did some very creative things, such as we had a popular Sierra Leonean singer, a musician named Steady Bongo, who went around the country and gave about 15 concerts every year on songs and themes about HIV aids and protected sex and handing out condoms and what have you. These were just a huge success. Unfortunately at the conclusion of my tour of duty the money dried up as PEPFAR tried to recapture money from the Department of Defense. But while it lasted the President would come to the concerts, the Ministers, all sorts of people would come, the general public. These were all exciting and fun events. There were activities in terms of establishing HIV clinics and testing centers in conjunction with this, so we were able to make some progress creatively using Defense Department money. This didn't start with me; it started with my predecessor, but it was a very positive aspect of what we did in Sierra Leone as well.

Q: OK, we are on our eighth segment of this segment. Ambassador Hull we are picking up from last night. It is now February 4. What are some of the other things that come to mind about your tour in Sierra Leone?

HULL: Well there were just so many dimensions to what we were trying to do with very few resources in the country. I mentioned earlier one of our efforts was deforestation and protection of the watershed around Freetown. What was fascinating out in the same forest reserve was a chimpanzee sanctuary that liberated adopted chimpanzees and rehabilitated them. We were able to, again an initiative begun before I got to post but completed while I was there, build fences

and so forth around the facility and really to work to have it recognized. So much so that on the anniversary of this chimpanzee reserve, we were able to get the President and the Government Ministers to come up and see the chimps.

Q: Rehabilitate them in what sense.

HULL: Well they had been adopted.

Q: Lost their ability to live in the wild.

HULL: Or they had been taken away from their parents. Yes, but while I was there there was the great escape. The very first chimp to be there was a fellow by the name of Bruno. The fellow who started the chimpanzee reserve had Bruno as a pet but then he realized it was wrong to have chimps as pets and they should be left in the wild. So he used Bruno to start this chimpanzee reserve. But unfortunately one day the caretaker left the door open and Bruno had the intelligence to lead an escape of several chimps. Bruno was notable because when you visited the preserve and walked through it, there were probably 60 or 70 chimps there; Bruno was a guy that probably could have been a fast ball pitcher for the New York Yankees. He would throw rocks at the visitors. But finally one day Bruno made his great escape and led a number of other chimps with him. Eventually most were recaptured, but Bruno has never been captured. A legend much like the fellow who,

Q: Alcatraz.

HULL: Who jumped out of the plane with all the money [D. B. Cooper]. Anyway Bruno has become a legend. They actually killed one person as they were making their escape. Some visitor who was coming in a taxi. He reached into the taxi and killed the taxi driver.

Q: The chimps killed the taxi driver.

HULL: Yeah, and traumatized the Americans who were coming to visit the chimps. In any case Bruno the chimp is still on the loose after four years or so in Sierra Leone.

Q: Is there a bounty for someone who brings in him alive.

HULL: Maybe. I don't think they want him captured. He seems to have readapted to the wild and that was the purpose.

Q: All kidding aside, he led an escape. I really seem to go back to what was the benefit of having them in, I won't say captivity, but in a controlled environment?

HULL: Well, one of the things was to see if you could rehabilitate them to the point where they could be reintroduced into the wild. While Bruno was the oldest and closest friend of the fellow who started the reserve, nevertheless…

Q: It was a temporary friendship.

HULL: Well I think it still is a friendship. I think he has always felt good that Bruno has his freedom. He is back where he belongs out in the wild. But we have very few forest reserves, natural tropical forest, old tropical forest between Sierra Leone and Liberia. So part of the chimp preservation effort went far beyond that to try to give incentives to farmers not to destroy the habitat of the chimps which also had environmental importance for production of oxygen and all sorts of other good things that tropical rain forests do for us.

Q: Part of the point were chimps being hunted and killed? Is that why?

HULL: Oh, they were being hunted and killed or hunted and sold as pets. But chimps are part of the ecology of tropical areas.

Q: Not to mention they are our closest cousins.

HULL: Well all too close. If they could have had a baseball team, Bruno would have been great. Anyway that was one thing we always did, but it was always a lot of fun. It was kind of funny, my brother-in-law went back to Sierra Leone, not at my encouragement, but he went there with part of some sort of medical mission. He saw my name two places. One of course was on the plaque of the new American Embassy Building, but the other was on the wall of the chimpanzee preserve for my commitment to helping these people.

Q: Can you say you were named after a chimp or a chimp was named after you?

HULL: Well I think probably chimps would be more inspired to be named after me. But anyway there were various activities like that, and I just wanted to note them. And also I mentioned earlier my effort to get around to all of the districts of the country which I thought was important to show that I was the Ambassador to every place in Sierra Leone. Particularly when I went back, it was several months before I returned to my Peace Corps village because there were some prominent politicians from my former village, and I did not want an identification that I was the Ambassador to that village or to that part of the country. So I very conscientiously went to other parts of the country first. There was good cause to go because we had a number of ambassadorial self-help projects throughout the country that were doing good work. One of the most interesting ones I thought was an effort we cooperated in to try to end the practice of female genital mutilation. One of the obstacles to ending that practice aside from the cultural issues were economic issues of the women who did the surgery in very unsanitary conditions, to circumcise women in the bush as part of secret society rituals, initiation to adulthood and initiation to the society. What we did as part of the self help project, was to provide tools to the women so they could farm with the equipment, so she would have a different source of income and would lay down their knives.

Q: You mean the women whose sole income was they performed this thing.

HULL: Yes. So there was a need. This was an economic incentive not to continue the practice. But if you could get a local chief to support the idea that this was a practice that should be ended, if you had that support, you could then do an intervention to help these women have an

alternative form of income.

Q: You mentioned yesterday that the reaction to the idea of ending this practice was mixed. So is this a personal crusade? Did you have allies in this?

HULL: Well there were some. I mean this was one up-country area away from the capital city. I remember going to one meeting where hundreds of people came because the American Ambassador came to show his support for this effort. There were many women wedded to tradition who felt that an uncircumcised daughter would never be marriageable. If you were not marriageable how would you survive and so forth. So this was a practice that had a lot of support even though there would be many infections and deaths among young girls because of the conditions under which this took place, plus the potential for HIV/Aids transmission as well through the sharing of knives for multiple operations, very unsanitary. As I said earlier there were those who took the approach that if we can't defeat the practice, then at least we can make the conditions under which this takes place healthier.

Q: So did the idea catch on?

HULL: I think the jury is still out on that very much. I have seen this throughout Africa of course. Somalia was a place where they practiced extreme versions of female circumcision. It is a major issue in Africa and it is one of those aspects that reminds us that tradition still has a very strong hold on the continent. One of the things I think we were going to discuss was the role of chiefs and the local government.

Q: Absolutely. There are those, there is a local scholar who maintains, thinks that he demonstrates that the two systems can and should coexist.

HULL: I think they can coexist. I think it has been a mistake not to pay more attention to the chiefs. On the other hand we have to be careful not to ennoble the chiefs as an institution that is a model for good governance in Africa. Many chiefs have been very abusive of their positions of power as have ordinary politicians. But it is a structure that is a great comfort to people. I was struck that one of the causes of civil war in Sierra Leone was the frustration of young people with the authoritarianism of traditional rulers in the country who told them whom to marry, basically told them where they could farm, what they could do, and young people had a different vision of their future. But at the same time they didn't have very many educational opportunities or economic opportunities, so some of them ended up being rebels. When the war ended and many chiefs had been attacked and efforts were made to kill the chiefs, the institution of the chieftaincy survived and perhaps was strengthened by the fact that ordinary rural Sierra Leoneans, when they needed a sense of security, turned to their traditional institutions of governance, meaning the chiefs, who had their own little police forces, their own little jails and so forth. Now there is still great frustration with chiefs who give the best land, farming land, to their strongest allies. There is a clique always of members of ruling families who are more advantaged than other people, but the reality is that it exists. I think very under analyzed situation and maybe even unique to Sierra Leone, but I don't think so, is the relationship between the traditional elite and the modern political elite in the country, because they are often from the same families. Dating back to colonial times the children of chiefs, particularly the sons of

chiefs, were educationally advantaged and sort of fast tracked for future leadership roles through which they would support the colonial rule. Although many years have passed, I think it is still the case that most people who were advantaged through that system continue to ensure that their own children are advantaged in terms of opportunities they might have.

Q: So there is overlap.

HULL: A great deal of overlap, and we have talked about the artificial boundaries that have created African countries, but I also feel the entire concept of the modern nation state is something that is entirely alien to Africa which mainly dealt in terms of ethnic groups and local governance historically. But the global system requires nation states, if we can use that term because in many places people don't think of themselves as one nation. But in any case those states cannot be allowed to fail because it threatens a system the world created beginning with the Treaty of Westphalia back in 1648 of how the world is structured. But at the same time it is very superficial especially to rural Africans for whom their very centralized government is very far away and seemingly does nothing for them, and what is relevant to them is their chief at the local level. Therefore, we do have this new focus on trying to bring government closer to people to make it relevant. We are going through a period as this happens of how you make local councils effective and independent of the chiefs and at the same time not alienate the chiefs to make them supporters and make them relevant.

Q: It is possible that in some countries they have worked out the chief does this type of activity, consensus building, resolution of conflicts, where the local authorities in the modern sense does delivery of infrastructure, maybe judicial. Anyway what do you say of the following statement. Traditional, village governance had a certain utility at that level but is very difficult in leaping to the next level of the national state.

HULL: I think there is truth to that because again another cause of the war in Sierra Leone in my view was the lack of access to justice. Many people, young women in particular but young men as well, felt that in the traditional tribal courts controlled by the chief that they did not have true access to justice. In fact there is an interesting situation in American law students coming over to intern by working with NGOs that go out to villages to provide some sort of legal representation to women. I think if this institution is going to be perpetuated, and I think there is some value to it, then its standards have to be raised. There has to be some sort of training for chiefs. Much as we train people to be better leaders in the West, whether in business or in government, there needs to be some re-orientation of chiefs as to what a chief is supposed to be and what represents an abuse of power, because that abuse of power is what leads to alienation and ultimately conflict.

Q: Do you think that training might come from their own compatriots rather than outsiders?

HULL: It might if you had those standards respected by the people providing the training. But there is almost a symbiotic relationship I think between the traditional leaders and the modern leaders. They really do feed off each other. They look after each other.

Q: So symbiotic in a sense that does not help society.

HULL: Right.

Q: OK, dark views of leadership in its various forms.

HULL: Oh it is not dark. It is realistic.

Q: It is realistic. But of course a strain of hope.

HULL: Well of course, as you know, we have gone through a period, particularly the decades from independence up to the end of Cold War, where there was very little hope. Very few African leaders have left office when they were supposed to. They abused their positions, and when you got to that point there were people who were so frustrated with all the criticism they, themselves criticized what was known as Afro-pessimism. Then there those who called for Afro-optimism. It seems to me that what we always need is Afro-Realism.

Q: A good sound byte. Well I want to move onto some general questions about the whole career, but you may have more comments about Sierra Leone.

HULL: No, not really. I am enthusiastic that they can do well but experience tells us when we deal with African countries, unfortunately all our optimism has to be qualified by a certain amount of caution.

Q: Like the stock market at its most volatile behavior. Sometimes today's success becomes tomorrow's failure and vice versa.

HULL: And sometimes the situations that look the most promising or most stable in point of fact have undercurrents of instability that we as westerners do not necessarily see.

Q: Thinking back to your FSN's prophetic remark when you left Somalia might be an example of what you are saying.

HULL: Absolutely.

Q: I want to ask about two or three things just in general about the whole tableau. I will mention them now and take them one at a time and go in whatever direction you want. First of all you had a wonderful anecdote about a person of high rank who sought political asylum in the U.S. I mean logically they were asking for asylum against themselves. Secondly you made some comments yesterday off the mic on how the Ambassador divides authority and the activities in the embassy between the Ambassador doing certain things and the rest of the staff doing other things. How about the anecdote about political asylum because it is such a juicy one?

HULL: I think let me talk first about the Ambassador and the role in the embassy. It is astounding to me that there are so many Ambassadors, and it is still a minority, but there is a significant number of people who are very poor managers, especially managers of people, which in a small organization, such as Embassies in Africa predominately are, even in the larger

embassies, you get people who are remarkably inept at looking after and managing and inspiring their own employees. They want to micromanage or they show inappropriate behavior such as yelling and screaming and all sorts of things. It makes you wonder what kind of power has gone to people's heads in terms that their image of an Ambassador is one that sometimes seems like it is out of the 19th century instead of the 21st century. One conclusion that I have come to is that public diplomacy officers who worked particularly for USIA before the merger with State Department are people who are well suited to be ambassadors because they had to manage, as Public Affairs Officers, many operations in which they got a lot of experience managing budgets. They weren't just doing their public diplomacy work. They were managing people, and they had a lot of experience. Very unlike reporting officers in the political and economic cones who would simply come up with a very, in many cases, a very narrow vision of their work and who were then suddenly asked to be managers of people and resources. Also the public diplomacy officer, Public Affairs Officer had to work with everybody in the embassy to take maximum advantage of them to get their input for cultural exchange nominations, to maximize publicity of their public activities, and what have you. So public diplomacy people I think, had a broader institutional experience and a broader managerial experience that may better qualify them. I think that it is unfortunate in the days of USIA so few Public Affairs Officers, because we were an independent agency, so few became Ambassadors, because I think there were a number of people who would have made superb Ambassadors.

Q: What principles should an ambassador go by in order to have a harmonious productive embassy?

HULL: Well I think some of the practices, I mean I haven't sat down and given this deep thought, but certainly I always felt it was important to empower the people who work for you, allow them to make mistakes, provided they were not fatal mistakes, but allow them at least one or two mistakes. If they learned from those mistakes that was terrific. If they didn't, then of course you had to take more corrective action, but too many people, I think, tried to micromanage rather than to work with their staff with shared vision, shared goals, and to then empower the people to go out and do their jobs while supervising and monitoring what they do. I think it is very important for morale for people to feel a professional satisfaction from the independence they get from doing their jobs.

Q: Why, just going on the bad ones for a minute, what motivates them? Is it fear, insecurity, lack of experience?

HULL: I am sure it is individualized, but I think there is an ego issue where this authority, this image goes to one's head because you are the personal representative of the President of the United States of America, allegedly with all the authorities that go with that position, although in fact you are told what to do by Washington generally. I think one of the great things about working in Africa is that quite often you are in countries that are low priority for people in Washington, and therefore the Ambassador had considerable independence of action on how to implement and pursue American interests in a particular country. Obviously you have to be judicious about what you do, but also you are empowered as much as you want to empower your own employees to do what makes sense with the resources that you have. The other thing a good Ambassador has to be able to do is recognize the reality of resources and where your resources

are. Increasingly in recent years they have been on the Department of Defense side, with the Defense Attachés side of the shop. But how do you use those so they support wider interests. I mentioned the patrol boats that we gave to the Sierra Leonean navy. At one level it was to strengthen their military capacity, but at another level it was to strengthen the rule of law capacity of the country in terms of being able to interdict illegal activities, or the HIV activities through the military because we had no other resources. But we ensured that the message as it went to the military was also going to a wider public. So you have to identify where your resources are and take advantage of them and try to maximize them.

Q: In a situation of political strife or rivalry what is the proper role of an ambassador versus the role of subordinates?

HULL: Political strife within an embassy?

Q: No, in a country. You mentioned yesterday about dealing with chiefs rather than….

HULL: Oh sure. I don't think it is just political strife. You are the Ambassador to the Government of the country, so whether you like that Government, whether you like that leader or not, you have no alternative but to deal with that leader. That does not prevent you from communicating dissatisfaction with the way a country is managed. But at the same time you have to be careful not to engage too deeply in the internal affairs of a country. Yes, you can support the principles of human rights and what have you, but once you start getting identified with one political party or another, whether it is the people in power or the people out of power, you undercut your neutrality. Therefore, I think it is important to engage with politicians throughout the political spectrum, but an Ambassador is a little bit more removed from what individuals can do. One thing I have always liked about the Foreign Service working in Africa is junior officers and mid-level officers in the Foreign Service in Africa interact with higher level personnel. Their jobs are broader, less narrow than in a larger embassy in a place like Rome for example. Your first tour officer might very well be out meeting with a Government Minister, and I always said, that as a public affairs, as a public diplomacy officer, my most interesting and exciting tours were at the beginning where I could be out at the grass roots, meeting the musicians and meeting the professors and so forth. Whereas when I was a PAO, I was more likely to be meeting with the editors rather than with the reporters, with the university presidents rather than with the professors. So the grass roots of our work in public diplomacy is always extremely interesting. I think you can take that a step further to say when you are a junior political officer in Africa you can go out and meet all sorts of interesting people to whom as an Ambassador it might be inappropriate for you to be getting that close.

Q: Is this different from the model let's say of Eastern Europe 1980's dealing with dissidents which all embassies did. Are you saying this is just a different paradigm?

HULL: Well I think in that situation, having lived through it, you wanted to have your Ambassador to have contact with the dissidents because that contact symbolized our opposition to totalitarianism. But at the same time you would have to interact with those governing, with the President of the country and everybody else on a Government to Government level. But you had to find a ways to signal your disapproval to the ways a country is being governed. I think one of

the things we commonly do in Africa is show American Ambassador support for and involvement with civil society organizations as a neutral force, because political parties as an institution are generally corrupted; whether they are in power or out of power.

Q: So Ambassadors should not censor or limit their contacts with people who are not obedient to the regime.

HULL: Oh absolutely not, but I do think ambassadors have to be careful to understand whom they are dealing with so they don't suffer the pitfall of being exploited. I think you have to go in with open eyes, that just as you are trying to send a message by engaging with certain people, they are tying to use you as well. And maybe that is your objective to give them the opportunity to use you to signal the Americans support for what they do. But if you extend, you can have your reporting officers engaging with all sorts of people. Sometimes governments will complain about that, and the job of the Ambassador is to defend our right to talk to anyone in the country, but at the same time the Ambassador has to be a bit removed from how much a person engages. I certainly, as Ambassador, engaged at the grass roots. Now I engaged with the people, for example, who were defending women's rights, the need for inheritance rights or who opposed female mutilations, so there was a signal there that was also a political signal. Those who were opposing female genital mutilation, FGM as it was known, they were taking personal risks in the society. By the American ambassador associating with that person you hoped that would reduce the risk to show there was world attention to what was going on. So there were those types of situations. The same with journalists; American ambassadors should defend freedom of the press, freedom of speech, what have you, which is always under pressure.

Q: Did you find in Sierra Leone a healthy number of people taking personal risks for freedom of expression, greater inheritance rights.

HULL: Oh yes.

Q: This risks being socialization.

HULL: Well, it is not just being isolated or ostracized. It is even at times a fear of people might get beaten up or what have you. In a society that can be very volatile, some people see the solution through physical action, attacks on people.

Q: So your last tour, Sierra Leone, your tour as ambassador from 2004 to 2007, looking back. No first I insist on this lively anecdote you told off the mic about a person asking for political asylum against himself.

HULL: Well there is always a certain problem that I think that people in Embassies have with political asylum in the United States. Obviously if people need political asylum, they should have political asylum. But in some cases people only need political asylum because they asked for political asylum. A good example was the head of Parliament in Ethiopia, who had gone to a conference in the Caribbean and was transiting an American airport on the way home when she decided she would ask for political asylum. One could logically ask how could the head of Parliament need political asylum since she was from the ruling party and had been in that

position for a decade or so. Furthermore the country was about to replace the incumbent president of the country, a largely protocol titular type position with a new person, and the new person was likely to be she. It just seemed to be very illogical. Well there were personal reasons involved why she left her family behind. There were other reasons why she decided why she wanted to go and stay in the United States. Well this person ultimately sought and got political asylum, and was last seen being fired from her job working in the mini mart of a gas station in the Washington DC area after having been part of ruling elite. She was Oromo which was one of the minorities in Ethiopia, and when she sought asylum she said, "I support the Oromo Liberation Front." So by simply announcing her support for the Oromo Liberation Front she needed political asylum.

Q: Well we are now on the home stretch unless you have something more to say about the MP who got fired from her gas station job.

HULL: No, it is just interesting that the act of proclaiming political asylum itself was what prompted the need for political asylum in the country. Then that of course led to another anecdote which was the person who actually became the President of the country, a man. The president had to be somebody who was not a political threat to the Prime Minister of the country in an odd sort of way. They ultimately selected an elderly gentleman, a very nice man, who ran an environmental NGO and who had been a pilot in Haile Selassie's air force and so on. A wonderful person, but at the time he was selected to be the President, he was awaiting a scheduled interview for a green card to live in the United States with his wife and his children who were already living in Alexandria, Virginia. So we had to consult with the INS or its successor ICE to get some assurance that this application could be suspended and re-activated once he finished his term of office as President, so he could go live in the United States.

Q: In failed states or rickety unstable states, is there anyone in the elite who does not want to have a green card?

HULL: This is how I know the brain drain is always such a loss for Africa. It is always such a dilemma when we, for example, send people on Fulbright grants with the purpose of having them study in the United States so they can come back and help their own countries, but in many cases they are helping our country by staying. So it is an investment for America, and then you say well shouldn't the money be spent on Americans for scholarships. That is a whole other debate we shouldn't get into, but I think the brain drain has been just devastating. I think it is understandable because of the environment people have to work in in Africa, the low salaries, the limited professional opportunities, and just management styles of institutions. People find just so much more intellectual freedom in the United States and professional freedom as well as a more secure environment.

Q: Are we in fact hurting more than helping by providing alternatives to people to live and work here?

HULL: It is hard to say because what is the absorptive capacity of countries for some of these people who study abroad. It certainly helps the diversity of our country to have these people here and we welcome them, but at times a certain frustration that people go and they don't come back.

Q: The original wording of the Fulbright text was mutual understanding. That is in the law and it doesn't, the emphasis was not intended to be on enriching the U.S. but creating understanding. So have we gone astray from the original Fulbright concept?

HULL: Well I think it is just reality, economic and political reality in the world. I always try and put myself in the other person's shoes. If I was an African going off to the United States often with every intention of coming back and helping my country but facing the reality of what can I do when I come back. And most people come back, at least those on official exchanges. I don't want to suggest that they don't. But there has been an enormous loss of talent from Africa to the Untied States and other countries that I think is very regrettable because I think Africa might be a better continent if they still had these very capable people.

End of reader