

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Foreign Service Spouse Series

CAROLINE SUE DILLON

Interviewed by: Ruth Kahn
Initial interview date: October 29, 1990

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Mrs. Dillon accompanied her husband, Ambassador Robert S. Dillon, on his State Department Foreign Service assignments in the United States and abroad

Background

Maiden name: Caroline Sue Burch
Born in New York City
Education: Duke University; George Washington University; University of Virginia
Profession: Teacher
Married Robert S. Dillon in 1951
Children

General Comments

Role of Foreign Service wives at post
Wives' efficiency reports
Children's adaptation to frequent moves
Assessment of children's benefits from Foreign Service life
Children's schooling in US and abroad
Pro's and con's of separation

Posts of Assignment

Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela	1956-1958
Living conditions	
Health problems	
Environment	
Children	
Unhelpful boss	
Efficiency report on wives	
Role of wives at post	
Oil production	
Anti Perez Jimenez revolution	
Government	
Schooling	

Social life	
Salt mining	
Recreation	
Snakes	
Tidal wave	
Consular services	
Princeton University	1958-1959
Husband's Economics studies	
Washington, DC	1959-1960
Husband's Turkish language studies	
Izmir, Turkey	1960-1961
Schooling	
US military	
Housing	
Environment	
Recreation	
Perceived role of Foreign Service wife	
Ankara, Turkey	1962-1966
Kindergarten teacher at American School	
Schooling	
Environment	
President, Turkish-American Wives Cultural Society	
Representation responsibilities	
President Kennedy assassination	
Social life	
Household help	
Cyprus crisis	
"The Johnson Letter"	
Anti-Americanism	
Local press	
Washington, DC	1966-1970
Study for teacher's certificate	
Housing and amenities	
Schooling	
Effect of local environment on children	
George Bush	
Involvement in local activities	
Rome, Italy: NATO Defense College	1970
Istanbul, Turkey	1970-1971

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terrorism Jordan's "Black September" Leila Khalid plane hijacking Communist group Dev Genc <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kidnapping of Israeli Consul General Elran Threats against Americans Children's education Environment Drugs and hashish Robert College Children's environment 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Washington, DC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Terrorist activity worldwide 	1971-1974
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kissinger's "Glop" assignment policy Teacher, International School Children Communist terrorist groups Family Environment Japanese terrorist group attack <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hostage taking <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hostage Consul Bob Stebbins Mohammed Ali visit Vice President Rockefeller visit Enjoyment Living conditions Monkeys 	1974-1977
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ankara, Turkey <ul style="list-style-type: none"> English Teacher, Turkish-American Association and dependents school Children's schooling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> US Air Force School Terrorist group activities Security precautions Cappadocia visits Environment Turkish language facility 	1977-1980
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cairo, Egypt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crowded environment Study of Islamic history English teacher, Cairo American College Visitors, visitors, visitors 	1980-1981

President and Mrs. Sadat
Embassy women's group
US-Egyptian relations
USAID Mission
Islamic Fundamentalist
Son Edward's schooling

Beirut, Lebanon

1981-1984

(Wife of US Ambassador)

Devastation
Armored convoys
Tense environment
Household help
Phil Habib and Maury Draper mission
Israeli invasion
Evacuation and return
The Lebanese
Cedars of Lebanon visit
Syrian army
Children's reaction to fighting and danger
Shelling and bombing
Bashir Gemayel
 Assassination
 Remembrance
 Tribute
Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camp massacre
Embassy blown up by car bomb
 62 deaths
 Effect on survivors
Death of friend Bonnie Pugh
Lebanese public
Marine guards
"Bud" McFarlane
Marine barracks bombing
Repeated shelling
Embassy Residence as target
Secretary of State Schultz visit
 Drawing fire on Residence
Husband as target
Frustrations
Local recreational trips
Ashrafiyah bombardment
Russian shells
Lebanese war experience
Lebanese public resilience
Lebanese reaction to Sadat's death

Fred Hoff, Military Attaché
Kataeb (Political Party) headquarters bombed

INTERVIEW

Q: I am Ruth Kahn and I'm recording Sue Dillon, on Oct. 29, 1990. She has spent many years with her husband, Robert S. Dillon, as spouse of a Foreign Service Officer. Sue, why don't you give me your overall idea of what your life in the Foreign Service -- the number of years, just a few general details.

DILLON: Bob joined the Foreign Service in 1956 when we had three tiny children. We went to Venezuela for the first post. Later on he decided to become a specialist in Turkish affairs, and he went to language training and to Princeton to study economics, and in 1960 we went off to Turkey. We were two years in Venezuela, then to Princeton for economic training for a year, full-time in Turkish language training for one year, then six years beginning in 1960 in Turkey.

Then we came back to Washington for four years. Bob worked in Personnel and also up on the 7th floor [Secretariat] for -- I'll find out what his name was, an important Russian expert. Then we went again to Turkey for a year, to Istanbul. Bob was brought back to be chief of the Turkish Desk. We stayed in the States for three years, then went to Malaysia for three years. We went there because Secretary of State Kissinger had decided that there should be something which later was called "[inaudible]." You shouldn't go to an area that you know anything about because a specialist could take it over, and he didn't like that. So he was switching everybody around. We got to go to Malaysia and lived for three beautiful years in Kuala Lumpur because we didn't know anything about Malaysia. (laughter) Then they needed us back in Turkey, so after Malaysia we went for three years, in Ankara again. Then we went for one year to Egypt. Then Bob was asked to be Ambassador to Lebanon and we were there for two and a half years. After that -- Bob had gotten interested in the Palestinians and he got a job a job in Vienna with UNWRA [United Nations Works and Relief Agency] dealing with Palestinian refugees. We were there, on loan to the UN, when Bob decided to retire from the Foreign Service, which he did in 1987. We came back to the States in '88 and he got a job as president of Amideast.

Q: He had somewhat more than a 30-year career by now, right?

DILLON: Yes. (interview breaks here, resumes on another day)

Q: Today is February 9, 1991 and we're going to continue interviewing you about your life in the Foreign Service with your husband Bob. In light of our conversation the last time, it's probably difficult to talk about 32 years in an hour, so I suggested to you last

time that we might begin in segments of, say, five years, and I believe we agreed to talk about your first five years in the Foreign Service, if you'd like to do that today?

DILLON: Fine.

Q: One of the things I'm interested in knowing more about is, what was it really like to go to a country as a mother of three little children, which you were when Bob entered the Foreign Service? How old were the children?

DILLON: Ten months, two, and three. Of all the people who were sent to overseas posts from Bob's February class, which was combined with the March class because one was small, only three families had children, and those three families were sent to the most-hardship posts. I think the idea was that bachelors and people newly married without children would be bored at these hardship posts and they should go to Paris and Rome and such places. And they all did, but we went to Porta La Cruz, Venezuela, which nobody knew even where it was. I had to get out a map to find out: it was an oil pipeline terminus in eastern Venezuela.

When we read the post report, we couldn't believe it. They did use to exaggerate a bit, but open sewers and people dying left and right of all sorts of diseases was rather frightening, so I went down there with the idea of trying to keep the children healthy.

Q: Let me interrupt a bit here: in order to go down there, what sorts of things did you have to do in the U.S. before you went to Venezuela?

DILLON: We had to borrow \$5,000, which was a lot of money then, because we had to take a hot water heater and of course a car, and stow everything that you can imagine we had to buy and take with us. Then Bob had to go ahead and try to find a place for us to live.

Q: What sort of health precautions did you have to take in terms of your three little children?

DILLON: Just the regular shots that the Service gives. Bob went ahead and tried to find a place for us to live. Meanwhile, for about two months we had to stay with in-laws until he succeeded. Then we went down there, the worst trip we've ever had because owing to a time change we missed the plane out of New York and had to spend the night there, then go ahead. And of course when we arrived in Caracas nobody met us because Bob had never got the message the airline had supposedly sent. So he was still waiting somewhere when we arrived and were sent on to Porta La Cruz. Nobody met us there.

Q: Let me interrupt you again: What did you do with three little children in the Caracas airport?

DILLON: Uh, nothing. Just waited for the next plane that would go to Porta La Cruz. It was an overnight plane, and we'd already been up two nights because we'd missed

connections the first night and sat around in the airport trying to find a place to stay. All day long we had to wait for the next plane, which was supposed to leave at 11 p.m. That was an overnight flight, so we flew down overnight and arrived in the morning. I don't remember how long we waited.

Q: Tell me what the children were like? This is sort of unfair but what can you remember about them?

DILLON: The little girl, the oldest, was very grown-up for her age, she'd never been even like a baby. I remember that she had packed her own bag -- she could have packed all of our bags, she seemed to know what she was doing. The second child, a boy, Robert, was [tired] of everything, because I had to carry the baby, and he kept crying -- "Put him down and pick me up!"

Q: Who helped you put the baby down and pick him up?

DILLON: Nobody helped but the oldest child, the little girl.

Q: So your biggest help with three children was the three-year-old. Well, that's reasonable.

DILLON: Anyway, of course it was a mistake to try to go down there -- try to go up to New York, try to catch the plane, try to do all these things without any help. But I thought, well, it's like going to the dentist, like tomorrow it'll be over and I'm sure it'll turn out all right. But it really didn't turn out all right. That was the worst thing that happened to us in the Foreign Service.

Q: So how did it turn out, if not all right?

DILLON: It turned out that we did arrive in Venezuela, we did make our way to Porta La Cruz, we did get to the office, and the people there didn't know who we were, said Bob was still back in the airport in Caracas. Rosario, someone who worked in the office, took us home with her to wait. I remember I had promised myself I would never let my children get in a situation where there were lots of flies all over them. But it was impossible because nobody had screens. So there were flies all over the food, all over the children, and I guess they carry diseases, because the children were sick and did catch amoebic dysentery when we were in Venezuela and were sick the whole year when we came back to the States. So I guess some of the health hazards did show up.

Q: If you were going to tell somebody how you think it ought to have been and what your expectations were as you started out, what were they?

DILLON: I didn't have any expectations. I didn't think anybody should help us, I didn't think the situation should be different. It's only in looking back that I see it was wrong to send somebody with three little children to an unhealthy post.

Q: So you were thinking this was "the American way"?

DILLON: I just wasn't questioning anything.

Q: You saw this more as your duty in being a good wife?

DILLON: No. A good mother.

Q: A good mother would do this for her children?

DILLON: Try to take care of them, try to protect them from whatever wasn't ...

Q: Did Rosario speak English?

DILLON: Yes.

Q: So that was comforting, to find somebody who spoke English.

DILLON: Oh, yes, she was a lovely person.

Q: So your experience in Venezuela covered two years. What sorts of important traumatic or cultural experiences or historical events -- how would you characterize life for an American mother? In this period you were 24, you had three little children, you're a college graduate, and you've come to a country where you -- did you speak the language then?

DILLON: A little. I never had any training in the Foreign Service, I never went to anything the Service ever offered, and they offered many interesting things. I had never been in position to take advantage of any of those. In those days, the Foreign Service did not offer language training, they'd stopped it.

Q: But how would you characterize yourself at age 24 going off to Venezuela? Can you remember what you thought about, or what you felt like?

DILLON: I just took everything for granted, that this was going to happen, that we would do it, and everything would be fine, I didn't question anything, just go, and seriously determined to take care of the children. And I didn't think of it as an opportunity to travel abroad at all. I dreaded taking my little children out of the country. That was just what I did because I had three children and had a husband who'd gone into the Foreign Service. I didn't question it.

Q: Okay. If you were to describe yourself so someone else could draw a picture of you, and if you were to step back from yourself, what did you look like when you were 24 with three children? How would you describe yourself?

DILLON: I guess I was young-looking. (both laugh heartily) And I was young-looking

for my age, and I assume I was naive-looking and probably acting because I was always treated by older women as though I was younger than I was, as though I hadn't had enough experience.

Q: That had a certain utility, I suppose.

DILLON: I think I was just sort of average American-looking housewife with children.

Q: So, you would characterize yourself as the woman in the picture as perhaps drawn by the New England artist?

DILLON: The Good Housekeeping magazine person. The Ladies Home Journal magazine that would have articles about someone who had triplets one year, twins the next year, and twins the next year, and got along fine with no trouble at all.

Q: Okay, all right! Well, it sounds to me, Sue, that that must have been a really difficult experience, to take three little children to as many airports.

DILLON: Once I had arrived, I loved the beaches, they had beautiful deserted beaches. The opportunities in the water were lovely there. And the views were nice, and the Trinidadian influence with their music -- I enjoyed all that. I had a good time. I had a lot better time than my husband did. It was his first post in the Foreign Service and he had to prove himself. He had a very eccentric boss who was quite maladjusted in the Service, who distrusted and disliked foreigners, didn't speak any Spanish, and was a very difficult person for all the people in the Consulate to get along with.

He also wrote lies about people in their Efficiency Reports. He was eventually caught doing this and because of that some of the people who worked for him did better than they would have done otherwise because he tried to ruin the careers of the young FSO's working for him. He was a tyrant. He didn't influence my life because I didn't have to deal with him much. He had a nice life himself. He hated children and he told Bob he should get out of the Foreign Service, that he'd never be successful in it because he came in with three strikes against him -- the three children. It was a very disagreeable situation for Bob.

One of the things I was thinking about was the Inspectors we had -- we always had good Inspectors who wrote good things about us, positive things. Our Inspector in Venezuela was a Mr. Stebbins, a very nice person who came down and was quite shocked at the living conditions. He couldn't understand how we were cheerfully going through day by day there under such poor living conditions. We had very dangerous snakes in our house, the children were filled with mosquito bites, wild packs of dogs roamed in our back yard. We had a lot of difficult situations. He (she laughs) found it more difficult than we did because I guess we'd gotten used to it by then.

In old days in the Foreign Service they used to rate in our Efficiency Report opinions of the wife and how she was doing. I think that's been a loss to the Service. The new ...

Q: What sorts of things were written about you then?

DILLON: If you were doing a good job, they said so. When you're trying to help your husband and living in a situation where your part of his work, to get a pat on the back is very nice. Now that they can't mention wives at all any more, it's a shame that if you work real hard -- to try to do the entertaining, and with your husband to do all the contacts, and be a good representative of the United States in many different ways -- it's too bad they can't say so any more.

Q: It sounds to me like you felt at that time that you were fulfilling a particular role as a representative of the United States. Can you tell me more what that was like, how you viewed that? What did you think that you should be like if you were representing the U.S.? What sorts of things did you do because of that?

DILLON: Well, I think that in social situations, in places where there were Venezuelans or where we were invited by Venezuelans, someone who was perhaps normally shy or close-mouthed couldn't be. You have to walk up to these people and be outgoing and make conversation with people that you may not know what you have in common about. You felt that you were always working at that, helping your husband in his job and social contacts and being an example of what an American is down there.

We had a little swimming pool that we went to and there were a lot of Venezuelans there, and Venezuelans in a bowling group that I belonged to. Just everything you do you feel like you're a part of the job.

Q: You've mentioned going to parties and socializing. Were there other things that you did and that you felt you should do because you were this wife of an American Foreign Service Officer? And if so, what were they? The bowling group -- was that American, or Venezuelan?

DILLON: That was a mixed group -- South Americans, some Americans, lots of different Venezuelans. There were people who were there because their husbands had jobs in the oil business. But I always felt like part of the whole thing, part of the whole team.

Q: And you're saying that that feeling changed over time?

DILLON: No. My feeling didn't change over time but the pat on the back stopped being there any more after that rule. *(interview breaks here, resumes another day)*

Q: One of the things, relative to Venezuela, I thought you might want to share with us is were there any sorts of really unusual historical events that occurred when you were there, or unusual traumatic national events? Anything specific that you think would be useful for us to know?

DILLON: Well, yes. We were there during the revolution on January 23, 1958, when

Perez Jimenez was thrown out of the country. The chief of the security police lived down the hill from us. He was attacked and torn to pieces, if you can believe it. A lot of people who had been on the side of Perez Jimenez were just dead the next morning after the revolution.

Q: You mean you saw people dead?

DILLON: Yes, they were just killed, people went wild, going around, grabbing up the people who had imprisoned them and actually mobs ...

Q: What did that make you feel like if you were the mother of three children? Were you frightened?

DILLON: No. It wasn't directed towards us and couldn't be directed towards us.

Q: So you felt safe.

DILLON: Yes. That was the unpleasant part. The pleasant part was that one morning we woke up at five a.m. to hear bells chiming. All the church bells were ringing and that was a sign that the revolution had been a success. People were instantly released from the jails, or released themselves, I don't know which, and trucks were carrying them all over the city, cheering. People were coming out of their houses with big smiles on their faces, because Perez Jimenez had been a very bad dictator and they were glad of the change even though it meant some nasty violence in getting rid of his supporters. They were very happy about the change of government.

Q: So you had a sense that the society was a happier place now that gave you a certain sense of enjoyment as well.

DILLON: Oh yes. A rather thrilling feeling of freedom for the people. We had a maid, Ofelia, whose husband had been imprisoned. He was released and came home. That made it a little closer to us.

Q: I'm sure. Can you tell me a little bit about a day in the life of the mother of three children in the country of Venezuela?

DILLON: (after a pause) Well, I don't suppose it was much different from a day in the life in the United States. It was in the tropics, so the weather was always good. Everybody would get up and have breakfast and go to the store. Dale was in a little school, I guess I drove her there. Robert went to a kindergarten-type school. Then we would go the pool and swim. Probably we went out most nights. There was an amateur theater group that Bob got involved with there; I think they did "Bus Stop." Anyway, we had a lot of friends, there were a lot of young couples. We played bridge with some of the Venezuelans; and some Americans we knew were married to Venezuelans.

I guess we had an easier life in one respect: we all had maids. There were a lot of people

available to be maids, it was a very, very poor place. A mud hut town, actually. The first house we lived in overlooked salt flats. It was interesting to see them come and dig up the salt every day -- people putting the salt in buckets and transferring it to trucks. It was a very poor town. There were shanty houses with tin roofs like you've heard about, so there were lots of poor people who wanted to work any way they could. We had people to clean our houses and wash our dishes. It made things a little easier, we had more time to take the children to the swimming pool, go bowling at night, things like that. Just an ordinary life.

Q: The smile that you have when you recall this looks like it was a happy time. I mean, it looks to me, as you tell me, you find it pleasant memories even though there were frightening things.

DILLON: Well, it was rather sad that I should have so many happy memories when my husband doesn't have any pleasant memories.

Q: Because his life was very difficult.

DILLON: Yes. You would think that if he had a difficult office situation, I would have suffered too, but I didn't suffer from that. I was able to enjoy some of the nicer things while he was in the office.

Q: Is there anything else interesting you'd like to tell me about Venezuela?

DILLON: We had a boa constrictor right next to the car one day when we went out to get in the car.

Q: That's pretty interesting! What did you do?

DILLON: I couldn't believe my eyes. There was this enormous snake slithering sort of painfully, because it was such a big thing it didn't slither, actually it lumbered along, and it was right beside the car -- I think it was looking for water; it was during the dry season. I was carrying the baby and I guess Robert was coming along with me. We climbed on top of the car, which was right in front of us, and I called when I saw someone down the hill. The person came up and saw this enormous snake too, and he ran back to his house to get a camera to take a picture. The snake kept slowly just moving up the hill and through a kind of scrub brush in our area, and disappeared before he returned with his camera. That was kind of an exciting event.

We also had a rattlesnake in our dining room wrapped around a lattice-back chair. We had a lot of rattlesnake stories. And cockroach stories were pretty fantastic. In the case of the rattlesnake, the maid picked up the chair by the other leg and carried it out. The snakes would come at night to warm themselves on the sidewalk behind our house. They were in our washing machines too. [We] were very afraid of snakes, also.

Q: Did you have any classes in the State Department on how to deal with snakes?

DILLON: I don't think they gave those classes. (both laugh) One of the reasons we were so happy to go to Turkey was there weren't any snakes in Turkey. Not any poisonous snakes.

Q: Did you have any interesting heads of states or celebrities or people like that came to visit you in Venezuela?

DILLON: Richard Nixon came when we were there but he was in Caracas.

Q: Were there any kinds of natural disasters -- floods, fires, that sort of thing that happened when you were there?

DILLON: No.

Q: But you look back on that as a very memorable, interesting and fun time of your life, even though you suffered for your husband. Is that accurate?

DILLON: Except for the amoebic dysentery, yes.

Q: How did you find it, what did you do about it?

DILLON: Well, our middle child Robert was very ill when we were there. He kept getting strep throats and very high fevers. One time when he had a very high fever and we took him to the doctor, he said he was severely anemic and needed liver shots, also that he should have some tests. That's when we found that he had amoebic dysentery, and I had it too. And we took some medicine that had some poison in it. I got well but I don't think Robert ever did, because he was left very nervous, he's been nervous all his life; kind of a hyperactivity he didn't have before; some of the problems with the liver.

Q: You've had some thoughts since about what you think was in the medicine that you [took].

DILLON: Arsenic.

Q: And then you said there was an event that you ...

DILLON: I forgot about the tidal wave when we were there. All of a sudden it came in one night and swept back all the houses in three blocks -- dragged out the furniture, ruined the houses. I had never heard of a tidal wave before, didn't know what they were. We lived high on a hill but friends who lived lower down, near the beach area, were hit by the tidal wave. I didn't hear of any injuries to people, they could see the wave coming and left their houses. It was interesting to see how far back such a wave can go, the strength it has in pulling everything out.

Q: Then the city you were in was beside the ocean?

DILLON: Oh yes. It was a small oil-shipping port town, not really a city, just a collection of mud huts called a "mud hut town." Most of the oil people had camps.

Q: Have you ever been back to Venezuela?

DILLON: No. There's no longer any complement there, they scrapped it. But there were a lot of U.S. citizens there who needed that post. Some of these citizens were in jail, and [arrested] from time to time, and some had been involved in accidents and needed someone to help them. At that time there was a need for a consulate. I suppose everybody has to go up to Caracas now.

Q: Today, July 6, 1991, Sue Dillon, wife of Robert F. Dillon, is going to speak about some of her experiences in Izmir. Could you tell us the dates you spent there and what you would like to talk about today? Turkey was the country that ultimately became your husband's country of expertise.

DILLON: We were in turkey for ten years in toto but at this time we stayed six years -- two years in Izmir, four years in Ankara.

Q: How old were you in those years?

DILLON: 29 and 30, 31 and 32.

Q: If you were to look in the mirror and describe yourself, what would you say you looked like?

DILLON: I think I looked like a brown-eyed, brown-haired 30-year-old person. Probably a little too enthusiastic, fairly positive, worried about my children's adjustment in this foreign country. There were three when we arrived in Izmir, aged five, six and a half, and eight.

Q: What were their impressions of Izmir? What did they think about it?

DILLON: I only remember my impressions. I was very upset because they'd come from a nice neighborhood school and they had to go to school in a warehouse with no playground. The roads they had to cross to get there were pretty dangerous -- Robert got hit by a car twice. The youngest child, John, got to go to kindergarten in a private school -- in those days kindergarten didn't belong to the public schools and he got to go in a little bus, so he was safe. He just went along looking for people to play with.

We were in a Air Force dependents' school under Department of Defense. The teachers were very good in the school, I needn't have worried about that but the children had some adjustments in their classes. Dale, the oldest, a girl, did quite well, the boys did all right in the long run but they would have been much better off in a neighborhood school where they could meet people easily.

Q: You had to go quite a distance to this school?

DILLON: No, about six blocks.

Q: What was your living situation like?

DILLON: We were living on the second floor of an apartment building, the landlord above us, American military people below us. It wasn't a bad place, it was fairly nice; had enough room for all of us, at least. There was a vacant lot on either side where servicemen would come and relieve themselves against the wall -- (laughter) that was nothing. It was full of snails that stank. Johnnie would go out front with his little hat and holding his gun and ruffians would run down the street and knock him over and take his hat and his gun. The landlord's doorman would not allow anybody to come visit our children -- a lot of little things that weren't very nice for children growing up. The main bad thing was that there was no real playground, the only place they had to play was a public block where all little children went that was ringed by perverts, by people exposing themselves. Very hard to take.

Q: Here you're a young woman, your expectations are perhaps a bit -- how did the other American women like yourself respond to that sort of thing?

DILLON: That was a place where I learned not to look at men when I was passing them on the street. We grow up in a country where when you're walking down the street you usually look at people walking towards you but it's not a good idea in some countries to look at the men, they think you're in for trouble if you do. These were the bad things. Once we adjusted to things like that we didn't notice them any more and we started enjoying life, especially after we moved to Ankara.

Q: To return to Izmir a little bit, were there any really impressive events that occurred there? I've heard the city described as a very beautiful place in respect of trees. Is that correct?

DILLON: It's a pretty port. It's just a semi-important port, small. It's a nice place, has some nice beaches nearby. Not a very exciting place, closes up early in the evening. When we moved on to Ankara there were more people that we thought were interesting, we had more interesting associates there.

Q: In Izmir were you part of a small group at the Consulate?

DILLON: We got mixed up with the Vornova [phon.sp.] theater people and people from Vornova, which is a Levantine community, a lot of people with British, French, Spanish passports, whose families had lived in Turkey for many years. Through them Bob was quite active in the theater there. He also started mountain climbing through those people. They were pretty decadent families, out of power; Turkey was beginning to take over its own industries and some of these old families who had run things for [inaudible] just in

those years. Now they're all Turkish-owned.

Q: Did these people know they were on the way out at that time?

DILLON: Yes.

Q: Did any really significant historical events occur during the time you were in Izmir, important in its history?

DILLON: None except for the return of the last Turkish troops who had been in the Korean War. I want to talk about the situation with wives at the time. During our six years in Turkey, all the wives were acting like old Foreign Service wives had. Which means that the younger ones would be helping the older ones and everybody would be acting in a very proper way about everything. They almost dedicated their lives to the Foreign Service.

There were the two types -- mine, which was sort of a naive, enthusiastic, be a good little girl and help the boss's wife, and those who were more assertive and went right into the culture, learned the language fluently, were more -- I can't think of the word for it. Anyway, all these women gave too much attention to their husband's job and not enough attention to their children. But it was expected of them and they had to do it even though we didn't have "bosses" in those days. Our bosses, our particular bosses, were not those witches you've heard about in the Foreign Service, who order everybody around to bring so many canapes to their party. While I was there our boss's wife did ask me to make the birthday cake for her husband's birthday -- a birthday cake for 85 people -- and she asked me to write her thank you notes to people for her. But it was the kind of thing that I would offer to do or that I was glad to do. These days nobody would be fool enough to spend their time doing things like that. (laughter)

After the 1972 directive came out and wives weren't mentioned in their husbands' efficiency reports any more, people stopped performing these types of jobs. You couldn't ask them to do anything. I think that it was wrong to not mention the wives any more. I think it hurt the ones who were active doing all these things because they didn't get pats on the back any more. It made a nicer community for everyone to be helping everybody else. On the other hand, I think it was silly of us to do so much of it.

Q: What sorts of things do you think you got mentioned for in your husband's review when you lived in Izmir? What sort of pats on the back did you get?

DILLON: What your apartment looked like, if you were keeping it nicely; the kinds of entertaining and the kinds of food you were doing and what your children were acting like; things about personality.

Q: What sort of things did they say about the [apartment]? Did you ever get to see what they[wrote]?

DILLON: Oh, I'm sure that I heard them, they were all talkative. I think I mentioned in the tape that when the Inspector came to Venezuela he was impressed with how well I put up with difficult circumstances. We didn't even realize we were "putting up" with such "difficult circumstances" but it was always like that. We always had a lot of hardships and expected them. These days when people have hardships they don't expect them.

Q: But you're saying you also felt like it was recognized by the people who had some input into your husband's career?

DILLON: Yes, we felt like we were helping our husbands by being good little wives and mothers.

Q: Okay. You spent two years in Izmir, and then you went directly to Ankara. What was Ankara like? How did the children like the move, for example? What did they think about that?

DILLON: They didn't mind, nobody objected to it. They just acted like I did, which was "this is something we're going to do and just take it for granted." I don't think anybody objected. They had friends but they didn't have friends that they were so attached -- all their friends were moving around a lot too, they didn't have friends whom they minded leaving so much because they knew they'd have other friends at the next spot. I guess they were concerned with what the school would be like and what our neighborhood would be like in the next place. The next four years were the happiest for us, I think, that we ever had in the Foreign Service.

Q: What was that happiness like?

DILLON: It was probably all dependent on my husband's job. He was doing a job that he really enjoyed, he became a Political Officer. It was a time in Turkey when he could do interesting things. He was active, busy, happy, had interesting associates, a good Ambassador, and I think that all reflected on the rest of us. Also, I got a job teaching kindergarten in the American School and was able to go with my little child, who was by then four years old, and the older three children were doing well in school, happy with their friends and active in school activities. Everybody was very happy at that time.

Q: So your life at that time sort of centered around your life and the children's life in the school years, is that right?

DILLON: Yes.

Q: What was your life apart from that in terms of your being a Foreign Service wife? What Foreign Service wifely things did you do?

DILLON: We were active in the theater. I was president of the Turkish-American Wives Cultural Society, going out to villages with these people helping village people and village children, teaching them arts and crafts. I did a whole lot of club kinds of things

and going out to an awful lot of parties during the night, and entertaining an awful lot. Not traveling too much, because of the children's ages, but my husband was traveling plenty.

Q: How do you view those years at the Embassy in Ankara? Bob was very happy, you were happy with the children, you're involved in club life and so on, but how would you summarize it?

DILLON: They were normal, happy years. No big events happened.

Q: Nothing traumatic?

DILLON: No.

Q: Nobody had to have an operation?

DILLON: Nothing traumatic. Things went along very nicely.

Q: What was the state of the country?

DILLON: It was going along very nicely too. No big problems. Of course when Kennedy was assassinated that was a very traumatic event, as for anybody any place.

Q: How was that viewed when you were overseas? What was that like -- to have the President assassinated and you're somewhere else?

DILLON: Well, we were going around crying about it all the time and the Turks were going around crying just as much as we were. All our Turkish friends felt scared, they felt that now our country would be without its young, vigorous leader and that somehow that meant that they were losing strength some where -- it made them worry, made them feel lost.

Q: So that was a difficult time in that sense. How was your involvement as a Foreign Service wife with your husband's position at the Embassy -- how was that carried out? You were busy at school in the daytime and went to parties at night, what sorts of things were you involved in?

DILLON: Well, they were just entertaining Turks, mostly, political people. We would entertain these people and invite our Embassy friends who spoke Turkish. Then they would do the same thing and invite us. Whenever the Ambassador or the DCM had parties to entertain the Turks they would invite us and expect us to entertain their guests. I had to go around and say to the Turkish ladies, "Hello, how are you?" In Turkish, "How many children do you have?" We would chat and be friendly. The men were directed to circulate and be more active about it. It was just one big cocktail party, one big dinner party after another the whole time we were there. Every night.

Q: Pretty exhausting though, right?

DILLON: Yes. I remember being too tired to go out and going out anyway and getting a second wind.

Q: With your teaching, how was your help managed?

DILLON: We had a very nice young Turkish woman who lived in our house and was there every night when we were out. She also cleaned the house and washed and ironed -- of course I did a lot of washing too, we didn't have a fully automatic washing machine in those days; we had a semi-automatic one and I remember I spent three or four afternoons a week just washing clothes, even with help. She would be cleaning. I did all the cooking when we entertained and she would help washing the dishes. But it worked out fine. Now these days we wonder how we got along with one bathroom! People getting up at the same time every morning and needing to shower and get dressed -- yes, we did.

Q: Your role at that time vis-a-vis your husband: it sounds like you did a lot of support at parties and so on, and you did some community work in the country. Did any of those people that you met in Izmir become lifelong friends?

DILLON: Oh yes, yes, that was the good part. We met some Turkish people our age whom we enjoyed and could do a lot of things with. And then they had sisters or brothers in other posts, so that when we went to Ankara our social friends had sisters or brothers there whom we could be friends with. Later when we lived in Istanbul people from the same families were there and in that way we had instant introduction to them. We got to be friends with all of them. This made us really begin to like Turkey very much.

Q: What sorts of things did those people do? What businesses or life ... ?

DILLON: One was an engineer who had a very active wife who'd attended the London School of Economics. They were very interested in boating, they were fun to go on picnics with. The wife had a sister, a kind of socialite, in Ankara, whose husband was a political science professor at the university in Ankara and another sister whose husband was in the Turkish foreign service. Most of the Turks in Ankara who were interesting were diplomats, and we liked them. Of course there was a variety of other countries' diplomats whom we found interesting and fun. And the university people there were interesting too.

Q: Other than the death of the U.S. President, did you have any unusual Foreign Service issues during that time? Were there problems, for example, with employment? You had a job but there were women who couldn't get jobs?

DILLON: Always in the Foreign Service I was one of the lucky ones, because I was a teacher. Actually, that particular job I got only because I had a college degree. Then I returned to the U.S. and got a teaching certificate and became a qualified teacher. Before that I was not a qualified teacher. In those days most wives either didn't have professions

at all or had professions they couldn't use overseas. There were rules against hiring people for anything but teaching English or teaching in American schools. This is still true in a lot of countries.

Q: What sort of things did the women of the Embassy talk about in relation to their opportunities to work?

DILLON: They never complained about it then, because it wasn't an issue yet. They didn't care, or they didn't know that they cared. I think it's ignorance, I don't think they realized that they might have been -- in those days everybody was out to help their husband.

Q: So they were doing the job they had, all right? Okay. Was there anything unusual in the country -- during all that time, you said, Turkey was sort of getting on its feet financially, beginning to get its infrastructure.

DILLON: Well, I just said that they were fairly placid years. Near the end of our last year in Ankara there was a crisis because of Cyprus. The Turks there were being treated very harshly by the Greeks and there were some very severe incidents -- murders that were highly publicized in the press in Turkey and people got very agitated about it. 1966 was the year of "the Johnson letter," from President Johnson, in which our government tried to tell Turkey to not get involved in going to war with Greece.

The Turks resented this very much and there was a reaction against Americans from then on. So 1966, the year we left, was also the year that Turkish-American relations got a little sour, and that affected us. Their press is irresponsible, they can take any line they want to and nobody does anything about it. They attacked our DCM's character -- he was the most sterling character you can imagine, and they attacked his character simply because they were mad about the Johnson letter. The newspapers would say some virulent things against the United States, things that were completely untrue, and that would rile the people. So we started getting some anti-Americanism.

Q: How did that affect your relationship with your Turkish friends?

DILLON: Well, it's always seemed that Middle Easterners feel free to criticize the U.S. for things the U.S. does, but you can't answer them back. It's not a good idea to argue back or to tell them they're saying a big lie or exaggerating or that they seem to be a little too hostile and there's no basis of truth in it. So we'd often go to places where people would say outrageous things. I never argue with people about things like that; I've never tried.

Q: So you and Bob would come home and ...

DILLON: Oh, he would, but I wouldn't.

Q: But there's still a difficult experience to ...

DILLON: We got used to it. I admired people who could argue well with them (Kahn laughs) Yes, we're still friends with them. They wouldn't mind if we talked about Turkish politics if we were friends. We could all get into a big argument and of course they would get more angry at their own government than we would.

Q: Okay. If you were to summarize those years in terms of, well, living overseas and its impact on your family, what would [you] say were the greatest benefits to your children?

DILLON: Well, in the long range I can judge that, because all of our children loved Turkey, love to go back to Turkey, enjoy our Turkish friends. Some of our children have been back many, many times and we all want to go back more often. So I think that the benefit was in opening their interest in travel in general and in other people. They appreciate the beautiful Turkish countryside, the interesting places like Cappadocia, they love to go visit those places, and Istanbul. They love the Bosphorus. I think they suffered a little bit in the beginning but in the long run they profited.

Q: Then, you left Ankara. What were the next five years like?

DILLON: We came back to the United States where we bought our first house, which was very thrilling to me. It was in Maclean, very nice -- it had three bathrooms (laughter) which we could share more easily. And they went to public schools. And the drug years started. The hippy years, the long-haired years, I think maybe our sons were the first long hairs in Virginia. They insisted on having long hair, which caused all sorts of trouble in the schools because people were against it, but they wanted to be different -- what they thought was "different" in those days.

So we had sort of hard years with the teenagers -- they were all teenagers by then. The youngest at that time was in grade school and got along fine. In 1968 we had another child while we were there, so then we had five children. We all lived a suburban life, affected by frequent deaths in our neighborhood from overdoses and things like that, several suicides. It was really a sick time in the U.S. Our sons running off to concerts in Baltimore; hitch-hiking in rain in the wintertime and at night doing dangerous things. Everybody was a little out of control. They were bad years -- for that, but otherwise they were fine.

When I say "otherwise they were fine," of course everything's affected by the rebellious voice, but if it hadn't been for the rebellious voice everything would have been fine. My husband was doing interesting jobs at the State Department working on the 7th floor in the Secretariat for U. Alexis Johnson and "Chip" Bohlen. Then he worked in Personnel and got himself posted to Istanbul. (laughter) So after four years in the States we got to go to Istanbul. In fact before that he went to Rome to the NATO Defense College for six months.

Going to Istanbul, returning to Turkey, was like our happiest day. We were so thrilled to go back, having the familiar sounds, the foods, the chance to live in Istanbul, it was just

wonderful to live there, on the Bosphorus, in the “queen of the Bosphorus.”

Q: How was your life in the State Department as a Foreign Service wife?

DILLON: Nothing. I didn't take part in anything -- didn't go to any of the classes offered in languages or -- I've never in the Foreign Service had a chance to do those things, I never was at FSI for languages because I always had little kids at home. So we associated with a lot of our Foreign Service friends during those years, and since our family, as well as our childhood friends were from Arlington, my life wasn't affected by any social obligations like there are overseas.

Q: Were you still meeting what I would call significant world leaders? Or with Bob working on the 7th floor, were you having opportunities to meet people at dinners and parties similar to when you were overseas?

DILLON: Now and again we did. I think we met George Bush for the first time during those years and met him again later when the Turkish prime minister visited and Bush hosted a party for him.

Q: What were your impressions of George Bush at that time?

DILLON: The same as they were later, that he was a tall, pleasant, rather shy person. And that she was a very warm, outgoing person. We certainly didn't dislike him in any way.

Q: What other unusual or outstanding personality did you meet when Bob was on the 7th floor?

DILLON: Mainly I've forgotten. (Kahn laughs heartily)

Q: What were the specific Foreign Service wife issues that were affecting you at that time? What were you doing about employment, for example?

DILLON: None. I was going to night school, trying to get my teacher's certificate.

Q: So this was an advantage for you, to be in the United States to do that.

DILLON: Yes.

Q: Were you doing anything in the U.S. related to Turkish-American cultural affairs?

DILLON: Oh, we were very friendly with all the Turks at the Embassy. (overlapping voices)

Q: It was a sideline, since Bob's work was not directly ...

DILLON: We were always invited to the Turkish Embassy for their functions and were friendly with their people.

Q: So you continued your Turkish connections.

DILLON: Yes, and attended things like their fairs, bazaars, et cetera. We had a lot of friends we'd made in Turkey who were in Washington then -- both Turks and other people who'd been in Ankara. I was involved in local politics in Arlington County, as much as I could be, trying to get out the vote, trying to get people to vote "the right way". (laughter) I wasn't involved in any issues in the Foreign Service wife's thing.

Q: Did you feel like a Foreign Service wife, or did you feel like an American -- what did you feel like? I mean, if someone asked "who are you?" what would you say during those years?

DILLON: Yes, I just felt like a regular American suburban person involved with my children.

Q: You didn't necessarily associate yourself as a Foreign Service wife in that context.

DILLON: No.

Q: Okay. Interesting. Were there any traumatic events going on in the U.S. at this time?

DILLON: (rather breathlessly) I'll say -- we had Vietnam, and the assassination of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. The first time Tom ever left the house was to go down and protest at the National Rifle Association. I took him in the baby carriage and we went down and protested; the first time he was ever out of the house. Of course those outside events didn't really affect our lives except for feeling sad about them.

Q: What are other important people you might have met because Bob was on the 7th floor?

DILLON: Well, I met Chip Bohlen and his wife and I met U. Alexis Johnson. They were very nice.

Q: Were they interested in what you had to say as a Foreign Service wife? Did they ask you what life was like in the Foreign Service?

DILLON: I think that Chip Bohlen and his wife were so charming that you'd have the impression they'd be interested in whatever anybody else thought about anything. But we didn't talk about the Foreign Service except about experiences that they'd had and we'd had.

Q: They didn't ask you for recommendations and things like that? (laughing)

DILLON: No. They were moving to Istanbul. That's when the terrorism started, there were a number of violent terrorist incidents in Istanbul then.

Continuation of interview, May 13, 1991

Q: Last time we finished talking about rearing your children in the U.S. Then as I recall you were leaving for Turkey again -- the date of that?

DILLON: The summer of 1970. We went off to meet Bob at the Defense College in Rome, stayed there for five weeks, then returned to Turkey, to Istanbul this time, where we started living a life influenced by terrorism. Either directly towards us as Americans or through my husband's job, we were influenced by terrorism. We began having guards for the first time and knowing people who were killed by terrorists. We lived a more restrictive life than during our first tour.

Embassies and Consulates began being fortified in some ways. Small ways at first. It was the year of "black September," when the King of Jordan decided to get rid of the Palestinians who he felt were causing trouble for him. He kicked out a number of Palestinian groups, and those groups went on to live in Lebanon. They decided that it was too hard to reach Israel, which couldn't be fought directly, so there would now be an international terrorist campaign. Many people may remember black September, when there was fighting going on in Jordan, and when a woman named Leila Khalid, a lone terrorist, hijacked a plane. It was the first big hijacking that we knew of.

Living in Istanbul, we were directly and indirectly influenced by that. Also, the Turks had a group called Dev Genc, which was a Communist terrorist organization that had gotten more and more active. In 1970 they kidnapped and held as hostage for a short time, then murdered, the Israeli Consul General by the name of Elran.

They kidnapped and held as hostage other people; it was just a year of general terrorism. We started having a guard put on our house and the USG about ten years later gave up the house because of the terrorism that was going on in Turkey.

Q: Just to the house, or to the people in the house?

DILLON: The elite in Turkey had often been unfriendly to Americans even though the people in the villages were and still are very friendly. The Americans were thought of [as] privileged people living in their country and there was a lot of hostility and resentment towards us. So the terrorist groups directed their threats against Americans.

Q: Who would live in that house?

DILLON: Yes.

Q: It was thought too dangerous to live in the house?

DILLON: It was too dangerous. I remember the first guards we had were kind of like

peasants with guns and one of them shot himself in the foot throwing his gun around and practicing. But I think, in the beginning, we resented the lack of privacy that the guards caused us. They would come in the house, they'd be looking in the windows, they'd be always around. Later on we got used to things like guards, even guards who were with us at all times; it didn't bother us any more.

Q: There were you and Bob, who else was in your family?

DILLON: When we went to Istanbul we had Tom, who was two years old, and Beth, who was in the second grade. Two sons were in school off in Ankara, boarding school because the local school didn't have grades above elementary, and our oldest was off to college for the first year.

Q: So that was really a considerable change for you, to suddenly have your family fragmented -- is that right?

DILLON: Yes.

Q: And your daughter at college.

DILLON: It was a change, yes.

Q: How did your children react to -- what did your daughter off at college think about her mother being guarded and all this sort of thing?

DILLON: I don't think she was aware of it. I don't think we bothered to say anything.

Q: What about the boys, who were off at boarding school?

DILLON: They were very wild, running back and forth on ferries and on buses, just having a good time.

Q: So they weren't afraid or anything?

DILLON: They not only weren't afraid, I think that they were (laughing) the opposite of afraid. In 1970 the Turks threw the fellow in jail whom they made "Midnight Express" about. It was a year of drugs and people being caught with drugs. All these kids were running around in what we called "the bowl" at Robert College, smoking hashish, and they didn't care if they were caught or not. We were just lucky they got away with it -- that was their attitude, they weren't afraid or worried about anything. I considered it a rather unthoughtful attitude, I think in those days ...

Q: These were American students at Robert College?

DILLON: They were American students who went away to school in Ankara for six months, then that school was disbanded, and the next six months they had to go to

Karamasel, which is a Turkish naval base which had some Americans there too, and they could come back and forth on weekends by ferry.

Q: And your children were involved in smoking hashish?

DILLON: Oh sure. and older children, everybody was doing it. They didn't care in those days that if you were caught your father would probably lose his job.

Q: They didn't care because ... ?

DILLON: They didn't care, they were thinking about themselves.

Q: So how did it ultimately resolve itself?

DILLON: They just never got caught.

Q: And you warned them, or ... ?

DILLON: Oh sure. They could see that people were getting thrown in jail for a long time for very minor offenses -- what they considered very minor.

Q: They were in what grade?

DILLON: High school.

Q: Did they finish high school there?

DILLON: No, they both came back to the States because we only stayed one year in Istanbul. One was a senior and one was a junior in high school, in Arlington.

Q: So the terrorism had a one-year effect on the children because they were involved in private school for only one year?

DILLON: Yes.

Q: And then you came back for how many years?

DILLON: Three. When we came back to Washington and the family lived just like "regular Americans" in every way that I can think of, my husband was still involved with terrorist things and with Turkey. During that time, 1971-74, there were the Olympic murders of the Israeli sports people in Munich, the murder of Cleo Noel in Khartoum, who was held hostage and was killed along with George Curtis Moore, and the murder of the Turkish Consul General and his assistant out in California by the Armenian group. All these things influenced everyone's feelings about safety. My husband was in charge of the Turkish Desk, so he had to go to California, and have the bodies returned to Turkey, console the widows, and deal with all the problems involved regarding the

Armenian attacks.

Q: So this gave you a kind of altered view or a changing view of life in the Foreign Service?

DILLON: All these things were adding to a changed view but we didn't realize it then. We were shocked by each event as it happened; we didn't realize that life in the Foreign Service was changing, we didn't think about that.

Q: Only in retrospect can you go back and say that that was the beginning of your time with terrorism, is that right?

DILLON: Yes.

Q: So it was a retrospective view, you didn't say "at this point in time I can see this happening" or anything like that.

DILLON: That's right. So, we lived three years in the U.S., and in the summer of 1974 went off to Malaysia as the result of something we must call "gl...[inaudible]." Henry Kissinger as Secretary of State had been disappointed and irritated by the fact that the Department seemed to have these specialists who stayed in one or two places and seemed to think that they knew everything; this irritated him. He wanted to give people more variety, so he decided that people shouldn't go to places where they "knew everything," they should go to a new place where they "don't know anything." And because we didn't know anything about Malaysia and because the Ambassador there did know, therefore he was required to have a DCM who didn't know anything about Malaysia.

So we got to go to Malaysia and as a result we were in Kuala Lumpur for three years. They were beautiful years because it was such a beautiful place, and we had a happy little family there of two young children; the older ones were all away at school or had finished and our older daughter had married. I was teaching school at International School, a wonderful school and the people I worked with were very interesting. So we enjoyed that, but we got mixed up with terrorism again, quite unexpectedly.

Q: Did you know that in going there you'd be experiencing this?

DILLON: No. This was an unusual incident. The Malaysians were affected by terrorism all the time and we had guards on the gate there, because of Communist guerilla groups they were fighting still up in the mountains. The government was very much against them. Guerillas would swoop from place to place down below and there would be minor incidents but not particularly directed against Americans.

What happened was that in the summer of 1975 was that a Japanese terrorist group attacked the building where the American Embassy had the top three floors; the Swedes shared the lower floor. Four people were wounded in the attack and 52 hostages were taken, including the American Consular Chief, Bob Stebbins. The hostages were held for four days while negotiations went on. Our Embassy people were very involved because

they were caught on the floors up above the Consulate. They were trying to help in any way they could with the negotiations but we weren't really central to them even though our people were caught. The attack, which was by the Japanese Red Army, was all directed toward the Japanese, 52 hostages being held at gunpoint.

All sorts of demands were made of the Japanese and excruciating demands and details went back and forth for four days. Eventually the hostages were flown out to the airport and a high-ranking Japanese official was exchanged for some of them. I think they went to Algeria before being released. Anyway, the deals worked, hostages were released after a very rough time.

My husband was Chargé at the time and I think because of that incident he got a reputation of being cool under fire and (she laughs) from then on he got more and more jobs connected with terrorism.

Q: More and more fire!

DILLON: Anyway, it had come out all right. The Japanese person who was given in exchange for hostages was later Ambassador to Austria when we were there and now is Ambassador to the U.S. We do keep running into old friends!

Q: What was it like for you when your husband was caught up in these [affairs]? What kind of thoughts did you have? What did you do with the children? What sorts of things did the family do under these circumstances?

DILLON: Well, at the time of this incident I was in Indonesia at a workshop in Djakarta with a lot of teachers from all the international schools in the area. We were studying different techniques in how to teach children. Someone came to me suddenly one morning looking stricken as though somebody had died and said, "I need to speak to you alone." I was ready to faint thinking something terrible had happened. Of course it was a terrible thing but not to my family --the person said there had been an attack on our Embassy and my husband was holed up in one of the top floors and they didn't know what would happen. So that was a relief, to find out that he was okay at that point. We just kept hearing on the radio how things were going along.

Q: Were your children with you in Djakarta?

DILLON: Yes, they were there at home. They were affected; I think they have some interesting stories to tell. Although their Mohammed Ali story is the one they like to tell the most. He came for a big fight in Malaysia and came to our house. Tom, our youngest, got to meet him. Tom is the kind of person who kept having his picture taken with important people. Vice President Rockefeller came through and I think Tom had his picture taken with Rockefeller at every turn. (laughter) I think the children thought the attack was exciting but were afraid at the time something would happen to their father. But they didn't fall in pieces or anything like that. By the time I got back it was all over, I just got to hear a lot about it, who the heroes were.

Q: So, all's okay that ends okay or something.

DILLON: Well, in a way, but it was a dangerous place to have your Embassy, way up high in a building like that. It took a number of years but they now have a new Embassy.

Q: So this was the only episode of terrorism while you were in Kuala Lumpur?

DILLON: That affected us directly, yes.

Q: What about life for you as a mother? You taught in the school, and you had the children -- in college, working or whatever? What was that like, keeping relationships long-distance?

DILLON: Well, the two sons who were in college in the States came to visit us at Christmas and in the summer, something the State Department paid for, a wonderful thing. In the old days in the Foreign Service people didn't get things like that. They didn't get to see their children at all, I suppose, or they didn't get to send them away to school; one or the other. We had a lot of advantages like that. Our life was wonderful because I went to school with the children every day and came back with them. We had a beautiful house on the golf course, with monkeys in the yard, orchids hanging down everywhere, gardenias were popping in our faces as we sat down for breakfast. Beautiful, beautiful green everywhere. Terribly, terribly hot, though. So we had an air-conditioned bedroom; the rest of the house open to the outside, not air-conditioned, lots of mosquitoes. People got dengue fever and things like that but we didn't, luckily.

Q: Did things come in from outside?

DILLON: All sorts of things came in from outside. Monkeys came in, threw things around, packed things. They were smart monkeys. If you tried to bother them, shoo them away, they would come back and take revenge. There were a lot of dangerous snakes around but we had them in our house only in Venezuela.

Q: So from Kuala Lumpur you went ... ?

DILLON: In 1977, straight to Ankara, Turkey again, where Bob was, again, DCM. The two youngest, Tom and Beth, were with us. Beth is now in high school having graduated from high school in Turkey. Tom was in fourth, fifth and sixth grade. I taught English to Turks at Turkish-American Association, also at the dependents' school. It was a very busy time, an interesting time, but there was a lot of trouble from the terrorist groups, especially the pro-Communist groups. Twelve Americans were killed in one year. That's when we started having security guards going everywhere with us, not only at the gate to the house but in the car. We lived in mid-town in a rather exposed place but we had no bad problems. A Palestinian group did attack the Egyptian Embassy across the street, killed some people. It was July 14, I recall, and the French who lived across the street in another direction couldn't have their Bastille Day party.

There were small things and some major happenings during the whole three years.

Q: How did all this terrorism affect your life there?

DILLON: It didn't seem to limit it at all. I was thinking that the Turks were suffering a lot, it was almost like civil war, especially at the universities. Students were killing one another at a high rate. The Communist-inclined students were killing those who didn't agree with them and trying to pressure the students into agreeing with them.

There was also a lot of trouble in the countryside. One time a Turkish friend and I decided to drive down to Cappadocia, in eastern-central Turkey. She was coming from Izmir with her son, I was going to take my son Tom, the same age as hers. It was my favorite place, I'd been there a lot of times, I'm kind of a good guide in a situation like that. And she was a Turk. Just as in my country I haven't been to Montana yet, she hadn't been to Cappadocia. So she was very glad to go and we drove down together.

When she learned that my husband wouldn't be on the trip -- it hadn't occurred to me to tell her so -- she was scared. Scared to go into that area because there had been civil unrest there, one group had been killing another group and vice versa. It eventuated that she was really scared silly all the way down. When we stopped to picnic by the roadside and my car wouldn't start again, she almost collapsed, she was crying, shaking from head to foot. I said no problem, we'd just get someone to give us a ride to the hotel we were going to in Cappadocia but she was afraid the guy driving a car would be a terrorist. Eventually we did have to stand on the roadside with our kids and flag somebody down. A very nice man gave us a ride, about an hour's trip to our hotel, and the hotel owner sent somebody to get the car started and bring it back. The trouble turned out to be a bad starter.

I didn't seem to realize that there was danger. Whenever I've been in a place supposed to be dangerous, it doesn't seem to occur to me to be scared. It seems to be just a normal thing; it didn't seem to limit our lives.

Q: But were other American women like you, what do you recall about that?

DILLON: See, we had lived in Turkey so long at that point, and I could speak Turkish, I felt comfortable in the countryside. People in the countryside are very friendly. I just never saw anything to worry about. But people who came to the Embassy and hadn't been exposed to the Turks for a long time sometimes were -- we had an Ambassador's wife who was terrified of Turks, she thought of them as people with a big saber who'd chop off your head. She'd grown up with this feeling that they were like that -- a caricature, you know? There were people who didn't feel comfortable but I think it was mainly that they couldn't speak the language and hadn't been there long enough to feel relaxed. I felt very happy to be there and I loved to take people who didn't think there was anything to do, around to see the things there were to do.

Q: What kind of friends did your children make? Basically other Americans in school?

DILLON: Yes. They went to a dependents' school, a U.S. Air Force school and they made friends there. They made a few Turkish friends but not enough. Most of those they knew were people who were our friends, American kids at that school.

Q: Did the children get involved in the culture in any way through activities?

DILLON: Just in that they had a course on Turkish culture and history, and some language. There were some half-Turkish, half-American children in the school whom they were friendly with. But exposure to "real Turks" meant those who worked in our house and the children of our friends. We traveled around a lot so they got to understand the language.

Q: I recall in your previous interview you talked about [how] Beth feels herself especially close to Turkey having been born there?

DILLON: One of the funniest stories I have is that when we left Malaysia, a place of beautiful lush green and flowers, things growing everywhere, I found it very hard to leave. At that point I really didn't want to go back to Turkey, I wanted to go to some place different or stay where I was. I had loved Malaysia. When they played their national anthem I would cry. I just loved the green and the beauty everywhere and all the different types of people.

So we boarded a plane, went directly by way of stops at several places to Ankara. En route from the airport there to the city you go through a hilly, dry, rocky area with a few little green things growing in the bottom of ravines. Our daughter Beth said, "Isn't it wonderful to be back in Turkey? Isn't it beautiful here!" And I'm thinking "I wish I were back in Malaysia with all that beautiful green." And she said, "Isn't this the most beautiful landscape you've ever seen?" I was rather surprised, but later on I realized I do like dry areas, there are beautiful dry areas. And when we lived in Lebanon we would drive from Beirut to Syria, we would pass through a similar area -- very dry and rocky, lined with scrub brush, sometimes hills and hills of just stones. They're beautiful in their own way. But I was rather shocked and surprised by her, at her tender age to think that dryness could be more beautiful than green.

Q: So, tell me at this moment in time where we're going.

DILLON: We were transferred directly from Turkey to Egypt and flew there with our cats and children to live there for one year. Actually Beth was about to go off to college, so this one year she was not in Egypt; only Tom was with us. Like Malaysia, Egypt too was a colorful place; even more so. You could stand on a street corner and watch the parade of costumes and different kinds of hats and animals and activity go by. A very, very colorful, exotic place. Very tiring -- it was very hard to get from one place to another because it was so crowded. Except for being exhausted all the time, we found it was wonderful because it was so interesting.

I took a course on Islamic history there at the Museum. I got to know the Museum well. Then I got a job teaching sixth grade at the Cairo American College, which is like an international school. It has a beautiful campus and we lived only two doors away, so that was convenient. In an area called Mahdi. It wasn't convenient for going downtown to cocktail and dinner parties, however, because it was way out of town, and not convenient for my husband in commuting to the office.

Our Embassy at that time was the biggest U.S. Embassy -- really a very, very busy Embassy. Everybody we knew came to visit us. Everybody in Congress came, imagining the Embassy was staffed with travel agents, people who could meet them at the airport and take them around. Even though we were there only a year, we profited from our stay because we got to go to Upper Egypt a number of times. I took 99 sixth-graders and some other teachers to Upper Egypt on a tour. We learned an awful lot about pharaonic history and Islamic history that we hadn't known before, hadn't been exposed to, and that I'd never learned in grade school -- I understand most people have studied Egyptian history in grade school but somehow I missed it. Attending school in Virginia, we probably studied Virginia state history all year!

Q: Who were some of these interesting people who came to visit you from Congress?

DILLON: Yes. Our Secretary of State Haig was one. We attended parties and tea parties with Mrs. Haig and the Secretary. This was the last year of President Sadat's life. A very likable man, who had a marvelous wife whom everybody who met her loved a very warm, charming person, as well as he.

So we were very sad at our next assignment a month after our departure to learn that he had been assassinated. We were in Lebanon then and people shot guns in the air to cheer his death, they disliked him so. I felt rather emotional, as I always feel when people die, with the flag at half-staff. After a few days people who worked in our house -- I think they were security guards in those days -- asked, "When are we going to put the flag back up?" I was so mad because they'd been celebrating Sadat's death I said, "WHEN he comes back to life again, that's when we'll put the flag back up!"

Anyway, we didn't have much time in Cairo. If we'd stayed longer we probably would have grown to like it even more -- everybody we knew who stayed on there loved it. Loved the Egyptian people, whom I found rather strange after living in Turkey. They're the opposite of Turks in many, many ways. They're so relaxed, and Turks are militant types who're dedicated to duty and are faster, quicker about everything.

Q: What was the role of women like yourself? Your husband was ... ?

DILLON: A DCM for the third time in a row.

Q: That would subsume that you had some influence with other women in the Embassy?

DILLON: We had an Embassy women's group. Women who worked in the Embassy were invited, of course, but most didn't come. We had monthly meetings, and activities, one of which was to take part in bazaars at the Hilton Hotel selling things that we would import or assemble for benefit of various charities; usually orphanages. We had a lot of do-good kinds of things like that.

Q: Did Egyptian women ever comment to you how they viewed these activities?

DILLON: The women who were involved with us were all very gracious, friendly people who were appreciative of anything we did. I was told that this kind of thing was not so much needed any more, that they were beginning to import so many things the average Egyptian needed, where before there had been huge duties on everything -- articles like kleenex and soap weren't so scarce any more. I think those bazaars in Egypt may have petered out completely by now.

That year we were in Egypt we were lucky, because Egyptians were especially friendly to Americans. I don't know if that changed after Sadat's death, but when we were there they were enthusiastically friendly toward Americans. As a result of the Camp David agreement things were moving along very well. The U.S. was pouring money into the country. The AID Mission was gigantic. The Egyptians were pretty happy, things were looking up. Even though the Islamic Fundamentalists had begun crusading everywhere, it wasn't felt very much yet. Sadat of course was repressing them: that's why he was killed.

Q: How old was Tom at this time?

DILLON: He was in seventh grade. At the end of that year he was then sent back to the U.S. to live with his sister for a year before boarding school because we went off to Lebanon -- the Department didn't allow U.S. children to be taken there.

Q: As regards his life in seventh grade and your other children who'd been in the States, comparing your life as a mother in Egypt, what was different about it?

DILLON: I wish I'd thought of that before, I wish that had been something I thought of then and appreciated. Tom had a wonderful life. Living apart from the school was nice, including the fact that I was on the school campus every day and we went off together in the morning. There were a lot of Egyptian kids in the school, so getting to know some of them was a nice experience for him. It was a very pleasant year, much better for him than the other kids spent in seventh grade in the States. There was no -- what do they call it now? We used to call it "juvenile delinquency." There were no broken families, there was no criminal element, there were no big problems at Tom's school.

Q: How do you think the quality of education he was getting in Cairo compared to the same grade for Beth in Arlington?

DILLON: Wonderful, a wonderful school, an excellent school in every way. The teachers were good, the quality of education was perfect.

Q: Let's look at just the issue of being separated from your children at various times: what sort of impact do you think that has had on their lives? You seem to have handled it well. Did the children handle it well?

DILLON: Well, I'd have to talk about each one and try and figure out -- it was mainly Tom who was separated from us during school years because he was finishing seventh grade when we went to Lebanon. Since only the wives, no children, were allowed in Lebanon, he had to go away to school. He went out to live in Arizona with our older daughter, who was married, and stayed there for one year. He had a very good year. Since he knew "everything" about what was going on in the world and had been interested in and exposed to these things, they thought he was some sort of a genius: he got straight A's without every bothering to do anything extra. He had a happy time, made a lot of friends, had a good life -- lots of sports, which he likes, and some good activities.

He decided at the end of that year to go to boarding school; he went to Choate for four years, 10th, 11th and 12th grades. Even after that he didn't rejoin us. Even when after Lebanon we went to Austria and he could have come, he decided he'd rather stay in Choate because he'd made a lot of friends there, and for the football. So we didn't insist that he come and attend school in Austria.

When I reflect on how did all these years of not being with the family affect him, they seem (she laughs) to have improved him! I don't know if he needed it but he's turned out to be a responsible, independent person -- what you're supposed to be. He's profited a lot from having some very good friends he stays in touch with, he's gotten a good education. He hated Choate, he said, when he was living there, but now he says he loved it and couldn't have got a better education anywhere and how glad he is that he went there. When he returned for the school reunion recently he even said that he hoped he'd be able to send his kids to a good school like that. I was rather amazed to hear that, after all his complaints, but it certainly didn't harm him to be separated from the family. It made him appreciate us more, perhaps, than it did the other kids, because when he's around he's always helpful and thoughtful. Maybe it was a good influence.

Continuation of interview

Q: This is Ruth Kahn interviewing Sue Dillon on September 10, 1993.

We last talked about your life before you went to Lebanon. Today we'll deal with what was probably a very difficult time for her then. As we were talking just now, you began to describe the period we'll be talking about, which was?

DILLON: June 1981 through '82 and most of '83.

Q: You'd returned from Cairo?

DILLON: Yes. I came back for the swearing-in of my husband as ambassador.

Q: That must have thrilled you! What is it like to be part of a swearing-in?

DILLON: Very impressive. [gap in interview, Kahn resumes]

Q: We reviewed the event of her husband's appointment as ambassador that she reported on an earlier tape. We pick up now as Sue arrives in Lebanon.

DILLON: Fighting had been going on all spring and early summer in Zahle, in the Bekaa Valley, location of the famous ruin of Baalbek. In view of this the wives of officers had not been allowed to go with Bob when he went on June 20. By the time he got permission for wives to accompany their husbands, I had been waiting a couple of months to go. So then I left.

I went first to Cairo to pick up my cat, which a friend had been taking care of, to take it with me to Lebanon. From the beginning, being there was very exciting, sometimes scary, sometimes very sad, sometimes a lot of fun. Right off the bat I had to become the housekeeper, because the Residence cook had been killed. And everyone who came to Beirut from Washington, the negotiators who were there, the specialists who came to help them, had to live in our house because none of the hotels were safe to live in.

Five years earlier when "the troubles" started -- some people called it the civil war, the Lebanese called it "the troubles" -- we had been living in Malaysia and seeing in Time and Newsweek magazines photos of the "hotel war" -- the fancy hotels on the waterfront being bombed, people living up high in them exchanging heavy gunfire, destroying the hotels. We'd seen pictures of a ruined city and had imagined nothing was left.

In some parts there wasn't much left. In order to go down the winding hill to the city from our house on a hill in Baabda, overlooking the city, we had to pass by sunken ships in the harbor, girders hanging, past places where various militia controlled their area and sometimes shot at people. When I had to go from one place to another in the city or downtown to the office from the house with my husband, we had to go in convoys in armored cars with "scouts" riding ahead to see if there was danger on the road. The rest of the time I had a driver, who also drove the servants back and forth and took them to buy food at the grocery. It was only when I went out at night or anywhere with my husband that we had to go in an armored car.

It's like being boxed up in a steel can, there's no air circulating, with a lot of people sticking guns out the windows, and swerving, and cutting off people who might get close; and a lot of noise, and very fast driving.

Q: How did you prepare yourself for this?

DILLON: I didn't know about it ahead of time, I didn't prepare myself. You get used to it

after a while. The second day the follow car crashed into us and then we crashed into the lead car in front of us as we swerved around it at high speed. I guess I was apprehensive the whole time I was in a car

To get back to the house: somebody had to run it, we had so many visitors, we had to give so many parties. And when visitors were there we had to do so much for them. They would have their own secretaries, so many extra security guards -- the cook and one of the maids had to make breakfast and coffee for them, some 20 to 50 of them were there at all times. When we finally did get a cook he wasn't very good, so I had to do a lot of the cooking even though we hired more people for the house, it was kind of hard for them to handle such a big ordeal.

Q: This was on a daily basis -- breakfast, lunch, dinner?

DILLON: When visitors were there. The first year I was there, before the Israelis invaded in June '82, Habib and Maury Draper were living in the house, working to negotiate a peace. After that there were more people, and during the summer when there was a real war going on, the entire Embassy lived in the house. But I wasn't there then, I'd been evacuated, so I didn't have to take care of everything; I understand that the poor Personnel Officer had to run the house then.

Q: What in your life had prepared you for this really difficult experience, this great responsibility in the sense of being a hotel manager? Was it close to being a hotel manager?

DILLON: I guess we'd had a lot of that in the Foreign Service but not on such a big scale.

Q: What sorts of things happened to you in terms of your family? You had five children, they must have been watching the newspapers, what did they think of their mother being in Lebanon as a cook?

DILLON: Well, I don't think they worried too much about that. I think they were pretty worried at the fighting that was going on, and the shelling. No children were allowed to go there but our two youngest children were allowed to come for Christmas and for times during the second summer. I guess they found it very interesting.

Q: What are the people like in Lebanon?

DILLON: The Lebanese are a very generous, social, warm, welcoming people. So when the kids were there people would offer to do a lot of things for them and they had a good time. The first Christmas we went to northern Lebanon, to the Cedars of Lebanon and where the poet Khalil Gibran had lived. The gigantic cedars are world-renowned. We had a beautiful time up there in the snow. We saw lots of armed Syrian soldiers but we were never able to go there again because of the fighting in that area, which Syria controlled. We weren't in any real danger then; later you couldn't travel there at all.

Q: How did your children view the guns, having just come from a country where they

weren't seeing that? Did they notice it? What did they say to you in terms of "here we are on business --"

DILLON: I think they accepted that. Life in Lebanon was, like, one day very, very sad, somebody that we knew would be killed or there would be a major crisis of some kind, people would be herded down, the next day we'd go to see people in the hospital and that was kind of sad. But then the third day came along: a big party, a trip some place to have a good time or to see something interesting, to see one of the beautiful sites like Baalbek or Tyre or other beautiful places; lots of activities going on at all times. So I don't think the children thought about it any more than I did -- they couldn't think about it all the time or they'd be worried.

Q: And you couldn't think about it all the time or you'd have been worried yourself.

DILLON: Yes. It was a very uncomfortable position to be in when shells were falling, and it was enraging when they'd fly over and break the sound barrier and frighten and intimidate everybody, and drop bombs on the city, which happened now and then; out of anger and just to intimidate. That happened all our first year, before the new invasion. One time when I went on a trip with the Women's Median [?] Club to Palmyra, a fine archeological site in the Syrian desert, as we were going down the hill on the way east to Shtoura, Israelis, trying to get at the PLO, bombed the whole area. It happened just now and then. Sometimes we could sit out on our front veranda and look down and see part of the city being shelled. It was kind of crazy, once.

Q: I would think. What kind of response did you have as you saw the shells going down as you were sitting on the veranda?

DILLON: Anger. Wondering what right they had to do such a thing. Just anger. When we were evacuated right after the Israeli invasion in June '82, I think that of practically everybody in the Embassy who were on the plane -- dependents, and people who were not importantly needed to stay -- no one wanted to leave, everybody was angry that we had to leave. Planes were shelling us as we sat on the ground to intimidate us. It was infuriating.

Q: You were angry because you wanted to stay.

DILLON: And because of the invasion, I believe; too dangerous. We never dreamed it would be as dangerous as it was, that there would be as much fighting as happened, or that the troops would stay so long.

Q: So in retrospect you can accept the fact that you had to leave because it turned out to be a good idea, though at the time it was very difficult to do.

DILLON: Yes.

Q: So you left, and since then your life [has] been that of Ambassador's wife-in-waiting?

DILLON: Yes. I had to wait while all sorts of things happened that summer -- people were evacuated, in accordance with the agreement Habib had made with the PLO; the Israelis were supposed to leave, which they didn't; and all sorts of other major calamities happened, such as the assassination of the newly elected president Bashir Gemayel. His brother Amin became president. Just before that occurred the terrible massacres in Sabra and Shatila of Palestinian women and children and old men who'd been left behind -- a major calamity I was lucky not to be there for. After that, the wives were allowed to return. Things seemed to be settling down; actually, they were not, a lot of fighting still went on,

Q: How long in between had you been in the U.S.?

DILLON: I was gone for four and a half months. When I came back, things were different. One couldn't go to lots of places one used to go to because of fighting between the militias of the various factions.

Q: Did you find yourself asking, "Why did I come back?"

DILLON: Oh no, I was very glad to come back, I'd have returned long before.

Q: What was the role of the Ambassador's wife when you came back?

DILLON: We had more people than ever! My husband had had quite a hard time while I was gone -- the whole Embassy was in the house. But things would go along rather peacefully for a few days, then there would be trouble on other days. Negotiations were in progress for the Syrians and the Israelis to leave. Those negotiations didn't succeed, they failed to get the troops to leave. Things came to a head on April 18, '83 -- the Embassy was blown up when a suicide truck driver-bomber drove into the front of the Embassy and blew up himself and the truck, causing 62 deaths among staff and people passing by or coming for visas.

Then we went to a lot of funerals and visited many people in the hospital. Embassy staff close by were invited by the British Embassy to move in; they continued to work there. Again, things had become every different. That was of course, the saddest time for me, who knew all these people. Our driver was killed: he'd been waiting for my husband to come down for the car; they never found anything but his foot. There was a lot of grief and sadness at that time.

Q: The driver was Lebanese? (Dillon confirms) There were yourself as an American woman and how many other like yourself?

DILLON: I think about 15, including some secretaries and people living downtown on their own.

Q: How did people handle it -- there must have been feelings of terror?

DILLON: Oh people handled it in different ways. Some got scared and left, most felt a challenge, responded very well and worked very hard and felt they were doing something important. And something that was exciting, too. Everybody at the Embassy was a volunteer, so they were people who wanted to be there and ...

Q: Who understood the difficulty of the situation. But it must have been a terribly stressful experience. Did you find yourself sleeping well? How did you handle all that?

DILLON: (laughing) I think I had pretty high blood pressure, and a short fuse. But otherwise, I didn't have any trouble sleeping.

Q: Well, if you cooked for 50 people, (laughing uproariously) it probably wasn't too hard to sleep! Do you see the people whose lives were changed forever, do you still hear from these people?

DILLON: Well, the person I was closest to was Bonnie Pugh, her husband Bob was DCM at the Embassy during our second year; before that it was Bob Barrett. We'd been close to the Pughs in Turkey. About eight years later, while her husband was Ambassador to Chad, Bonnie Pugh, changing planes in Hong Kong en route to her daughter's wedding, was killed when her plane was blown up by terrorists. Some other people I see now and then; most have stayed overseas or retired, I don't see much of them but I see a lot of the Lebanese -- they're travelers, and many of them come to visit from time to time.

Q: What was it really like to be the wife of an American Ambassador in a country in incredible turmoil?

DILLON: Well, the Lebanese were all looking to the Americans to save them, so everybody wanted to be our friend, everybody wanted to be hospitable to us, help us out, and they wanted the American government to come in and solve their problem. By the time we got there, they'd been having their civil war for five years. There were many different militias and factions opposing one another, all sorts of terrible things might, and did, happen. They were hoping the U.S. Ambassador and his government could save them.

Part of the reason they thought that was because in 1958 when there was a big upheaval in the area, the Marines landed -- Camille Chamoun was president then -- there was great danger of anarchy, and things calmed down and were "solved." So, Lebanese were hoping that something would happen and save them again. When the PLO left in the summer of '82, conditions were dangerous and unsettling and American Marines did come again. They shouldn't have remained but they ended up staying because of the Shatila and Sabra -- massacres, in fact they left and came back just because things were in danger of turmoil again or worse than they had been all along; the Marines stayed. Which, a year later, led to 242 young Marines being blown up by another suicide bomber.

Meanwhile we had Marines staying at our house, encamped around it, during times that

our house was being shelled. They took over our swimming pool little house and lived there; they just were every place. Even as guards on top of our roof

Q: Were you in the house when it was being shelled?

DILLON: Yes, and we had a lot of shelling. "Bud" McFarlane, the special negotiator who replaced the ailing Phil Habib who had heart trouble, arrived with his wife "Johnny". She and I could both cook and we used to make brownies and fried chicken and extra things for the Marines. A lot of sad things happened, as when we'd go down and talk with them at the swimming pool and elsewhere, and people were trying to wash their clothes, helpfully, and they'd be sitting there writing their wills. They really thought they were going to die, and maybe some of them did when they were sent back to the airport, where most of them were encamped.

We had a lot of shelling in September when the Israelis finally pulled out because groups went up to the mountains to fight over the territory that was being evacuated, and we had quite a lot of trouble between the Israelis' withdrawal and the big bombing of the Marine barracks in October. We weren't there then, we'd been gone for 11 days.

Q: I haven't experienced shelling, what is that like? I mean, what do you do? You don't stand at the window, I guess.

DILLON: We didn't have a good place to go to be secure. When shelling started most of us would go down to the pantry. We had flak jackets and helmets, and sometimes we spent the night there -- all of us: secretaries, security guards, special negotiators, everybody would lie down on the floor and try to sleep as the shells were falling. It was a jolt: when big shells hit, they slam, and they slammed into the hills all around us, you tell when one would or would not make a direct hit to your building. However, we never had a real direct hit. The ground shakes, there's a terrible WHOOSHing sound, and the slam makes a huge, huge sound, it's startling, kind of knocks you off your feet.

Q: So you're in the pantry, in your flak jacket, what do people talk about when you're being shelled like that?

DILLON: Well, they don't talk about the shelling at all, they talk about what their regular business is. Or small talk. Yes, they just continue acting normal. I don't think that any of us felt we were to die, I certainly didn't feel that way. It was scary because of the jolts, and the sound, and impact, but we didn't feel like we were going to die. And I had figured out a thing about people: when shelling starts, people who have been hit in buildings always think they're going to be hit, and people who haven't been hit directly -- haven't had a whole building fall on them -- have some kind of strength that they get from not having had this happen to them before makes them think they'll never be hit. It's like, normally, people don't think they'll die, that they'll live forever? I think that's part of it. I had Lebanese friends who were terrified every time a shell came anywhere near, they'd been hit before. Oh our garden was hit, and the side of our house, we had plenty of shrapnel, windows were blown out, but because the house was built sort of against the

side of a hill and the shellers were on the other side, they kept trying to come closer so the shells would hit us, but they didn't.

Q: So when you wrote letters home -- did you keep a diary during all of this? (Dillon assents) Have you ever gone back to read it?

DILLON: Yes. I could find only half of it today but it reminded me of the very exciting events we had. Taking off in the midst of shelling and -- I'd forgotten about this -- for a month I went around the house with my bag packed, carrying it with me wherever I went in case I had to dash off suddenly. We had some shelling that caused a big fire right against our bedroom, everything went out, including telephone wires, and I started to wonder what I should try to save. I began taking Bob's suits out the door. The cats were very upset by that time! When we finally left, the packers worked all through an enormous shelling. I don't know how they had the nerve but they did, packing us up as shells were falling all around us.

Q: Then they packed you up and you left.

DILLON: Bob and I left, and one of the cats; that too was to be sent to us later. That was when we finally left, in October 1983. I had left a year and a half earlier when the Israelis invaded. It was at the end of the following summer when we had a lot of shelling around the house and Johnny and "Bud" McFarlane and a lot of other VIPS were living with us.

Q: What was it like being in a house with the VIPS?

DILLON: We baked cookies. We had lots of visitors, and all the militia leaders and people involved in negotiations, et cetera, came to the house, so they had to be served coffee and snacks whenever they came. There would be a flurry of activity when a business meeting was going on.

Q: Does it seem real? This was a very profound experience that you must look back on and think, was I really there?

DILLON: Yes, it was very real.

Q: It was pretty real but I mean don't you look back now and you say you meet famous people, you meet people that you're doing ordinary things for, like bringing them a cup of coffee. There must have been emotions around you later for just that sort of thing.

DILLON: Well, we had a lot of visitors who were impressive, and of course we had the Secretary of State Shultz staying with us for a while, after our explosion when our Embassy was destroyed. The shellers tried to get him with a shell, and that caused quite a disagreement between me and his security people, which he got back at us for in his book that's just been published: "the Dillons were scared." But he had promised when he came not to spend the night in our house. He had promised not to cause any trouble. The Embassy had been blow up and we were in turmoil. But the people around him didn't

promise anything like that and they were very demanding and difficult. I understood that when he promised not to spend the night, he wasn't going to spend the night. So when he began staying nights and we were getting the worst shelling we'd ever had, the neighbors across the street said that they'd been closer to death than they had been in the several years. I felt he should leave. That made him furious, so he tried to retaliate by saying, in his autobiography published this spring, that we were "scared." We weren't "scared" of anything.

Q: Did he think you shouldn't be scared?

DILLON: He was insulted because I wanted him to leave; very angry, caused a lot of trouble because I told the security people I didn't think he should spend the night there, which he'd promised not to. He didn't put that together, you can put two and two together there. He was trying to do an important job and that was all he was seeing, he didn't see that he was drawing danger to our neighbors and to other people. And to himself, of course; he didn't realize it, he hadn't been through it. He hadn't been living there, he didn't understand. People like him who have important jobs are always surrounded by tough, nasty people who push their way around; that's how they want it.

Q: So you feel that the tough, nasty people around him were very unsympathetic to your stand of danger being brought.

DILLON: Completely. He didn't speak to me directly, he got the word from the middleman who was protecting him that I was being "irrational" and demanding.

Q: It must have made you feel terrific.

DILLON: Yep. (Kahn laughs heartily).

Q: Here you'd been risking your life for how long?

DILLON: He had a big ego. He didn't appear so, he appeared to be a genial, sweet guy but he had a big ego and he felt that his ego was being tromped on.

Q: I think it's interesting, though, from what you're describing to me, how one could have a sense that you would be anything but scared. I'm not even there, I just get scared listening. That's a surprise to me, that somebody who comes and hears the shelling doesn't understand why you'd be scared. He heard it?

DILLON: Sure. He didn't realize it just missed him by a hair. (Kahn laughs)

Q: Well, perhaps it was ...

DILLON: He was having trouble negotiating with some very difficult people, he was going to try to do his job and there were other things involved that he didn't take into account.

Q: Do you think that women who were wives of important people like ambassadors were ever listened to?

DILLON: No.

Q: Were there other times that you could think of that you had the feeling that there you were risking your life and that people weren't listening?

DILLON: (after pause) I don't think I'd care to say "listened" generally. I mean, it didn't occur to me to think about that. But the reason I think I got along at some things, I'm the kind of person who looks around and sees when something could be improved. Immediately after the bombing we didn't know who'd done the bombing or why but they were still trying to get Bob because at the time of the bombing he was supposed to be at the front door. He was delayed by a telephone call, and that telephone call saved him. The social secretary, a good friend of mine, had just left him, was coming down in the elevator just ahead of him when the suicide bomber drove into the building and she, I guess, was just stepping out of the elevator when the bomb hit; they never found anything of her but some fingernails. Implosion, they call it; you're blown in.

Q: Was this before or after?

DILLON: Before. After the bombing -- our big armored car had been destroyed -- the chauffeur was standing by the door when the bomb went off and he was blown up along with the car. So we had a new car, beige color, no frosting on the windows, and my husband has very white, shiny hair and he shows up from a long way off and I noticed he was riding around right after the explosion -- caused by we didn't know whom -- almost like a target. So I asked Security if they could put a little shade in the back window so it wouldn't be so obvious that car contained him. Well, do you think they'd do anything about that? Of course they were busy with other matters but I considered that a vital problem: to do something to prevent the U.S. Ambassador's being so visible.

Things like that really sent my blood pressure up, because I had no effect. I asked them to do it, I insisted that they do it, I tried to get my husband to insist they do it; nobody did a thing, nobody paid any attention to me, they acted like I was being hysterical about an unimportant thing, whereas it was one of the basic things that should have been taken care of. You asked a little earlier if people listened to me: no, they didn't listen to me and ordinarily I didn't try to get them to, I just tried in this case because I thought it was important. I also tried in the Shultz case and that didn't turn out well.

But generally I just went around doing things there were to do. And I played a lot of bridge, and went on some wonderful trips. And I loved the Lebanese and had a good time.

Q: Even while the shelling was going on you went on the trips?

DILLON: Yes. Some of our trips were during dangerous times but usually our trips around the country were to visit various people and places when there wasn't any shelling.

Q: You mentioned your husband was saved by a telephone call. What other times did things happen to him that you were concerned about or that frightened you in terms of his personal safety?

DILLON: Some of the major happenings were in the summer of '82 after the Israeli invasion, when a lot of shelling occurred. The Israelis came all the way up to our house and dug in around it and shelled the city. After they sent off a big barrage of shells, the PLO down in the city would launch shells, aiming of course at our house too, so there was a dangerous situation. But just generally every day it was dangerous going any place in that car, and you did feel it.

Q: Did you feel like you had other close calls?

DILLON: In September '83 when we had constant shelling I took off to Saudi Arabia with "Bud" McFarlane and his wife "Johnny." We took off by helicopter from the ministry of defense's yard amid all kinds of shelling all over the place. Meanwhile, the night after we left, the worst shelling our house had ever had took place. There were many hits and everybody had to evacuate the house and go down to President Amin Gemayel's house, which was not very safe but for some reason they thought was safer that night. I guess it was because he had a bunker underneath it and they all slept down there that night. In Saudi Arabia the next morning we woke up to find a wire that things had been really very dangerous the night before and everybody had had to leave the house. So that was a close call. But any time you go in a helicopter there are close calls, too.

Q: You're going to read me from a diary?

DILLON: No, this is something -- I don't remember numbers very clearly and understand what the Lebanese had been through for five years before we ever even got there, before the Israeli invasion, before all these other things happened. They told me that in June 1978 and in the first week in October, the Syrians were shelling the country. There were two big shellings of Ashrafiyah, a section near downtown Beirut, when 13,000 shells fell in one night in one small area; 40,000 shells in six days. Two-hundred-forty millimeter mortar, the heaviest weapon there is, from the Russian arsenal, shelled continuously day after day after day. So you can imagine what that area looked like, and you can imagine the shape that people were in.

Q: The Lebanese told you that.

DILLON: Yes. They were always telling us what had happened before, you know, explaining what had happened before so we'd understand them. One of my Lebanese friends said, a few days after the French Ambassador had been assassinated -- he was a

close friend of hers -- "The terrible thing that's happening to us Lebanese is that we're very upset when a tragedy like that happens. We cry and cry and we think 'we must do something about this' and then we sort of just accept it. We're getting hard, we're hardening ourselves. It's terrible what's happening to us." She said, "And then the next week you've forgotten all about it, because something else has happened." They were worried about living like that, having all these terrible experiences one after the other and getting hardened to life.

Q: Did you feel that some of what you went through made you feel risking your experiences in the same light and you feel that something you went through has made you hardened to life as the Lebanese felt was happening to them?

DILLON: Sure, sure. That's what I mean when I say when you ask, "How was it living there?" and I say, "Well, the first day there would be some terrible tragedy, somebody would be killed or something awful would have happened." So you'd be very upset and running around to the hospital or doing something about it -- ordering flowers to be sent, very upset. And then the next day you'd just sort of make accommodation to this thing and by the third day you'd be going off to another party. That's the way they lived; very social people.

There were things that happened -- like, we'd been in Cairo before we got to Lebanon, we'd been with Sadat, who was a hero, we thought. We were at a party one day and we heard that Sadat was assassinated. So, to us, that was a terrible tragedy. There, certain Lebanese militias and certain Lebanese were celebrating by shooting off guns and jumping for joy, and very happy, because they were people who felt that Sadat had sold out to the Israelis. We went home, and I had the flag put down at half-mast. They didn't understand why I should care so much about somebody like Sadat; they were going on with their life, it was just nothing to most people. It was very upsetting to me. But then, that went away too.

Q: But it must be difficult nevertheless to live in that sort of emotional up-and-down experience, it must be very hard in many ways.

DILLON: There were things that happened like: I was getting ready to jump in the bathtub before getting dressed one night when I was staying at an apartment we had down next to the Embassy, to go out that night to a place called the Durreford [phon.sp.] Apartments. Just then erupted a huge hail of gunfire -- I thought they were shooting at our apartment, it sounded like they were right in the room with me. I learned later that a group had gone by and assassinated some people in a car right in front of the house; we had about 19 bullet holes in our building. But I didn't know what it was, you know, you get sort of (laughing) jumpy when you hear shots that happen so close. And Bob was in the States, I was alone there in that apartment. A lot of scary things happened like that. A PLO group tried to kill a friend of ours, Fred Hoff [phon.sp] a military attaché, when he was going through the harbor, shooting through his windshield; he was injured, not killed. Well, we went through that place all the time, it's the same place where John Gunther Dean, the Ambassador who preceded my husband, had all the tires blown out on

his car in an attempt to get him. Things like that happened from time to time and if they happened unexpectedly of course you weren't prepared. But I guess they went away sometimes, too.

Q: How do you think you had the internal strength to cope with this kind of very stressful living? To what do you attribute your personal ability to go on in a ... ?

DILLON: You know, we talked about this before, earlier, when I was going overseas and the difficult situations with little children? I found that much more difficult -- to be taking little children, leaving the country and going to foreign places which were unhealthy and unhappy, and putting them through health hazards and suffering. I found that a lot more difficult, and we wondered afterwards when we had hard times with the kids how we ever survived them. But at the time I remember saying, you just put one foot in front of the other and just go on, it's expected of you, it's the job you know, you don't question it, you just do what you -- (both laugh). And I wanted to be there with my husband -- he really seemed to need to have me there. I was of use, and I wanted to be with him, and he wanted me to be there, so I ...

Q: So you felt you were doing an important thing.

DILLON: I felt what I was doing I had to do. (laughs softly)

Q: (laughing merrily) You were doing what you had to do, eh? If you were to advise a young woman today who was in the position of being an Ambassador's wife going into a difficult setting, what kind of advice might you give her?

DILLON: (pause) Well I don't know. It would depend where she was going. If someone were to do the things that I did, I don't think I would say anything but it's a long line of crossword puzzles unless you get caught in a blitz. I -- I don't know. Anybody who would go in a situation like that would go because she wanted to go; and [if] I had an important job in Washington, I wouldn't have gone. (Kahn laughs heartily) And a lot of people do, these days.

Q: Okay. I'm pleased you're going to share something from a diary you kept, so I would be interested in hearing -- what is it?

DILLON: (reading) "Wednesday, September 14, 1983: One year ago today the hope of Lebanon was destroyed in a massive explosion at Kataeb (phon.sp.) headquarters at Ashrafiyah. Most of the plans for remembrance of this one-year anniversary have been postponed because of the troubles that have been going on since Sunday, August 28. The airport has been closed since then too. But I wanted to go to Bashir Gemayel's grave at Bikfaiya, so I got marooned -- it was only Christians who dared to go into that area. My regular driver Gemiel withdrew as it would be unsafe for him to be in the Kataeb area, the present fighting in the Shuf being mainly between Lebanese forces, Kataeb, and Druze militia, backed by Palestinians and Syrians. The gravesite had changed since I was there February 23, which was the day Maya, Bashir's 18-months-daughter, was killed in

an explosion in an attempt to kill him. On that day I'd gone up to Bikfaiya to play bridge with Leila Alia (phon.sp.) and Yvonne Gemayel. It was a snowy day. We walked down the steep hill to the mausoleum and could see a pretty, tiny church on a lower peak where they were having services for Maya, who'd been killed a couple of years before. The church bells were ringing. I took the sprig of orchid I had bought along the way and put it in front of the crypt where Mayas's and Bashir's pictures were. It was still the stark, dreary place it had been in November when I visited there after returning from my five months' evacuation. This time an overhead entrance had been added, a chapel on the lip of the hill, and a grotto to stand or sit under facing Bashir's tomb. Soldiers had put a lot of empty shell canisters two and a half feet high with water to hold and preserve the flowers people brought. I had to cover my face with my hands to hide my tears so I wouldn't disturb others. I had brought four red roses from the garden and a green vase. Along the way I asked Marun to stop at the flower shop so I could buy a fancy spray but it and all the other flower shops were closed for this sad occasion. I said to Marun, 'Malesh... it doesn't matter. Bashir would prefer these flowers anyway, his tastes were simple. You know that word simple? It's the same word in French.' 'Yes, that's why we loved him.' When I got back to the house someone had delivered two boxes of Bashir's tapes, one for Phil Habib and one for me, from Solange, his widow, with a note that said, 'His voice to remember - in testimony of my deep friendship - Solange.'"

When we were in Lebanon we met a lot of chieftains and VIPs and people with great personalities and people with power but the only one that really impressed me a lot was Bashir Gemayel. He had been called a thug and a murderer because he cleaned up opposition when he was making himself -- he was only 33 years old -- into the head of the Christian right-wing forces. He had come to the house a lot to talk to Bob about all the things that were going on. All the leaders of the different factions, the militias, did come to the house, but he had an unusual charm and an unusual ability to make you feel that he was going to really do something about the problems. He was ready to compromise with the other forces, and I had the feeling when he was elected President he was really going to do something to save the country. People who liked him adored him, so that after he was killed and everybody was distraught about that, the word was that God called him to Heaven because people were beginning to worship him and not worshipping God's Son as much as they used to any more. Of course that's an exaggeration because Lebanese are very good Christians, the ones who are Christians, that is. But he was somebody very, very impressive and I felt that it was a terrible loss to the country that he was assassinated.

BIOGRAPHIC DATA

Spouse: Robert S. Dillon

Both Entered Service: 2/56 Left Service: 3/87

Status: Spouse of retired ambassador

Posts:

1956-58 Puerto La Cruz, Venezuela
1958-59 Princeton University, Economics study
1959-60 Foreign Service Institute, Turkish language study
1960-62 Izmir, Turkey
1962-66 Ankara, Turkey
1966-70 Washington, DC
1970-71 Istanbul, Turkey
1971-74 Washington, DC
1974-77 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
1977-80 Ankara, Turkey
1980-81 Cairo, Egypt
1981-84 Beirut, Lebanon
1984-87 Vienna, Austria

Spouse's Position: Consular Officer; Economic Officer; Political Officer; Personnel Officer; Deputy to Consul General; Special Assistant to Under Secretary of Political Affairs; DCM; Ambassador; Deputy Commissioner General of UNRWA

Place/Date of birth: February 26, 1931, New York City
Malden Name: Burch

Parents (Name, Profession):

Guy Irving Burch, writer, founded Population Reference Bureau
Wilhelmina Taylor, editor, newspaper reporter

Schools (Prep, University): Duke University; George Washington University, AB History, 1960; University of Virginia, Teacher's certificate 1973

Date/Place of Marriage: June 16, 1951, Washington, DC

Profession: Teacher

Children:

Dale
Robert
John
Elizabeth
Tom

Volunteer and Paid Positions held:

A. At Post:

Volunteer - worked with village children and women in Turkey; helped in orphanage in Turkey. Paid - taught English as a second Language to Turks during two assignments; taught in International Schools in Malaysia, Egypt and Austria; taught at Air Force

dependent's school in Turkey

B. In Washington, DC:

Honors (Scholastic, FS): Received Woman of the Year Award from U.S. Marines, 1978;
Received certificate of appreciation for work done after bombing of Embassy in
Lebanon, 1983

End of Interview