

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

PAUL E. WHITE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background

Born and raised in Indiana
Racial environment
Family
Sacramento State College, Valparaiso University
East-West Center, Hawaii
Interest in Japan
Southeast Asia travel

Vientiane, Laos: International Volunteer Services (IVS); Volunteer 1966-c1970

English language instructor
USAID supervision
Guerilla warfare
US government presence
CORDS
Operations
The Hmong
Environment
Sam Thong

Transfer to USAID (Direct Hire): International Development 1970-1971

Operations
Environment
Pathet Lao
Military operations

Seoul, Korea: USAID; Internship Training 1971-1972

Environment
Korean/Japanese differences
New Village Movement
Korean Institute of science and Technology (KIST)
Korean Educational Development Institute

Vientiane, Laos: USAID: Deputy Director for Rural Development	1972-1974
Environment	
Peace negotiations	
Fred Branfman	
Jane Fonda	
Education level	
Infrastructure	
Corruption	
Phnom Penh, Cambodia: USAID; Refugee resettlement	1974-1975
Wartime environment	
Phnom Penh isolation	
Local culture	
Khmer Rouge	
Operations	
Relief organizations	
Ambassador John Gunther Dean	
Negotiated settlement	
Khmer Rouge	
Congressional delegation	
Operation Brotherhood	
Evacuation	
Utapao Air Force Base, Thailand: Refugee Reception Center	1975
Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian refugees	
Operations	
Panama City, Panama: USAID:	
Office of Education, Health and Nutrition	1975-1980
Family	
Indian tribes	
General Torrijos	
Tribal development	
Working with local government	
“Zonians”	
Living environment	
Infrastructure	
Relations with locals	
Ancon Hill	
Negotiations	
Sandinistas	
Nicaragua	
Food program	
Stanford University; Student; Communication and Social Change	1980-1981
In the third World	

Left-leaning professors Environment	
Lima, Peru: USAID: Deputy Chief, Office of Health, Education and Nutrition	1981-1983
Preschool project	
Political situation	
Sendero Luminoso	
Belaunde democracy	
Military legacy	
Educational planning project	
Economy	
Environment	
Operations	
Indian/Latino relations	
Relations with locals	
Teachers	
Scholarship programs	
Relations with Embassy	
Catholic Church	
Central America Book Program	
Military	
Teachers' Union	
Comments on success	
Family	
Headquarters, USAID: Chief, Education and Training, Energy and Environment for Latin America	1983-1986
Kissinger Commission	
Soviet Union training	
Central American Peace Scholarships Project	
Thermal energy	
Job training programs	
Georgetown University program	
Country Development Strategy Statement (CDSS)	
Planning long term	
Embassy/AID relationship	
Sandinistas	
Bookstores in Public Universities	
Guatemala City, Guatemala: Deputy Director, USAID	1986-1989
Ambassador Alberto Piedra	
Peace negotiations	
Indian programs	
Spanish/Mayan relationship	
Comments on operations	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agriculture cooperatives Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) Central American Peace Scholarships Project PL480 currency Military vs. Indians Female training Family planning Nicaragua Government Military 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Headquarters, USAID: Director, East Asian and South Asian Affairs Pressler Amendment Pakistan program Cross border programs India Congressional interest Female teacher training program Pakistan “off limits” territories Afghanistan programs Taliban Pakistan intelligence and military Contractors Cambodia program Khmer Rouge International Non Government Organizations Laos programs Relations with State Department Congressional staff members Collapse of Soviet Union Philippine base negotiations Philippine capabilities Islam 	1989-1991
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tokyo, Japan: Development Counselor, USAID Program Japan’s aid program organization Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Operations Japanese war reparations US/Japan aid policy differences Global Partnership program US-Japan Common Agenda HIV/AIDS Japanese Peace Corps Korea program North Korea 	1991-1998

Mongolia
 Japan's foreign language training program
 Japanese economy bubble
 Environment
 US Ambassadors
 Office of Development Assistance
 Development Assistance Committee of OECD
 Collapse of Soviet Union
 Japan/Russia disputes
 Mongolian Consultative Group
 Japan's Latin America aid programs

Mexico City, Mexico: Director US Aid Program 1998-2002
 Wild fires
 Environment alerts
 Tuberculosis
 Programs
 Elections and observers
 Relations with government officials
 Non Government Organizations (NGOs)
 Exchange programs
 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)
 Unions
 Congressional interest
 Family planning

Retirement 2002

INTERVIEW

Q: This is a Foreign Affairs Oral History Program interview with Paul White. Today is May 30, 2006, and we are in the northern Virginia suburbs of Washington, DC. This interview is being conducted under the auspices of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy. Paul, let's begin at the beginning. Could you tell me when and where you were born and something about your family?

WHITE: I was born in August 1941 a small town in southwestern Indiana, Brazil, and Indiana. When all you have in the state are hogs and corn, you have to find exotic names for towns to keep the people there. My home town was named Brazil - Indiana.

Q: Okay, let's go on your parents. What do you know about your father's side?

WHITE: My father was known as W.C. White, William Clarence White. He was a piano tuner and technician, organ repairer, and musician. He was born in the south - Kentucky.

As a young man, he worked in the coal mines. His first and only business was piano tuning.

He became a piano tuner because he was working in a German-owned piano factory as the stringer. His job was to put the big strings at the bottom of the sounding board and the small strings at the top. At one point the piano tuner fell ill. In the tuner's absence, my father tuned the new pianos. When the piano tuner returned to work he was surprised that my father had done a better job than he could have done. He took my dad under his wing and taught him the trade. Then he said, "If you'll just leave town so you're not in competition with me I'd be obliged to you."

That is when my father left Kentucky. He had a 'portable' profession – tuning pianos or playing piano. Wherever he was, he was able to make money tuning pianos, playing piano in silent movie theaters and elsewhere. He became a gypsy – going from town to town. Where ever he was, he was able to sustain himself and make enough money in one place to buy gas and move to the next when he wanted. He owned a Model T Ford. A black man with his own car was unusual in the early 1900's.

My dad was playing piano at a West Virginia hot springs resort when he met my mother. She was working as a maid at that resort. She once told me, "I had never seen a man as tall and handsome as your dad. And he had a profession. She had never met a black man who was other than a butler or waiter or some other lowly service job. They were married and together came up with a plan for a better life. They would go to California where they would find a brighter future."

They headed west. Like two gypsies on a journey of discovery. They only got as far as Indiana because the work for both was so good there that they decided to put their California dreaming plans on hold and make their future in the Hoosier state.

Q: Of course, too, there was an era which is a little different from today, when every house and we're talking about the smallest farmhouse, had a piano because, for one thing, there wasn't anything else and people would sit around the piano and they'd make somebody, usually a daughter but often all the kids took piano lessons and they played the piano, sat around and sang.

WHITE: That's right. My father was born in 1890. So we're talking about a time well before television. The piano was perhaps the most popular form of 'in home' entertainment. But it was also a time of harsh prejudice toward people of color. As a young man, my dad encountered lots of brutality – in words and in deeds.

When he started tuning pianos from town to town, the good news was that every church and every school had a piano. Most were in dire need of attention and tuning so churches and schools became his main work domain.

The bad news was that as a businessman my dad had figured out that there was a piano in almost every home. That would be a far more lucrative market if he could find a way to

access it. The problem was that he was a black man. During the day, the housewife and her kids were at home alone. The man of the house was away at work or working in the field in largely rural Indiana. That presented a formidable barrier to my dad being able to access that inviting home market.

Self-educated and a self-taught musician, and self-taught in his profession of piano tuning, my dad was extremely positive and creative. He was not one to be denied an opportunity. After much thought, he devised a plan - he hired a white "front man." His choice was a somewhat elderly white man named Rowe,

My dad and Rowe would park in front of a house, Rowe would knock on the door and say to the housewife, "Excuse me, ma'am, do you have a piano?" "Why yes I do." "Does it need tuning?" "Of course, it's been years...." "Well, let's talk price. Would \$5 dollars be reasonable?" They would agree on a price. Often it was barter, like two dozen fresh eggs and some freshly cured ham, vegetable from the garden.

Once the price was settled, Rowe would grin with a glint in his eye and say, "Ma'am, there's just one thing – you see, I'm not the piano tuner. See that black fellow out in the auto, he is the piano tuner. But you don't have to worry. I have a pistol right here (and he would draw and brandish the pistol). You don't have to worry about a thing. He won't do anything untoward. I'll be with him every minute."

As silly as that might seem these days, it was the right formula for those times. That is how my dad accessed the household piano tuning market.

Q: Indiana and the farm country had a reputation as the center of the Ku Klux Klan.

WHITE: Indiana has a history of being the largest KKK state outside of the solid south. Many KKK Grand Dragons have come from the Indiana arm of the Klan.

Q: Yeah and it's hard to visualize today but this was big stuff. What do you know about your father's parentage?

WHITE: I don't know a lot. My parents had 8 sons before me – all were either still born or died shortly after birth. I was the 9th and stubborn so I managed to survive. But that meant that my parents were relatively old - around 50 - when I was born. I did not have the opportunity to meet my grandparents on either side of the family. I know their names and I know where they were from and I heard a few stories about them, but that is about all. I never met my grandparents.

My paternal grandfather, Daniel, worked in the coal mines in Kentucky, as did my dad who worked in the mines at an early age of perhaps 9 when more fortunate kids were in school, He 'escaped' from the mines because of a tragic accident, a mine collapsed on him, breaking his back. After that, my father could no longer work at manual labor. That is when he taught himself music and that is what eventually took him to work in the piano factory – a job that shaped his career.

Q: How about on your mother's side, now.

WHITE: My mother's family was from the red hills of Alabama. They were Muscogee-Creek Indians. They lived as sharecroppers in and around the Tombigbee River. When I was young, we would make pilgrimages in the summer from Indian down to Alabama. Those were days of great adventure.

The Creek Indians lived in elevated houses - up on stilts just like I latter saw in Laos and Thailand. The Tombigbee River flooded often. When it did, the chickens and piglets were taken right up into the safety of the elevated house. The larger animals -cows, mules and horses- had to fend for themselves.

The "Brackette" family lived in extreme poverty. Our annual visits to the 'country' were exciting for me because my 'country cousins' were so different than the kids I grew up with in Indiana. I could barely understand a word that my Alabama cousins uttered. It was English; they did not grow up speaking Creek. But it certainly was not Standard English; it was 'pidgin.' Their entire world was that little red sand hill community about 5 miles square. It was like the outside world did not exist.

However, I witnessed an amazing transformation of my 'country cousins' over a relatively short time. We started the summer sojourns to Alabama, in the early 1940's. At some point, the Federal Government, in an effort to upgrade their housing, gave them house trailers and ran electric lines to those trailers. Within just a few years, my cousins were living in a world like I lived in back in Indiana. They were listening to baseball and the Lone Ranger on the radio, and later they were watching the Mickey Mouse Club, Captain Kangaroo, and the evening news. They were learning about the outside world and they were now talking the same language that I spoke. What an amazing life transformation – brought about by the introduction of electricity.

Q: Was this just an isolated group or were they part of a larger Indian community?

WHITE: There was no reservation. They were isolated families. Relatives lived in close association with one another, perhaps echoing the 'clan' structure from the days of their past. The Creek were known to have always accommodated run-away slaves and to have sought an existence isolated from the majority culture. Their isolated and independent existence was still in evidence in the way that they lived and in the racial mix of the people, predominantly Creek but with a smattering of blacks and whites as well.

Q: In Andrew Jackson's time.

WHITE: Exactly. The Brackette's and others essentially hid in the woods and stayed there. They hunted, raised chicken and pigs, and they grew some of the basic foods. When they needed more than a subsistent existence, they became sharecroppers.

There wasn't a broad sense of community. They lived in poverty in family grouping in a unique life style that I now understand much better than I did when I was growing up. Working with the Maya in Guatemala and Mexico, with the Indian groups in Panama, and with the Quechua and Aymara in Peru gave me a new understanding of my own family history. What had seemed to me as a child to have been a lifestyle brought about by poverty is now recognized with a better comparison. They lived much as the various Indian groups in Central and South America are living. The many shared attributed makes me feel that there they lived a Native American way of life very similar to what native communities live in Mexico, Guatemala and Peru.

Q: Now, back to your parents, did they stay in Brazil?

WHITE: They ended up staying in Brazil, Indiana even though that was not their intention at the time.

Q: Really, before your birth and all but what were their intentions? And was your mother considered to be Indian when you were growing up in Indiana?

WHITE: My father was considered to be black; for most, my mother's racial or ethnic origin was an enigma. She couldn't be placed in any easy group. After my parents were established in Brazil, my mother brought her younger sisters and brother up out of the south to Indiana. Her next younger sister (Emmie) and her brother (Dick) looked as Caucasian as anyone could ever look - with white skin, brown hair and Caucasian features. The youngest sister looked even more Indian than my mother did, with reddish Indian skin coloring and long jet black hair. Clearly, we were a family different from anyone else in Brazil, Indiana – a family that reflected the complex racial mixture of the Muskogee-Creek.

Q: Did you get, were there any stories from your family about settling there and being this unusual family, particularly in rural Indiana at the time?

WHITE: Yes – there were many stories about struggles with racism although those stories were not openly shared, they were family secrets. The earliest story was about a tragic day from my father's youth in Kentucky. He personally witnessed his younger brother, Romie, who was lynched by a gang of young white boys. Romie was coming home from school. It was alleged by a group of white boys that Romie had looked at a white girl in the 'wrong way' even though she was on the opposite side of the street from where Romie was walking.

The gang chased Romie to his home where they brutally beat him with baseball bats. Romie fell into a coma. He never recovered, dying a few days later. My father witnessed this lynching. As a child, I never heard this story. My parents did not talk about such things but an aunt let the story slip out while visiting us.

Another glimpse into racism was the story about how my parents ended up in Brazil, Indiana. They were originally trying to get to California, travelling from town to town,

working in each town to earn enough money to buy gas and continue moving westward. In Vincennes, Indiana, on the border with Kentucky, my dad found lots of work and what he believed to be a friendly and accepting environment. My mother found a job working as a maid and nanny for a wealthy family.

They had tired of the rigors of life on the road and decided that they would settle down in Vincennes. However, as my dad's piano tuning business grew by leaps and bounds, he became aware that he was taking business away from a rather inept but blind piano tuner. This white tuner complained to the KKK. One night there was a great commotion and a then a great conflagration – a fiery cross was burned in front of the place where my parents were staying. Get out of town Niggers was chanted by an angry mob. My parents feared for their lives. That night, they packed their few belongings and the next day, after telling the Shultize family where my mother was working that they had to leave, they departed Vincennes and made it that day to Brazil, Indiana near Terre Haute.

Those racial incidents – the lynching and the KKK cross - were reflections of a less gracious time in America. When I learned about this sad history, and as there was a growing sense of 'black pride' in America in the mid-50s, my life was profoundly impacted. I felt a rebellious spirit ignite somewhere deep within me and an angry spilled out.

The easy place to direct that anger was toward my father. It annoyed me that he would say, "Yes sir" and "No ma'am" to everyone. When he went into a house to tune a piano he would say, "Excuse me, ma'am, do you mind if I smoke in your house?" That was at a time when no one asked permission to smoke, but my dad did. I felt that he was obsessively subservient to the white people around him and that fueled the anger that I felt about the 'unfairness' of America.

My dad would say to me, "What has happened has happened. The past is the past. These people here in Brazil are my clients. They give me work and they support our life. They had absolutely nothing to do with what happened to me in my youth. I was raised to treat everyone with respect, whether they're black, yellow, or green. I say "Yes ma'am" and "No ma'am" and "Yes sir" and "No sir" to everyone. That's just my nature."

That did not make any sense to me. I could not understand his attitude – where was the anger and hate that he should have felt?

Q: But how about growing up, as a kid? Was there was, a black community or whatever you want to call it in Brazil at the time? How was the school system in terms of equality issues?

WHITE: There was a small black community. Brazil advertised itself as the "clay center of the world." Located in Clay County, many of the small towns around Brazil were named Clay City, Coal City, Coalmont, Coal Bluff, Carbon...., and I could continue. Brazil's economy was based on a plant that produced architectural tile from the clay, and also on strip pit coal mining. These industries attracted a small black population. The

black community was divided – a large part living in “Stringtown” and a smaller number of families living elsewhere. We lived on the border of Stringtown, and the white community – it seemed like we were not a part of the black community and certainly not a part of the white community. As a child, it always seemed to me that we were in ‘limbo’ with no real place in society.

So there was a small black community. My dad did not work in the tile factory like many of the other blacks did. He was an independent businessman and was border-line middle class. We did not attend black church services that held much of the black community together, but largely thanks to my mother, we bridged both groups. My mother was well-known by both communities. We lived in harmony with both.

The public school system in Brazil was excellent. There was little prejudice in the system itself although at a personal level there was always lots of name calling. Kids can be very cruel and often reflected what they learned at home more openly than the adults they learned from.

In school, I was given every opportunity to do whatever I wanted, and I did a lot. I played in the band; I played football; I ran track; I was in the Thespian Society; and I was an excellent student who had perfect attendance for all 12 years of schooling.

Socially there was a line beyond which you did not go as a minority. You didn’t even think of interracial dating in those days. Inside of education system there was much opportunity and acceptance; socially a different set of values were in force.

Q: Did you sort of inherit your father’s musical ear?

WHITE: I did not. My mother insisted that I take piano lessons and that I play an instrument. Like many kids, I preferred sports. I didn’t show any interest in music or have any particular musical talent until high school. There I joined a rock ‘n roll band and then, for the first time, I began to dedicate quality time to learning the music craft.

My dad, on the other hand, was a musical genius - a musician’s musician. He was masterful at all of the stringed instruments, and especially the banjo and mandolin. While widely acclaimed for his piano playing, he was a virtuoso on the mandolin. He could make the mandolin emulate the human voice. When he played mandolin, people smiled, they cried, they danced.

One song that he was known for was ‘*Listen to the Mockingbird*’. He would make the mandolin strings or piano sound just like a mockingbird. He also played on the piano a medley of all of the service songs and included some John Phillip Sousa marches in between each one. He could make the piano’s low notes sound like booming drums and the upper notes sound several piccolo playing in unison. I wish now that I had paid more attention to his musical talent. I wish I had recorded him. At the time, I was too angry with him to appreciate his prodigious talent.

Q: at home, what was life like in the family?

WHITE: Life was good. In those days before the Great Society welfare programs, most blacks lived in and benefitted from two parent families. I certainly did. My father spent one night away from my mother in their four decade marriage. That one time was because he was serving on a jury. It was a hung and the judge required the jury to spend the night at the courthouse to the great concern of my mother who could not understand why her husband could not come home that night.

My dad was old school' - very old fashioned. He did not show emotion in public so there was never any lovey-dovey hand holding, kissing or softness in our home. I don't recall ever hearing my father saying a word of praise to me about my school work or my being the captain of the football team, or anything else. He was not soft but he was a good person. I never saw him drink and never heard him swear. But he had one very visible vice, he was a chain smoker. He rolled his own, most often with one hand,

Prince Albert pipe tobacco was the tobacco of choice and Riz La cigarette papers were the only papers that he would use. As he was finishing one cigarette he was rolling another. All of his pants legs were filled with small holes. The hot loose tobacco would dribble out and give his pant legs a distinct look. Although he was not soft, and certainly was idiosyncratic in some ways, he was known and respected in a sixty-mile radius of Brazil for his piano tuning, for his integrity, for his politeness and honesty, and for his absolute dedication to doing his best at whatever task he undertook.

My mother was a 'salt of the earth' type. Everyone loved her. She grew flowers; she painted oil pictures of nature scenes that people would come by the house to buy. Her vegetable gardens produced extra income in the summers, and she was known for spending some time every day fishing for bass and blue gills in every lake, creek and river within walking distance of her home. My mom was as outgoing, gregarious and social as my dad was quiet and introspective. He was taciturn, especially at home. He hardly said a word.

Q: Was your mother sort of the power behind the family, as far as pushing you towards school and education and all that?

WHITE: Yes, she certainly was and my dad certainly was not. My dad felt that he had established a really good business and that as a son I should take over that family business and continue tuning pianos in the market that he had established. He knew that I was an excellent student and that I was interested in going to college but he tried to persuade me to just spend a few years working with him after high school, thinking that if I did I would eventually stay and take over his business.

My mother had always encouraged me to learn. She taught me to read before I went to first grade, reading Zane Grey books to me every day and then having me read them to her. Even though angry at my father, out of respect for him, I spent the first year as his

apprentice, going with him to tune pianos every day. I learned the technique needed but never had a passion for the job.

After the year, I was ready to go to college. This time my mother became a bit hesitant about my decision because I had decided to attend college in California. I wanted to put some space between me and my parents and see if I could survive outside of my family situation. My mother was not happy that I was going to California but she understood my motives for doing so and accepted my decision. She was certainly the person who pushed me succeed academically. She had 3 years of schooling; my dad only one year – the most that they could receive where they grew up. They both understood that education would open doors for me that had remained closed for them.

Q: How about in the house? You sit around at the dinner table talking about politics or religion or anything like that?

WHITE: Definitely not. We did have a family dinner table because that was the tradition at that time. But it was an extended family table. My mother's sister lived in Brazil, coming from Alabama at my mother's invitation. She had seven kids. Their financial situation was more precarious than ours and the mother and father both worked a couple of jobs. My cousins were the brothers and sisters that I never had and they spent a lot of time at our house.

So often at dinner time there were three or four almost brothers and sisters around the table with us. That certainly made the conversation lively. It gave me playmates and it meant that the conversation around the table was dominated by the kids. We did not talk about current affairs or politics or religion or the daily news. The conversations were about natural things, about the garden, about the weather, about neighbors, common rural people topics.

We had a goldfish pond in our backyard. My mother loved to fish. She tried to go fishing every day. Around the table we would talk about going to the woods, hunting berries and nuts, the snakes or squirrels that we encountered. In fact, it was not until I went away to college that I started to understand that there was a broader world out there that people talked about that involved politics, international issues, current affairs and religion.

Q: Where did the family fall, say religiously?

WHITE: My father was a Christian Scientist. He was not a church-going person but he did believe. Until he suffered a heart attack and emphysema and was admitted to the hospital by others when he was not in control, he had never seen a doctor. It was only at the very end of his life did he receive medical attention.

My mother, like many Native Americans, worshipped nature. Like my dad, she was not a church-going person either. She did teach me about Nature on our daily fishing expeditions. When I was four or five years old, my parents decided that I should go to church so that I could know about religion and make up my own mind about what I

wished to follow, if anything. There was a bus that picked up neighborhood children and took them to the First Church of the Nazarene. I started attending that church.

I found the Nazarene Church to my liking. <Many friends my age attended and everyone there was friendly. I went there for most of my younger life. I was a good Bible scholar, having read the Bible through several times. The Church wanted to send me to a Nazarene Church college, hoping that I would become a preacher or missionary. But as I mentioned earlier, when I graduated from high school I went to work for my dad rather than attend college. But, in answer to your question, I had a very active religious life even though my family was not a part of it.

Q: Politically, was there a political cast to your family?

WHITE: I certainly heard my mother say many times that she had never cast anything except a Democratic vote. She traced that back to Roosevelt and Truman. I don't remember the details but she was very clear that she was a Democrat. I never heard my father mention politics other than practical things – about how one or another local politician might impact his profession or earning ability.

Q: Were you much of a reader?

WHITE: I was an avid reader. As I mentioned, I was reading Zane Grey novels before I went to the first grade.

Q: Zane Grey was a very popular writer of western stories.

WHITE: *The Riders of the Purple Sage*, I had read a lot of that book out loud to my mother before I ever went to the first grade. I remember that there was a ten o'clock lights out policy in our house on school nights. I often could be found, however, down under the covers with a flashlight reading whatever I could get my hands on. My problem was justifying the need for so many flashlight batteries.

When you grow up in a place where you don't quite fit into the social structure, you don't quite fit well with your parents, and you're an only child with few real friends, although I did have all those cousins to play with, life got pretty lonely. I found very early on that books were a magic carpet ride to anywhere in the world or beyond. I became a voracious reader of anything and everything that I could get my hands on.

Q: How about, you say that the school was, you didn't feel prejudice at the school. How did you find the school? It was part of the Indiana public school system, I assume.

WHITE: Looking back on it now, Brazil was a good place to go to school. I received a really solid foundational education from a few teachers who were outstanding. The high school science teacher, Mr. Mosher, was a tough but phenomenal teacher. He could have taught in any college anywhere. On the other hand, there were other teachers who were

not so strong academically. Perhaps their main job was being the football coach or the basketball coach but they also taught academic subjects.

I remember when after graduating college I joined International Voluntary Services and was posted to Laos. I saw my high school geography teacher who was working summers at the public swimming pool. I told him that I was going to Laos as a volunteer. He had no idea where Laos was. There were strong and weak teachers in the school system, but the strong ones were really good. They were masterful in what they did and their ability to impart knowledge, to inspire, and their confidence in me as a student set me up well for success in life.

Q: In school, were particularly white girls out of bounds, more or less?

WHITE: Absolutely, There was no socializing between whites and blacks in any way. That was just something you didn't even think about growing up in those days. And of course, after learning about the lynching of the person who would have become my uncle for that very thing, I was not interested in opening any doors that did not need to be opened.

Q: Well, how about, what was your impression of, since you were sort of on the periphery of two communities, what was your impression of the small black community?

WHITE: My sense was that they, that like any community there was a range of people. There was a World War II ambulance driver in the military that came back a drunkard. When you saw him he was usually staggering down the middle of the street or falling off the sidewalk on his way to the Dew Drop Inn to buy a another bottle of wine. He was one extreme of that community – a heart of gold but with severe problems. My father was at the other extreme - totally responsible, aware at all times of how others perceived him, conscientious, dedicated to his work.

Most people fit more towards my father's side. I recall the men as hard workers in difficult and demanding physical labor jobs. Often they held down several jobs in order to make a living wage. Most of the wives worked as maids in peoples' houses or as cooks or they would take in laundry. As with the men, many held down two or more jobs.

What most strikes me, as compared to today; almost all of the black families were two parent families. Most of them had a large number of kids and so they struggled economically, but the kids were always well dressed, even if in hand-me-downs. While there was poverty in that community, no one thought about hand-outs. There was a strong sense of community with everyone looking out for everyone else. The entire community raised the kids. People knew each other's circumstance and helped as a community when there was a need. The church often was the place that generated that sense of community and that assured that those in economic or emotional need received assistance. .

Because I've been overseas so much, I have not recently been part of a community in the United States. Comparisons with today are not based on actual experience, but there was such a strong sense of community when I was growing up. We know all of our neighbors. We had community parties. There was a stigma associated with having children out of wedlock, or accepting welfare rather than earning a living, and there was pride in and a respect for the institution of marriage. There was an understanding that if a kid (or an adult) was out doing something that was outside of the social norm, that someone would not only see it but would also talk about it to others and that the word would get back. There were informal strictures that kept the community together.

Q: You didn't have a problem being attracted to the pool house crowd or whatever?

WHITE: In a small, rural town you didn't have the kind of vices that you have in big cities. I don't think I ever heard a term like marijuana or cocaine until I went away to college. Occasionally you would see a star athlete smoking a cigarette and that was really something, to see because he would usually be hiding behind a telephone pole or in a shadowed place out of eye sight. That was the kind of vice that existed at that time – nothing like today.

There were many benefits of growing up in a small, rural town. Our family would go on vacation every summer. We were lucky because my father was self-employed. For a couple of months in the summer we would just get in the car and travel. We often went to Alabama, but because my mother loved the mountains west of the Mississippi and especially of the Pacific Northwest we would go west.

My father loved Indiana – including the flatness of it, because he earned a good living and was popular. My mother loved the mountains, the rivers, the forests, the alpine flowers. So they made an agreement, for a couple of months every year we'd go out to a place where my mother enjoyed. When we did that, we would leave the house open, not locking the doors even though we might be gone for several months.

We never thought that someone would go into the house and steal anything, and of course no one ever did. It was a different world in those days. Part of it was rural Indiana. When I go back to Indiana now, it's still looks a lot like it was when I grew up but things have changed.

Q: In school, what sort of courses grabbed you and what courses didn't grab you?

WHITE: Everything grabbed me. I loved school. For twelve years I had perfect attendance. I never missed a day of school. Sick, rain, shine, sleet, hail, I had to go to school. I loved school.

I was in a post-Sputnik high school. After Sputnik, they ripped away history and English, literature and civics. Those 'soft' subjects, were replaced by Russian, analytical geometry and calculus. [Ed: On October 4, 1957, the Soviet Union sent into orbit Sputnik 1, the first artificial satellite in history. Sputnik's launch came as an unnerving surprise to the

United States. The space age had dawned and America's Cold War rival suddenly appeared technologically superior. This event sparked considerable emphasis on education.]

I loved the new curriculum and the high school science teacher was a master teacher. I graduated from high school thinking that I would major in astrophysics. I did start my college career studying science and astrophysics but I quickly moved away from that because there were too many temptations out there - other things that I wanted to study and the science curriculum had virtually no electives. I decided to move away from science for just one year – taking anything that I wanted to sate my curiosity, and then I thought I would return to science.

After a year of psychology philosophy, anthropology, sociology, art and other subjects of interest, never did go back to science.

Q: You graduated from high school what year?

WHITE: 1959.

Q: Did you feel part of the high school or again were you a separate unit?

WHITE: I felt like I was a separate unit. I had some close ties. The guys in the rock band were all close friends. I was a captain on the football team and on the track team as well. Our football team was undefeated our senior year and so the track team. Sports were a big part of my life and some of the football players were close friends. But, in general, I felt like a lone wolf, partaking here and partaking there but not being a part of anything.

Q: Well then you said that you started looking at California. Where'd you go and what attracted you to where you went?

WHITE: When I was in junior high school I read a book by Lafcadio Hearn [27 June 1850 – 26 September 1904] about Japan. That changes my feelings about myself. I went from not feeling a part of anything around me to totally falling in love with Japan. I found a way to engage Japanese pen pals and ended up with seven or eight. I developed a love for things Japanese and decided that I had to go to Japan as that is where I might find something special that would make my life whole.

The closest place to start was California. That is how I picked California. Rather than accept a four-year scholarship to the University of Michigan, even after visiting and loving the campus, I decided that Michigan was just too close to home. We had a summer home in Michigan and I knew that if I were to attend Michigan my parents would probably move there and would then expect me to come home every weekend. I wanted space so I began my college experience at UC Berkeley. It didn't take long for me to grow to hate Berkeley. It was way too big and impersonal. My freshman English class was larger than my hometown. I transferred to Sacramento State, which was a small

college that was just being landscaped. I felt comfortable there. I begin to spend a lot of time in California thinking about and getting to know about things Japanese.

After two years at Sacramento State, my father's health declined. I returned to Indian in my junior year to be closer to home. I completed my final two years of college at Valparaiso University in northern Indiana. Valpo was a really good school. The largest Lutheran university, it was able to attract the best Lutheran professors from around the world. It was a small school where I was could play football and run track, and play in the orchestra. I majored in psychology and art and I had a minor in math and philosophy.

The Dean of the College was a Niponophile. He loved Japan and spent every summer in Japan. When I was talking to him about graduate school he mentioned the East-West Center a possibility, noting that I could explore my interest in Japan at the Center. I had not really thought about Hawaii but the Dean made it sound very attractive. I applied and I was accepted with a full graduate fellowship.

I went to the University of Hawaii, majoring in Asian Studies. That program gave me an opportunity to travel to Japan and other parts of Asia. I had realized a long held dream.

Q: First, let's go back to Sacramento State. How did you find it? Did it have an Asiatic focus at all there or were you able to get much out of it?

WHITE: My most salient memories of Sacramento State are about how hard I worked there. I had a part-time job at the Bureau of Motor Vehicles, purging old drivers' licenses records of out-of-date tickets. I also held down a campus job a janitor in the dormitories, running a buffing machine. I really struggled to earn enough money to continue with my studies. I studied hard and even thought about playing football. I was really missing being a big man on campus as I had been in high school, but I recognized that I did not have time to do more than I was doing.

I lived off campus in a boarding house. Most of the boarders were construction workers who were working on the Donner Pass highway. I wasn't more connected to these guys than to students at Sacramento State. There was nothing very Asian for me in Sacramento but I often went to San Francisco where I spent a lot of time in Japan Town and Chinatown.

Q: Were you picking up any stories, 'although this is before sort of attention was focused on it, the wartime relocation of the Japanese from California. Were you getting any insight there?

WHITE: Not really. I had a few close Japanese friends but I don't think that subject came up at the time, I did learn a bit about how the Japanese viewed themselves relative to other ethnic groups. It was during this period that I also became aware of other aspects of our own culture. There was an ice cream parlor close to the boarding house. I often went there to study. I met Victor there - a Jewish kid who grew up like I did, sort of an outcast.

Victor did not have any friends until we became close friends because he liked to play chess and so did I.

I learned a lot from Victor, about how other people view the world. Victor and his family had a really distorted view of black people. They were amazed that I had body hair. His mother admitted that she had always thought that black people did not have body hair until one day she looked at my arm and said out loud, "My God, you have hair on your arm!"

That was startling knowledge for them, shaking what had been absolute knowledge. The mother called family members, "Come and look!" For me it was revealing as well. Growing up in Brazil where I had never visited houses of classmates outside of our community, as a black person I did not know much about family life. When I went to Victor's house, and to another white friend's house to spend time with him and his family I started to see how they lived and I started to learn some things about how varied and different family life is from one family to another. While I didn't have any close Japanese friends, this new learning that I was experiencing was preparing me for a time when I would have Japanese friends.

Another learning that happened at that time had to do with Mexican migrant workers. A guy at the boarding house was an artist - Harry Moss. Harry was broke. He was living in a closet at the boarding house because the boarding house manager liked him. She let him sleep in a hall closet, which was just big enough for him to fit into. Harry had an assignment to paint Mexican agricultural workers. He felt that he needed to 'suffer' with them first in order to capture their 'essence.' We went to the hops fields together. That was the first time I had been exposed to Mexican migrant workers. Through Harry, I learned a lot about their trips to the hops fields and then to the black cherries in Michigan, the whole circuit that they followed in those days. I was starting to see and understand a complex world.

Q: Well then, Valparaiso, what was it like? Was it different than Sacramento State?

WHITE: It was very different. First of all, I lived on campus, I was in a fraternity, I played in the band, I played football, I ran track. I was part of the university there, unlike Sac State where there might not have been anyone on campus who even knew who I was. At Valpo everyone knew me.

It was at Valpo where I for the first time took a drink. I was in a rock band. One day someone in the band had a bottle of blackberry brandy. I had never had a beer but for some reason on that occasion on the bandstand the bottle was being passed around and I tried it. I got drunk for the first time. It wasn't pleasant.

I had never, throughout high school and my two years in California, had a date. That was just not a part of the social structure in Indiana and then at Sac State I was just too busy working and didn't have such things on my mind. At Valpo I was more a part of the

campus and social life. I had lots of fans, especially girls who followed our band. I started dating – really late in life - a junior in college. I was at Valpo from 1962 to 1964.

Q: Did you, early on at all get caught up in sort of the election of 1960 and Kennedy and all that? Did that touch you at all?

WHITE: Barely at all. I prided myself in was being apolitical. I stayed far away from campus political rallies and political organizations. I would get up and leave if a political or religious discussion was begun in the dorm or elsewhere.

Q: Were you picking up anything about the Cold War, the Soviet Union and all that?

WHITE: Only on the margins. Because I went to a post-Sputnik high school where the competition with Russia was discussed, I was aware of it. But things political had not yet become a part of my life at that time.

In November 1963, when President Kennedy was assassinated, I was at Valpo. I had moved out of the student dorm and was living in an apartment right at the edge of the campus with two roommates. I remember that I was cooking in the kitchen when I heard the news that President Kennedy had been shot. I remember going to the campus. Everyone was there wondering what would happen next. But I was not very informed about our concerned with the big international items of our time like the Cuban Missile Crisis [October 1962]. I was still at heart a pretty naive Indiana farm boy.

Q: Well, you graduated from Valpo in 1964 and went on to the East-West Center that fall. What was the attraction of the East-West Center?

WHITE: It was a graduate school where I could major in East Asian Studies. Most of the American fellowship holders majored in Asian Studies, China, Japan Southeast Asia or south Asia. A few Americans studied South Pacific studies. The Center paired American graduate students with Asians. It had peak funding from the U.S. Congress, probably because of the Vietnam War and a hope that such programs would increase East-West understanding and produce a new generation of better informed diplomats on both sides of the Pacific.

The Asian roommate generally was studying a technical subject rather than about U.S. culture. My roommate was from Japan because I was studying Japanese. Mitsuo was a great roommate. He studied, and studied, and studied some more. The University of Hawaii was the host for the East – West Center. It was a reasonable graduate school for Asian studies, for oceanography and a few other fields but it was not a powerhouse across the board. The East-West Center itself, because it was very well funded, was able to attract visiting lecturers and important people from Asia and the United States. There was a lot of valuable research going on at the Center. I had a chance to get to know Dr. Gordon Allport, who was a visiting Expert, He engaged me in thinking about the Korean minority in Japan and how their treatment my compare with blacks in the U.S. and even the Japanese interment during the Second World War

Q: While you were going there and Valparaiso also, did Vietnam and our involvement there raise much interest with you?

WHITE: Not really. Students were beginning to protest the war but that was not an item of personal interest for me at the time. Hawaii became a training center for government officials and Peace Corps volunteers who were being assigned to Vietnam and to Laos and Cambodia. On the margins I began to hear more about Southeast Asia and I began to develop a growing interest in Southeast Asia even though I was largely focused on Japan and East Asia.

Q: How did you find, you were taking Japanese at this point. How did you find Japanese?

WHITE: It was really hard for me. Most of the students in beginning Japanese class were Nisei and Sansei. They already had a smattering of the language or more. I was starting from zero; they were not. I found it very hard but I had a Japanese girlfriend. I learned a lot from her.

Q: Was she Japanese Japanese?

WHITE: Japanese Japanese, yes she was. She was a Japanese student from Japan who had been to the U.S. as a high school student in the American Field Service program and she had attended a Catholic school in Japan. She was bi-cultural and bilingual.

Q: You had to be careful that you didn't learn feminine Japanese.

WHITE: That's what happened. I picked up some very feminine Japanese from her. Also, living in Hawaii I had many Japanese friends. They speak very antiquated Japanese from the southern islands of Japan, and still spoke it like it was spoken 150 years ago. Between those two, when I got to Japan I had a rude awakening about my Japanese. I had to relearn a lot and I certainly had a lot of people laughing at not only what I had to say but how I said it.

Q: What was the view you were getting of Japan at this particular point?

WHITE: Before I went to Japan, my view was definitely through the rose-colored glasses of Lafcadio Hearne on through the eyes of others that I read. I was getting a really nice view of Japan. My view became much more realistic when I actually set foot on Japanese soil. As part of the East-West Center program, I went to Japan for a field study experience.

I found that being different in Japan made life very hard. Everybody in Japan was the same and being the same put people in a place of comfort. Individualism was not as prized as it was in America, and if you had a dark skin that really made you a *gaijin*, an outsider. If I told people my name was Mr. White, they'd say, "Oh, Mr. Black, it's very nice to meet you." Color was on their minds and the difference stood out and was more

than I could ever have imagined. Being a poor university student made it even worse, because students had very low status. In the beginning, I was pretty disappointed in Japan.

Q: Well you went to Japan when?

WHITE: In 1965.

Q: And you were there for how long?

WHITE: I was in Japan for a couple of months, but on that same trip as part of the East-West Center program I travelled to Southeast Asia. Our group went to Singapore and then Malaysia right at the time that Singapore and Malaysia separated. After Kuala Lumpur, we went to Bangkok and then up to Chiang Mai. In Chiang Mai, I first was exposed to the cultural diversity of Southeast Asian culture. Having been really whipped by the homogeneity of Japan, I couldn't believe how diverse the Golden Triangle area was and how gracious, open and friendly the Thai were, especially in the northeast.

I was mesmerized by the cultures and languages of the ethnic minority hill tribe of the region. I decided that I'd spent enough time focusing on East Asia. I vowed to start a new journey of exploration and discovery – I committed to becoming a Southeast Asianist upon graduating from the East-West Center. I knew that I would find a way to travel to and work in Southeast Asia.

Q: Then, while you were at the East-West Center could you switch subjects or were you still focused on Japan?

WHITE: I still remained in the East Asia program but started to develop deeper friendships with the EWC fellows from Southeast Asia, and especially the Lao.

Q: Paul, looking at a letter you wrote to us, I don't believe you mentioned the role of Ralph Bunche. Is this a place to do it?

WHITE: Sure. The reason I was at the East-West Center is that Dean Tuttle of Valparaiso University loved Japan. Dean Tuttle traveled to Japan every summer. When I met with the Dean to discuss what I should do with the next chapter of my life after graduating, he uncovered my childhood fascination with Japan. He was excited. He immediately suggested that I consider enrolling in the East-West Center.

That application required a couple of letters of reference. The Dean agreed to write one letter of recommendation. He suggested that I find a prominent black personage to write the second letter. Being a country bumpkin from Brazil, Indiana, I did not know anyone. The most prominent black person I knew was my father and he had a second grade education. The Dean suggested that I approach Dr. Ralph Bunche by sending him my excellent college transcripts. At the time, Dr. Bunche was serving as Undersecretary for

Special Political Affairs at the UN. I found his address, sent him a letter, and he graciously wrote a letter of reference for me.

That's how I got into the East-West Center. My East-West fellowship ended in 1966. It was a tremendous and life-changing experience.

Q: Whither?

WHITE: I came to Washington to apply for various jobs. My one objective was to find a job that would take me to Southeast Asia, preferably northeast Thailand or Laos. I was not having any luck. Then serendipitously, I met on the street someone I knew from the East-West Center - Jack Parameter. Jack had just signed on with the International Voluntary Services to go to Laos. He convinced me to go with him to the IVS offices. I did and ended up joining IVS to go to Laos as an IVS volunteer.

Q: Tell me about the IVS. What sort of organization was it in the Sixties?

WHITE: When I joined, IVS was a church-based group. It was a Quakers group that was used by many for alternate service. Many IVSers were conscientious objectors who didn't mind going to Southeast Asia but didn't want to do so in the military. IVS in Laos was largely funded by USAID. It had programs in Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, and in Iran, Iraq and other nations as well. But the largest number of people was in Southeast Asia.

In Laos, the IVS volunteers were out on the front line in what was called 'forward area' programs. They were dedicated to doing whatever it was that they did – the main programs were in rural development and education. Some volunteers worked in agriculture, primary health care, irrigation, sanitation, malaria eradication, fish pond and rural road construction and many other fields. At some point during the 1960s, some of the newest volunteers leaned pretty far left to the point of being openly anti-government and anti-government funded IVS programs in Southeast Asia.

Eventually, these new volunteers rejected all U.S. government funding. That automatically reduced IVS to such a level that only a small number of volunteers remained in a few countries. IVS became just a shadow of its former self.

Q: Well when you were doing it it was

WHITE: During my time of service, IVS was large and vibrant. I worked directly under USAID supervision for most of my time in Laos. .

Q: What sort of training did you get before you went out?

WHITE: We had an interesting few weeks of training in Washington. The academic training focused on cross-cultural awareness. An anthropologist was on staff, Jay Ingersol. He helped us understand what it might be like living and working in a foreign

culture. We received intensive Lao language training for one week at ten hours a day, I believe at Berlitz or another contract school - it wasn't a long duration language training program but it prepared us well for rural Laos. The instructor spoke no English so it was find a way to communicate and learn. As I look back, that was an effective way to introduce Americans to a totally different tonal language with no easy cognates.

Q: Then you went to Laos...

WHITE: I was in Laos from '66 to '73, with a short stint in Korea during that time as well.

Q: Where did you go initially?

WHITE: Initially I was assigned to Vientiane. I was assigned to the education team and was sent to Dong Dok, a fledgling local college; I was assigned to teach English there. My original agreement with IVS was that I would go up country to work with the Hmong ethnic tribes. That is what I expected but when I arrived in Laos I was told, "Well, you really don't have much choice. There are only two programs - an education team and a rural development team. None of them work up in the Hmong area that you want to go to."

It took me a number of months to negotiate an up country assignment in Hmong country. In that interim period, I worked at the local university and then was assigned to the Asia Foundation, working for its iconic director, Lou Connick.

Q: What was the situation in Laos in 1966 when you got there?

WHITE: It was confused, at best. There were neutralists, rightists, Pathet Lao and everything in between. It was hard to tell on any given day what warlords were on what side. There was active fighting in the countryside but it was very quiet in backward towns of Pakse, Savannakhet, Vientiane and Luang Prabang. The guerilla warfare there was associated with war in neighboring Vietnam and was mainly along the Ho Chi Minh trail that ran along the entire border of Laos and Vietnam.

Q: Had the battles of, I think of Kong Le, between the generals, had that already happened?

WHITE: The Kong Le coup had already happened. The struggle seemed to be for the Plain of Jars and along the Trail. The larger struggles with concentrated North Vietnamese support were yet to come.

Q: Here you were an American working for a voluntary NGO (non-government organization). What was the official American presence there at that time?

WHITE: As I best understood it, the official American presence was in a group similar to CORDS in Vietnam [Ed: Civil Operations and Revolutionary Support was a counter-

insurgency program based in Vietnam, not Laos]. That was a coordinated government body that folded State and AID, CIA, the military attachés all into one group. A lot of people lost their designation while in Laos. It was a very large mission - probably the second largest in the world behind Vietnam would be my guess. There were lots of direct hire government officers there and also lots of contractors - like IVS.

Q: What was your initial, you spent a considerable amount of time, seven years. What was your initial impression of the Laotians that you were making contact with?

WHITE: Before I went up country? Well, before I went up country my impression was that Laos was a very happy place. There was no evidence that I could see in and around Vientiane of the war, except you would occasionally see soldiers on the street. But working out at the university or working with the Asian Foundation, where I worked with Buddhist monks, my impression was that the lowland Lao were an extremely easy-going people, very friendly and open. That was something I was looking for after having found Japan, a place that I had loved so much before going there, to be rather insular, protective and somewhat hostile or at least reserved with foreigners. I didn't find any prejudice in Laos so I felt very comfortable there.

Q: How did you find the students, as students?

WHITE: Laid back. They did not have the discipline and strong study habits that I would have expected. They were not burning the house down to learn English as the educated already spoke French. Many felt that was enough. Laos was a French colony and French was the language that was used in academia. While there was a smattering of students interested in studying English, the group was small. But I was there part-time, knowing that I would soon leave. I never fully connected at Dong Dok and was not closely attached or involved the way that my IVS colleagues were. Those who were assigned to Dong Dok formed a core of people dedicated to that institution and they developed a group of students who showed great interest in English and the American way of life. Those education team members have wonderful memories of serving at Dong Dok.

Q: Well then, you went up country, where'd you go?

WHITE: I went to Sam Thong, Xieng Khouang Province. That was right at the southern edge of the Plain of Jars. It was the provincial administrative capital; Long Tieng was just across a ridge line from Sam Thong. Long Tieng was the headquarters of General Vang Pao and his secret army.

Q: What were you doing there?

WHITE: I originally was assigned to teach English at the teacher training school. The valley of Sam Thong was a seat of provincial governor. Sam Thong housed all of the administrative offices of the government and also had a large primary school and a teacher training school. The school system was primarily for the Hmong as it was in a largely Hmong area. I taught English but quickly identified other areas where I could be

of better service. I began to help the teachers build school furniture and improve school infrastructure. I also spent time working on community projects, building a sports complex, and promoting adult literacy and adult participation in the school system.

Q: What was your impression at the time of the relationship between the lowland Lao and the Hmong?

WHITE: There were clearly some frictions between the groups. Some lowland Lao felt that the Hmong were dirty and uneducated. I heard such comments a lot because I had learned my Lao from the Hmong so I spoke Lao with a heavy Hmong accent. So when I was in Vientiane or other parts of Laos and would speak Lao, people right away would detect that I lived with the Hmong. That would occasion side comments about the Hmong that often were not gracious. That was unfortunate. That was not a lot of opportunity for interaction between the Hmong and the Lao, because they live in very different geography. Laos was a country with few roads and little connection between the people who lived in the mountains (the Hmong and other ethnic hill tribe groups and the people who lived in the river valleys (the lowland Lao). There wasn't a lot of social contact between the two groups.

Q: Where you were, was this almost strictly Hmong, or were the lowland Lao sort of holding administrative positions?

WHITE: Sam Thong was a Hmong village. However, some administrative positions were Lao or a similar group, Lao Puan. Many administrative positions, however, were held by Hmong. For instance, the Provincial Director of Education was a Hmong – Moua Lia.

Q: I've heard since many Lao and many Hmong ended up in Minnesota and places like that, that there was a real problem because they didn't have an alphabet or whatever. In other words, that they really hadn't received much, their culture just did not prepare them to move easily into the Western world. Is that true?

WHITE: The Hmong were among the most primitive of the people in Laos. There were probably some hill tribes that were even more isolated and primitive but the Hmong lived in an area with no roads, with no cash economy, and with no written language (except for a written language promoted by missionaries that was known only by a few people). That's why they had adjustment problems when they came to the U.S. as refugees.

Hmong were reported to have hunted for squirrel with crossbows in Golden Gate Park. The majority of Hmong who came here were rural people with no little or no education. But the Hmong are remarkable. They have, in a short generation, turned that around. I attended a meeting held by General Vang Pao a couple of years ago in Wisconsin. It was a tribute given to him by the Hmong. From the stage, one could look out across a large valley and see three kinds of Hmong represented. There was the old generation of Hmong wearing their iconic Hmong dress and jewelry. The women held parasols to protect them from the sun. Then there were the soldiers - because the Hmong army still exists. They were dressed in camouflage fatigues. Finally, there was the new generation Hmong –

either born in America or raised from a young age in America. They had the benefit of a Western education and who were now doctors, nurses, lawyers, some local politicians, academics and business owners, even some airplane pilots.

The three groups were distinct. They showed major elements of recent Hmong history. It was just incredible to see, and for me, having lived for many years with the Hmong, it was great to see the bright future for the younger Hmong. They speak fluent English and are Americans who are contributing to their communities, to their states and to the nation.

Q: When you were there, in the area you were, what was the military situation and how were the Hmong being used?

WHITE: The military situation was difficult. The U.S. policy was that the Hmong essentially were to hold defensive positions rather than take the offense. While there was a strong desire by General Vang Pao and others to take the Plain of Jars, and there were a couple of incursions to do just that, groups eventually had to withdraw because offensive actions were not supported. That were a lot of 'rules of engagement' that limited what the secret army could do. .

The security in northeast Laos was difficult as well. There were many North Vietnamese regular troops in northeast Laos supporting their Pathet Lao allies and maintaining and protecting the Trail. In order to work with refugees, we often had to overfly enemy territory to get to the refugee locations. We were constantly being shot at as we flew around that area. A number of colleagues and pilots were killed due to enemy action. There were no U.S. military people there other than one official military advisor. The officers up country were a gaggle of civilians who were working in a very dicey area.

My boss was Pop Buell, a legend in his own time. Pop was a famous AID (Agency for International Development) type who had worked in northeast Laos for many years. You needed to have Pop's approval to travel to Sam Thong. I learned later that my long stay in Vientiane was needed so that Pop could have me checked out. Once he was satisfied that I would fit into his program, he gave IVS permission to assign me to the school in Sam Thong.

One of Pop's operations officers was killed by enemy fire. The school assignment in Sam Thong had been another 'test.' When Don was killed, Pop came to the school to ask if I was ready to move to the airstrip and become one of his refugee officers. That was why I was there.

Pop supervised five or six American operations officers, officially titled Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation Officers. I had now passed two of Pop's tests and found myself working directly for him even though I was still an IVS volunteer.

Q: Well, to begin with you were sort of working really in the school in what could be called I suppose the support/admin area. How long did that continue?

WHITE: I worked in the school for a year or so under the eagle eye of Moua Lia – the Hmong Provincial Education Chief. Pop Buell was aware of my actions at the school. He wanted his ops officers to speak the language and accept the tough conditions of flying out and working behind enemy lines with no conveniences. Living with the locals, eating with them, working with them and for them were requirements. The tests were to determine if the person had the nettle to live and work under such difficult conditions.

In Sam Thong, his test was to throw the ‘candidate’ over to the school and abandon him. Pop would keep tabs quietly through his Hmong contacts. I had done a good job at the school and I had learned the language, so when Don Sjustrom, was killed by the North Vietnamese, Pop invited me to take Don’s place. That transpired perhaps a year or so after I started working at the school.

Around that same time a number of IVS volunteers in other forward areas came under attack or were killed. IVS decided to withdraw all of its forward area volunteers and move them to Vientiane. At that time Pop Buell came to me to ask, “Would you like to work here with me or would you like to go to the capital?”

I didn’t have to think about that. “I’d like to work here.” Pop walked over to the single sideband radio. He called the IVS office in Vientiane and asked that I tell the Education Team director, Bernie Wilder that I was resigning from IVS. Pop then called the AID director, Charlie Mann, and said, “I’ve got a fellow here who has quit IVS. He won’t be coming down to Vientiane. I want to put him on an AID contract starting this minute.” That was the total negotiation that occurred to take me from volunteer to USAID contractor, and that put me on a path to eventually become a Foreign Service Officer.

Q: During the year you were working with the school you were working in which language, was it Lao or was it Hmong?

WHITE: I chose to speak in Lao. That was the language of the school system, along with French, and Lao had broader utility than did Hmong. I learned a little Hmong but Lao was the language that I mostly used in Sam Thong.

Q: Then after a year, that takes us to 1967, 1968, then you moved out to work with refugees?

WHITE: I became one of Pop’s refugee officers. Our job was to track civilian population movements, especially in areas where they might get caught in crossfire fighting or were in danger of being caught in bombing. Our job was to move threatened populations to safer places and then to take care of their basic human needs until they were resettled.

We would fly in by helicopters or in fixed wing air craft if there was a landing strip. The refugees would be moved by air unless there was a safe ground path to the resettlement so that the group could walk from danger. By moving villages, we were in effect depopulating areas by removing all of the civilians, mainly women, children and the elderly. Another way of looking at these civilians were that they were the dependents of

the military as most of their men were in the military serving either around their villages as self-defense forces or away from their villages on other fronts.

It is difficult to maintain an effective fighting force if the soldier's family itself was in danger. While at the time I did not have this view of the program, in retrospect it now seems that a lot what we were doing was moving military dependents to safety, moving villages where there was imminent danger of Pathet Lao or North Vietnamese attacks.

Once we moved a refugee group, we first provide simple shelter assistance – perhaps plastic sheeting to protect them from the elements while they were gathering building supplies from the forest. Rice, cooking oil and grains (bulgur wheat) were provided. As soon as possible, agricultural tools and seeds were provided, and if needed, chickens and pigs might be provided. We helped the resettled villages build schools and small health clinics and we provided training for local nurses, medics and school teachers. School and medical supplies were provided.

Q: Well was it hard to get the people to move?

WHITE: No, it was usually easy as the information about their precarious situation usually came directly from the villagers themselves. The bulk of the refugees were Hmong or “highland Lao” as they dwelled on the mountain tops. There was a smattering of other highland ethnic groups and in some areas, substantial number of Lao Theung (“mid-slope dwellers.” One of the major resettlement issues was to find an area similar to their homeland as their agricultural and very culture was built around where they lived – top of the mountains, mid-slopes or lowland Lao in the river valleys. Problems were encountered when a highland group had to be settled on the plains.

Malaria-carrying mosquitos not endemic in the highlands were at lower levels, the swidden (slash and burn) agriculture that was practiced was not suitable for the lowlands. The temperature was hotter in the lowlands and the native dress was not designed for the hotter weather. There were so many considerations that had to be taken into account when identifying a resettlement area.

Where practical, key villagers were taken to the resettlement area before a move, or they were asked to identify where they wished to be resettled. Of course, when an attack was imminent or underway, there sometimes was no choice. Often villages wanted to move close to their village but that sometimes resulted in yearly movement. Once resettled, they were again near the front lines and the next dry season they would be attacked again and would have to move again. There was danger of them becoming ‘perpetual’ refugees if the appropriate resettlement area was not chosen. Once people had moved and resettled a few times, getting them to move again became more difficult and if they did move, getting them to rebuild, clear land, plant crops, build schools and clinics became difficult as well.

Q: Was this a period of increasing Pathet Lao taking over territory?

WHITE: Yes, in northeast Laos the Pathet Lao aided by the North Vietnamese regular army became more aggressive over time. They were continually moving south and the Hmong and Lao armies were only on the defensive, in part because of our policy. A key enemy objective was to protect the Ho Chi Minh trail and to recruit villagers to carry arms and munitions and to rebuild Trail areas destroyed by bombing. Attacking radar and guidance facilities that aided the U.S. bombing missions was another key target of enemy action, in addition to the steady land-grabbing attacks

Q: Did you get involved in military action?

WHITE: Only on the margins. There were times when I was sleeping in a village and a nighttime firefight for safety's sake forced me out on a trail. But for the most part, we had good intelligence about where the North Vietnamese were, where the Pathet Lao were and other than getting shot at as we flew back and forth to work, we were pretty safe on the ground. Other than Don Sjustrom, who worked in an area that was a hotly contested area, no other operations officer was killed due to enemy action.

Q: Was the Laotian Government involved in these movements or...

WHITE: The Laotian government was not very visible out in the Hmong villages that I visited, but of course the military campaigns, even of the Hmong secret army and the Lao Theung units as well, were coordinated with the Lao military. The Lao military had liaison officers who worked with General Vang Pao and the large military campaigns were all coordinated actions.

I worked at the local village level with local officials. On the security front, that meant checking in with the village commander of usually self-defense forces. I was not involved in the broader military planning and coordination. At the local level, the village headman, the *naiban*, and the next level up, the *tasseng*, were Hmong in the Hmong area and were Lao Theung in the Lao Theung areas where they had a similar structure. There were a few lowland Lao villages but not many. I did not work in the Lao villages.

In the mountain areas that were generally considered to be Hmong, there were smatterings of Lao Theung, Tai Dam, Yao, Lisu and other tribal groups. They worked with General Vang Pao, often as distinct units within the larger military structure. There were very few lowland Lao who we worked with and at the highest levels, of course, there was probably much more contact. The king, Souvanna Phouma, the Lao military commanders all met with and had a relationship with General Vang Pao.

Q: I would have thought it would have been a bit disheartening to the Hmong to continually have to move. I assume it's all giving up territory, rather a feeling that we're on the wrong side.

WHITE: It was certainly disheartening. Villagers were under continual pressure because of military operations, and in the conflicted areas there was continually movement. And it was almost all one way because of the policy that kept the Hmong fighting defensive rather than offensive actions. That meant when territory was lost, it was not recovered

and refugees were being settled in an ever smaller area, bound to the south by the plain of Vientiane. The longer the war went on and the more that the same groups were resettled, the more discouraging it got for everyone, including for the refugee officers and especially for the refugees themselves.

Q: Well, was there any attempt to bring in some fancier military power, either new equipment or other, professional soldiers, or anything of that nature?

WHITE: The Hmong were tremendous fighters. Your question makes me think of a boxing match that I saw last night on TV. The corner man kept saying to his boxer between rounds, "You just have to let your hands go. You can beat this guy if you just let your hands go."

That was the way the Hmong felt. If they could only receive our support to take the battle to the enemy they would drive them from the Hmong lands. But as long as there were made to simply hold defensive positions on the top of hills and not ever move forward, not ever be on the offense, they could never gain the initiative. When General Vang Pao's troops did go on the offensive, usually on their own, they were successful. Of course, more sophisticated weapons and air support would have helped but there were 'rules of engagement' that limited what the U.S. could do.

In addition to protecting their own villages and people, and preventing communist takeover of their homeland, the Hmong also were engaged in protecting some U.S assets, such as the TACAN (Tactical Air Navigation) that was used to guide our bombers to air strikes on the Ho Chi Minh trail. However, at least by my understanding, there was no master plan to go on the offensive with the purpose to recover lost territory in order to re-establish a Hmong homeland that was free and secure. That seemed not to be in the game plan.

Q: Do you know what was the reason for this, this game plan?

WHITE: Perhaps Laos was, as was called Cambodia, a sideshow for the larger effort in Vietnam. What we were doing in Laos seemed to be a holding action that prevented the war from spreading into Thailand and to facilitate our bombing of the Ho Chi Minh trail. This holding action or containment looked at larger issues than those of the Hmong or even the Lao Government. Of course, I did not operate at the level where perhaps there was a clearer understanding – what I've indicated was my view from the bottom of the totem pole. The plan might have been very different than what I saw from where I was.

Q: Did you run across any of these troops Thai who were turned into Laotians for a short period of time?

WHITE: There were Thai operating in the Hmong areas - they were called PARU, I don't recall what that acronym meant [Ed: Thai Police Aerial Resupply Units, essentially special forces units]. To my understanding, they were not fighters. They were there as

reporters, watching the action and informing the Thai Government about what was going on in Laos.

Q: How long were you doing this?

WHITE; for quite a while. I was in Sam Thong from 1966 to 1969 or 1970. I had an opportunity to become a direct hire government employee, but that was a 'limited' appointment. Later I had an opportunity to drop the "L" appointment and become a full-fledged Foreign Service Officer. In order to do that, I joined the International Development Intern program and as a part of that program I went to Washington for some training and then was assigned to an internship in Korea. That was in 1971. Altogether, I was in training for a year and then served in Korea for a year and a half.

Q: What were you doing in Korea?

WHITE: In Korea I rotated to all of the AID offices in the Embassy. My main assignment was in the development loan office.

Q: How'd you find Korea? You'd already had a glimpse of Japan and now you experienced Korea. How did it compare?

WHITE: Fantastic. It was a great assignment. The first thing I found was that, very different from the Japan, Korea was a very open and accepting society. They were very American-like. When you met a Korean you knew up front whether he liked you or not. They were very straightforward. A benefit for me was that the Korean and Japanese languages are similar. Grammatically they're exactly the same. Learning Korean was not difficult if you had Japanese as a base.

At a time I served there the U.S. foreign aid program was winding down. We were getting ready to 'graduate' Korea and we were starting to shut down our AID mission operation. That created a kind of freedom to do evaluative assignments rather than developing new projects. During the short period I was in Korea I worked on a number of projects – the Korean Development Institute, the Korean Institute of Science and Technology, The Korean Education Development Institute, among others. The Mission Director was Michael Adler, one of AID's greatest leaders. Philip Habib [served from October 1971 to August 1974] was the ambassador. What a combination that was.

It was an exciting time to be in Korea. It was the first time that the North Koreans came to Seoul. The South Koreans created a 4New Village Movement program that was designed to assure development in the countryside and to beautify Korea as well. It put chicken and pig pens in every backyard and new roofs on the houses. This countrywide program was implemented along the corridor that the North Koreans would come down on their way to Seoul. I also had a chance to work in a Master Teacher program. Because education was treasured, Korea gave a major push to spreading quality education to the most remote villages using Master Teachers in Seoul reaching the rural most villages by radio and television. That was an exciting program.

AID was working in really high tech ways. I had not been involved in normal AID work before. In Korea, there were university contractors like the University of Michigan designing computerized agricultural models for Korea. The Korea Educational Development Institute was state of the art think tank for education. We created KIST, the Korean Institute of Science and Technology. At the start, it had two or three PhDs. AID sent a large cohort of scientists for PhD training in the U.S. Now KIST has four or five hundred PhDs. Korea is a real success program for the U.S. foreign aid program.

It was a good time to be there and I learned a lot about standard AID operations, but I did yearn to get back to Southeast Asia. When I left Korea I returned to Laos, this time to work in Vientiane. I was in that job for a year or so, maybe not quite a year when I saw a cable from Cambodia. The AID mission was desperately in need of a refugee officer to serve as the Deputy to Jack Williamson, someone I had worked with in Laos.

I took that assignment. I studied Cambodian for a few months and then went Cambodia where I served from 1974 to the spring of 1975.

Q: Well what were you doing back in Vientiane?

WHITE: I was the Deputy Office Director in the Rural Development Office. That was a difficult job for me. I had been in the field for many years and field work was exciting. It was hard for me to sit behind a desk and really not do very much except shuffle papers and tell other people what to do. Sitting behind a desk in the capital city was not my 'cup of tea.'

Q: You'd been away for a little while. Was there a change in attitude about how the war was going and what was happening?

WHITE: In Vientiane I had a countrywide view rather than just the Military Region II view that I had previously when I worked in northeastern Laos. Clearly things were continuing to disintegrate everywhere. It was disheartening to see across the whole country how things were playing out. And again our policy constrained actions that may have turned things around. The most you could do is sit and watch things deteriorate without having any good solutions.

What I was not privy to were the negotiations that were going on at the highest levels - the peace negotiations. Things were happening that I did not know about.

Q: Did you find yourself, having been in the field, did you find it difficult sort of living in Vientiane at all?

WHITE: It was difficult. That is why I moved as quickly as I could to Cambodia. I didn't particularly like living in the capital city, commuting to work in a car, sitting behind a desk. There was so much to do - I wanted to be more directly involved. There was an interesting period that I mentioned before, when the IVSers were being withdrawn from

forward areas. My closest friend at that time was Fred Branfman. He was an IVSer who very quickly decided that the U.S. was on the wrong side of the struggle and that the North Vietnamese and the communists were on the correct side. Fred began to wear black pajama on his body and in his mind. He totally believed in the North Vietnamese cause.

We were really good friends. Fred was constantly after me because I was working up country immersed in 'secret war' stuff and military operations and refugees. We had tremendous arguments. Fred eventually left Laos and returned to the U.S. to become a luminary in the antiwar movement. He was one of the leading people because he had actually been there and had lived in Southeast Asia. He probably accompanied Jane Fonda to Hanoi. We drank a lot of *lao lao* together, argued a lot, and ended by going in two totally different directions.

Q: Did you see the stereotype of corrupt, discredited government versus the modern uncorrupt communists who could come in with a clean broom?

WHITE: Well, that is the kind of thing heard a lot on Radio Beijing and Hanoi in their broadcasts to Laos. They talked a lot about the corruption of the government and how the foreign influence – France and the United States – was there to enrich the few and impose on the rest. There was corruption at all levels of the Lao government and incompetence as well, but I'm not sure how much the people thought corruption. The government did not touch many lives, especially in tribal areas. Government corruption was not the kind of thing that you felt or heard about at the village level. But, there was the constant political propaganda by the communists – talking about the foreign devils and their running dog lackeys – it was political.

When I first started working for Pop Buell as a refugee officer he sent me to a Lao Theung village. It was hard work during the day and of course no running water or electricity at night. The entertainment was in sitting around an open fire at the village headman's house and listening to the village elders tell stories. I had this natural inclination towards anthropology so like Margaret Mead, I would ask about the language and culture, the political organization and the social customs, the history and the myths of the people. They always shared with lots of enthusiasm.

One day, the military commander was visiting the village. He was the highest level Lao Theung that I knew of. His name was Xieng Man Noi. After hearing my questions and the responses of the village elders, Xieng Man Noi pulled me aside for a personal conversation with me. He said, "Your interest in the past of the Lao Theung people is wonderful. You make the people feel very proud that you are interested and want to know about our culture and history. And you bring us rice, cooking oil, tools, medicine, school books and supplies for our children. You help us like no one else." He looked away for a while in deep thought, and continued, "But, when you are not here with us, the communists come and they also talk to the villagers. They do things differently than you."

“The communists” he continued, “don’t give these villagers things – they take things from them. They take a portion of the rice crop, and a pig or chickens, and they take our young men to serve in the army or to carry guns and ammo down the Trail. They don’t talk about our past, they talk about our future. They talk about the bright day when the last foreign devil is driven into the sea and all of their lackey dogs are dealt with. Then, we will control our own destiny and have all of the things that you have, airplanes, food, tools – it will all belong to us and not to foreigners.”

He ended by repeating again those words that were my political education – “The communists talk about our future and give us hope; you talk about our past and make us proud of who we once were.” What a revelation for me. I had tried so hard to stay away from the war, from politics – I was a development person identifying felt needs and helping people to have a better life. I was not a soldier or a politician or a spy, I was an apolitical development worker trying to help people have a better life. What a shock it was to learn that I was seen by the villagers in a Cold War political context. That was an eye-opener for me.

In the airplane flying back to Sam Thong I did a lot of thinking about that comment by Xieng Man Noi. I realized I wasn’t in Laos just to teach English or to build a school or to help feed refugees. A light came on. Until that point, I had never been a political person; I did not have a political bone in my body. I had never thought my role and how I was perceived but in that one conversation in the Lao Theung village I learned a lot about the world. It changed the way I understood the world around me. That was the day that I ‘grew up.’”

Q: Well back to corruption, it sounds like in Laos that you might have had corruption and all but the whole system was so decentralized and lack of organization didn’t make a lot of difference.

WHITE: Things were decentralized, or perhaps better spoken - village based. For instance when I went from village to village people would come up to me and hand me some local decree from the government. They would ask, “Can you read this?” I was the only person there who could read. So I would read it to them. Perhaps it would say, “In honor of the king’s birthday, the school system will have two days of vacation.” Because the decree had not been shared with the local teacher, who might have been the only one who could have read it, they hadn’t taken the requested action.

There was very little understanding in the most isolated villages that there was a country called Laos ruled by a king. In the tribal areas, the political structure was of clans and tribes. Allegiances were to tribal leaders and to warlords. The concept of a nation state for many if not most was weak at best.

Q: And also I take it that there really weren’t the resources, infrastructure, to rob it blind by the leaders.

WHITE: In the capital city of Vientiane, and to a lesser degree in Luang Prabang, Savannahket and Pakse, where there was a cash economy, roads, electricity (sometimes) and where foreign aid flowed on its way to the hinterlands, and where there were government offices and military leaders and businessmen, there was corruption. The U.S. was supplying virtually everything to the country and there is no doubt that money and goods were syphoned off. But that large corruption was happening in a very small circle of people. Once you left the cities, there was not the opportunity for that kind of corruption. We were flying in and dropping rice to villages. Everyone knew everyone else so the rice would get divided up in whatever ways it needed to get divided. The headman and military commanders perhaps got more than their allotted share, but the scale of that kind of corruption was small. In a small village not even with a cash economy how much corruption could there be?

Of course, if there were North Vietnamese or Pathet Lao military near they might tell the village headman, "We need thirty per cent of the rice. If we get it, we won't attack your village." Maybe such things occurred - rice being siphoned off to people that we did not want to have it. But the kind of corruption that we think about in more advanced economies where the sheer level and nature of official corruption affects every person in the society was not present in the largely rural and unsophisticated Laos.

Q: You went to Cambodia from when to when, now? When you went out there in 1974, what was the situation?

WHITE: The situation was grim in Cambodia. There were a few cities under control of the Cambodian government but most of the countryside was either in Khmer Rouge hands or was 'no man's land.' At night, the Khmer Rouge owned the countryside.

While major road arteries were still mostly open when I arrived in 1974, they also were shut off one by one, including the vital link with the outside world, the Mekong River. Within the first six months, Phnom Penh was becoming a city under siege. As refugees flooded into the city and as ground and river links were cut, food, fuel and food needed to be brought in by air in a Berlin airlift like operation.

Q: How did you find the Cambodians vis-a-vis the Laotians?

WHITE: My sense was that Cambodians were not nearly as friendly as the Lao. The cultures are very similar, but because the country was more developed, the war had a greater impact on the lives of the people than did the war in Laos (and again, my experience in Laos was in the tribal areas, I did not work in the cities with the lowland Lao so this might not be a fair comparison).

Cambodia was more developed than Laos and the people were more educated. At least I was not dealing with simple country people who lived in isolated villages and were subsistent farmers. In Cambodia, I was dealing with people who understood more about what was going on around them. I liked the Cambodians but they were more edgy and harsh than were the Lao. They were also very aware that the Khmer Rouge were brutal

butchers. I have heard Westerners say that no one knew that the Khmer Rouge soldiers were going to commit the terrible atrocities that they committed in the 'killing fields.' That simply was not true.

When the Khmer Rouge came into a village they would cut off the head of the village headman and often the heads of the school teachers, medics and nurses – anyone who had an education and contact with the government. The Cambodians often said to me about the Khmer Rouge, "They look Cambodian, they speak Khmer, but they have Vietnamese hearts" – because many of the Khmer Rouge grew up in Vietnamese controlled areas of the country. I often heard people say, "We need to do whatever we can to prevent the Khmer Rouge from taking control of the country." Perhaps no one was really listening.

Q: What were you doing?

WHITE: The same thing that I did in Laos. I worked with refugees but not directly as I had done in Laos. In Cambodia, we worked through international organizations and private voluntary organizations, like the International Committee of the Red Cross, World Vision, Catholic Relief and CARE. When there was a new group of refugees our refugee office in the U.S. Embassy would decide which voluntary agency or NGO would be assigned to work with that particular group. The chosen organization would set up temporary shelter, soup kitchens, provide health services, and in some cases, where feasible, would help to more permanently resettle the refugees.

The refugee office was based in the U.S. Embassy compound in Phnom Penh. That was different from Laos because in Laos USAID had its own compound. Working in Phnom Penh was my first direct exposure to an embassy environment.

Q: Well how did you find the embassy environment?

WHITE: I liked working in the embassy. I had often heard that State Department people did not speak the languages of the host country and that they were often culturally insensitive. That was not true in Cambodia. There were three or four really good Cambodian language officers in the embassy and everyone was doing their maximum to help Cambodia and to seek a good outcome for Cambodia.

The picture often painted of embassy officers in pinstriped suits going to cocktail parties and having a few high ranking Cambodian friends who spoke for themselves rather than for the people was not totally accurate. There may have been some of that, but many embassy officers were doing their job with great dedication and diligence. That was true in Laos and in Cambodia. The ambassador was John Gunther Dean [who served from April 1974 to April 1975]. He was an interesting man. My impression of him was that he was always pressing for negotiating positions that favored Cambodia and that those above him looked at the peace process from broader perspectives.

Q: The Khmer Rouge still was impossible to deal with, essentially.

WHITE: That's absolutely right. There was no way to deal with them. I was there when in February or March 1975 a big congressional delegation came to Phnom Penh. I think they had also been to Vietnam and Laos. Their chief concern seemed to be to find ways to cut funding and bring the U.S. assistance to the military in those countries to a swift end. This was being done at the very point where we had implemented the Vietnamization policy which put the Vietnamese Army in charge and our military in advisor roles. There were no U.S. fighting units in Cambodia but the Cambodian army was totally dependent upon our supplies of equipment and munitions.

Bella Abzug and Millicent Fenwick, John Cary and others came out to Phnom Penh to look at our program of cooperation with the government and the military. I was assigned a control officer role for Bella Abzug and Millicent Fenwick. I was supposed to take them to refugee camps but they insisted on going to a government jail where captured Khmer Rouge soldiers were being held. They were not concerned with the refugees and our program for them; they wanted to know if the Khmer Rouge soldiers were being mistreated. That delegation foreshadowed the beginning of the end of funding for the war effort in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Q: Did you find that, in a way, this resettlement, I would think as the Khmer Rouge encircled Phnom Penh, you begin to run out of room to resettle.

WHITE: In Cambodia we couldn't do much resettlement – which implies putting people back on the road to a normal life and self-sufficiency. In Laos we moved people to safe areas and attempted resettlement. In Cambodia we did not have to move people. They flooded into the cities as the Khmer Rouge came to control more and more countryside.

We provided temporary shelters and medical care and soup kitchens to urban refugees and had a few programs in outlying provinces, like Battambang, where there was still a hope for resettlement. Most of our effort was focused on how to handle Phnom Penh. The city was under siege and refugees continued to pour into the beleaguered city from all over Cambodia.

Q: Well after Congress cut support, was this signal to everyone that this was the end?

WHITE: It was a final nail in the coffin. We knew that things were going to come to a bad end. The only question was when...., or perhaps there was a hope that the peace process would produce a miracle.

In February and March of 1975, things were dismal. The U.S. Congress cut funding and the indigenous militaries were cut off from arms, ammunition and supplies. In a final push, the communists took over Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. The Khmer Rouge came into Phnom Penh in April. The embassy had an evacuation plan fairly early on, maybe in March. There were few if any dependents in Cambodia. If any were there, they were evacuated first, and then non-essential personnel. In the end it did not require a massive evacuation such as took place in Vietnam.

Q: When did you leave?

WHITE: I left just before the end. The Ambassador sent me to Battambang province to evacuate the Operation Brotherhood Philippine doctors and nurses who were working in the refugee camps. The original plan was that after I evacuated them to Phnom Penh by helicopter that I could go to the Thai border and walk across with a couple of Americans who were at a border post. I found them. They closed out their offices and crossed over but I did not have proper documentation. The Thai would allow me to enter Thailand.

I eventually had to work my way back down to Phnom Penh in a series of adventures that you could make a move about. I left a few days before the final evacuation. My assignment was to help set up the reception and processing center in Utapao, Thailand, a Royal Thai Air Force base. The center received Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodians who had to flee after the communist take-over. The refugees were then processed and sent to the Philippines, to France, to the United States and to other countries willing to accept them. This was a joint State, military, USAID operation.

Q: You were in Thailand, doing this, from when to when?

WHITE: I was in Thailand from the spring of 1975 for a few months. It was not a permanent assignment for me. That was while I was waiting my on-going, next assignment.

Q: What was your evaluation of how we were handling the people coming out of Cambodia and Laos and Vietnam?

WHITE: It was what it was. Friends of the United States were flooding out of those countries and they were from all social classes. For instance, in Vietnam a lot of the Vietnamese Air Force people were flying out jets and landing them at Utapao, This gave the Thai great heartburn, I'm sure. The pilots were handled very differently than villagers who were also escaping communist control. There were also senior government officials and functionaries of USAID and the Embassies of those countries.

Those people who were official – that is they has some direct connection with Americans a government officials counterparts who worked closely with us or our employees in government offices, or even people who worked in our houses – there was such a wide variety. Processing was as good as it could be given all of the confusion associated with the collapse of these countries.

It certainly was difficult because you were sending some people off to foreign shores and other people were being assigned to refugee camps in Thailand. That was too much for me because I had worked for the better part of a decade with the Hmong. I knew that they had chosen to be allies with and fight for America at great personal risk. It seemed beyond heartless to abandon them in border camps for an undetermined time and future when others were being sent to a new life in the west.

I requested a forward assignment to Africa or to Latin America. I spoke Thai, Lao and Cambodian and had worked with refugees for a decade. It seemed that I was an ideal candidate to work on the Thai-Cambodian or Thai-Lao border with those that we had for all practical purposes abandoned. I left Southeast Asia for a new assignment in the Republic of Panama - a new part of the world for me – Latin America.

Q: So you went to Panama? You were in Panama from 1976 to 1979. What were you doing in Panama?

WHITE: For a while I was lost – a new culture, a new language, my first ever regular USAID assignment. I was assigned to the Education, Health and Nutrition, office and was not sure how I ended up there. I had worked for AID for almost ten years but had not been exposed to AID language, culture or processes. In Southeast Asia, especially in refugee programs that bridged many different agency interests, paperwork and process was minimal; resolute action was expected. In a traditional AID program like the USAID/Panama Mission, in a normal office, dealing with project papers and country development strategy statements and project implementation proposals and Project Papers, with Congressional budgetary processes and careful accounting of every foreign aid penny, I was lost.

Fortunately, one thing saved me. My Office Chief had been my supervisor in Laos for a couple of years when I was assigned to his office in Luang Prabang. I was his deputy there and now I was his deputy in Panama. We were now together again and we were very close friends. He had had a more normal AID career so he became my mentor teaching me how to survive the real culture shock of AID documentation.

Q: Also, I'm told that because of our worldwide reach, AID could assign people anywhere in the world. I've talked to people who were African hands who were saying, "These guys who had been in Saigon or some place where they had three or four servants and everything else and all of a sudden they're in the middle of an African village. They didn't like it, they didn't like the Africans, they're no longer the little pashas that they'd been before." Was that part of your culture shock?

WHITE: I didn't fit that mold because I had always worked out in villages where there was no running water, no electricity, no toilets, and no modern conveniences. That is what I longed for again and I was able to quickly parlay the Panama experience into something more like Southeast Asia. My mother was American Indian. She lived with us because my father died while I was in Korea and as an only child; I took our mother into our household. She was with us in Korea and in Laos, and then when I was assigned to Cambodia, my wife and mother lived in Bangkok because there were only a few dependents permitted in Cambodia. She also lived with us in Panama.

People there loved her because she looked just like the Panamanian Indians. Everyone thought that she was our Indian maid or nanny, but she was my mother. At some point, General Torrijos was having real issues with the three Indian tribes in Panama, the Chokó, the Kuna and the Guyami. He wanted to bring the tribes more into the

mainstream culture of Panama and was seeking help to do so. The General asked the AID director, Irv Tragen for assistance and because of my mother, the Director turned to me.

That assignment put me back out in the mountains and jungles, walking to Guyami villages or Chokó villages or sailing around the Kuna islands. I was back in my element.

Q: I want to come back to this but you mentioned that you got married. Talk about your wife.

WHITE: I spent some time in Luang Prabang, Laos - the royal capital. I had been sent there by the U.S. Embassy doctor because I had contracted falciparum (cerebral) malaria. The doctor told the AID Director that if I went back to the Hmong area and fell ill with malaria again I would leave Laos in a body bag. I was transferred to Luang Prabang.

In LP, for the first time since being in Laos, I was living in a city. I had my own house, right on the Nam Khan River. I'd never had a house before. In college, I would eat in the college cafeterias and in Laos, with the village headman and other villagers. All of a sudden I had a government-provided house with running water, electricity, toilets, bath tubs and hot water. My job with refugees was the same but I was having trouble figuring out how to live in a house.

One day I attended a major Lao military meeting on a distant mountain top. I thought I understood everything that was going on but on the helicopter ride back to LP I was talking to the woman sitting next to me. She was a nurse on a Lao military psychological warfare team. I was telling her what I understood from the meeting. She smiled and then explained to me what really was discussed. She helped me understand the personalities, who they were related to, what their histories with one another were, and what was 'between the lines' in what was said.

We became good friends and eventually were married. Somphon is Laotian Thai Chinese. The family settled near Nan, Thailand. A mixture of Lao and Chinese was spoken in their home, and she went to a Thai school. Marriage was a big change in my life. I had been a confirmed bachelor until I was smitten and fell like a ton of bricks before I even knew what happened to me. Somphon and I are still married. We don't have children.

Q: Now when you were in Panama, what was the state of the Indians?

WHITE: There were three tribes, each with a different situation and different states of development and interaction with the outside world.

. The Guyami homeland was in the mountains near the Costa Rica border in three provinces, Veraguas, Chiriquí and Bocas Del Toro. They were very well organized because they had many things to be organized against – like the incursion onto their reservation land 'comarca' by non-Indians farmers and cattle breeders. There was also a large copper mines in their territory. They also had organized around a charismatic woman mystic named "Mama Chi." There were three Guaymi chiefs – 'caciques' – who

coordinated with one another and generally were always on the same side of important issues.

The Kuna Indians in the San Blas islands are probably the most organized indigenous culture in the world. The Kuna often left their islands to work on the mainland or to serve on merchant marine ships. When a Kuna left his village and island, he was assessed a quota - money that he was required to send back to support the island. If he did not, his family was ostracized. That was a really tight and strictly enforced social system. The Kuna were good merchants, selling handicrafts and serving as tourism guides.

The Chokó were the poorest and least organized of the three tribes. They lived near the Colombian border in the Darien. Their leadership was not strong and they were more a series of villages that had little social structure than they were a cohesive nation like the Guaymi or the Kuna.

Different tribes had different needs and interests. It was not easy finding things in common that could be negotiated for or demanded from the Panamanian government. I would try to get the three tribes together in general or over a specific issue. Developing a common policy approach was almost impossible. Should the comarcas strengthen their prohibition against access roads or open for more access? Should the tribes demand even more formal laws governing the comarcas or should there be more lax laws? Should the groups seek more schools and bilingual education and should they find ways to integrate more fully into Panamanian society or withdraw more? There were not common agreements about any of these issues.

Very much like Laos, my job was to become totally familiar with the culture and use that knowledge to help the three Indian tribes define their own directions regarding development, integration into the broader culture and how they wanted to participate politically in the larger society.

Q: Did you find yourself acting more as an advocate of the Indians vis-à-vis the Torrijos government? Was that what AID was doing or what?

WHITE: I did find myself in some conflict but it was not with the Panamanian government. General Torrijos was very open and sympathetic to the Indians and they really liked him and felt that he as a leader was trying to do the right thing for them, even if the bureaucracy was not. If things were moving too slowly or for whatever the reason things were stalled and the Indian groups were not getting what they wanted, they did not blame Torrijos. Like many charismatic leaders the General had an ability to separate himself from the workings of his government.

Where I got into a bit of a problem was that I was often invited by Torrijos to go with him when he went out to the Indian areas. He loved to give speeches in Indian villages. My going with him put me in some conflict with the embassy, who felt that there was no reason for person in the bowels of the AID mission to be traveling with General Torrijos. I also worked with General Torrijos' sister. Berta Torrijos was the head of Panama's

preschool education program and I was designing a preschool education project. That also helped my connection with the General and made the some in the embassy somewhat uncomfortable.

AID's essential role with the Indian groups, other than being eyes and ears and trying to figure out what the Indians wanted, was to try to shape a development agenda that responded to felt needs and interests in Indian communities. I developed programs that helped the Kuna Indians acquire electric generators from excess property so they could electrify their islands. I started aquaculture projects (tilapia) for the Guaymi to put protein into their diet. I also ran a bilingual education project in the Guaymi area. The projects with the Choco were much smaller, such as individual rural road access or school or community center construction projects.

AID had for a long time talked about participatory development – the importance of people participating in identifying the development projects funded by donors. I conceived of a Guyami Development Project that put all of the initial decisions about project identification in the hands of the Guyami Indians – the caciques and their council of elders rather than in the hands of AID program managers. AID had talked a lot about participatory development but had never tried to make it work in an actual situation. My doing so put me into conflict within the AID mission with the bureaucracy. Letting local people really participate in project identification and development and still meet all of AID's requirements for how projects were to be developed was a bridge too far.

Q: Well how did you find relations between the Indians and the Panamanian, I assume basically the Panamanian bureaucracy?

WHITE: Pretty bad. The common Latino phrase was *Indios y gatos animales ingratos*, "Indians and cats are ungrateful animals."

Most in the bureaucracy felt no matter what you did for the Indians they still hated you. The standard government programs did not do much in Indian areas and there was little good feeling at all between the Indians and the bureaucracy. Fortunately, the kinds of projects that I was funding were funded directly with the Indians rather than as AID normally, channeling funding through a government ministry. At the request of General Torrijos, a few projects were developed in the Guaymi area in close coordination with Ruben Dario Parades, Minister of Agriculture, and the Bilingual Education Project was funded through a U.S. NGO but it worked closely with the Ministry of Education. But, for the most part, I funded activities directly with Indian communities.

Q: Did you ever run across that unique tribe the Zonians?

WHITE: A lot. I dealt a lot with the Zonians. Not so much in my official capacity....

Q: This is the Americans who lived in the Panama Canal Zone.

WHITE: Right. My contact with ‘zonians’ was not official but in Panama I had a motor home. I mentioned this before, my mother is American Indian. She loved to fish. Every Friday after work, my wife, mother and I would get in the motor home and drive out to the Canal Zone. We would go to Gamboa, which was right in the middle of the canal, halfway between Panama City and Balboa. I would park the motor home on the banks of the Chagres River and my mother could fish to her hearts delight - Friday evening, all day Saturday and all day Sunday. On Monday morning early, we would head back to Panama City. While I was out there in the Zone every weekend I would meet lots of Zonians, the good, bad and the ugly.

Most Zonians were good people. I had many friends in the Zone, including the Canal Zone police, school teachers, health workers and just ordinary folk who lived there. There were certainly a few Zonians who hated everything about Panama except their beloved Zone. They would let you know that at every possibility. In general, however, the Zonians developed a lot of good infrastructure in the Canal Zone that eventually was turned over to Panama by the Canal negotiations. The infrastructure was one of the things that Panamanians looked forward to – like the school and hospital system and the Canal Zone College.

Q: I take it relations between Americans and the Panamanians were fairly good because ten years later they began to get nasty under Noriega.

WHITE: Propagandists told the regular Panamanians citizens that Americans were oppressive and that we were occupying their country. Wherever I went, people thought that I might be Cuban - until I opened my mouth. After three or four words in Spanish they knew that I was a gringo. Until they heard my Spanish, everyone was really friendly. When they knew that I was an American and not a Cuban, many were not nearly as friendly although some then really warmed up to me because I was American.

There were Panamanians who depended on the Americans. Panamanians who were in business, who worked in tourism or for the Canal or who serviced American in some way were very pro-American. But the general public was far more susceptible to the endless left-wing propaganda machine. Many, especially college students, were anti-American. You would never guess from the general atmosphere there in urban areas that at one point Panamanians were hoping to be a U.S. state.

Q: Was the Panama Canal as overwhelming an issue as one assumes it was.

WHITE: Yes, it was the 500 pound gorilla in the relationship. The Canal was important, but it was Ancon Hill that took a lot of abuse. Ancon Hill was in the Canal Zone. It was a place where all of the antennas were sticking up in the sky. People would say, “That’s where the CIA works. That where our country is manipulated. That’s where our countrymen and women - our leaders – are being bought off.”

Acon Hill became the magnet and the talking point rather than the Canal itself. The big issue was the Canal and national sovereignty. By the time that I arrived in Panama, in

1976, we were already advanced in the negotiations that turned the Canal over to Panama. While I was there, President Carter came to Panama.

Q: You stayed there until when?

WHITE: I stayed there until mid-1979. Somoza was overthrown in July 1979; President Carter wanted to work out a relationship with the Sandinistas to show that the United States could be friends with and cooperate with a communist nation in our hemisphere. I was asked to go to Managua right at the early stages of the Sandinista government. My assignment was to negotiate and set up a food aid program with the Sandinista government. The program was to provide relief to the population who has suffered during the 'war' and also to demonstrate that the U.S. government was willing to work with the Sandinistas. I was in Nicaragua for three months or working on those tasks.

Q: How did you find the situation and your reception in Nicaragua in this period?

WHITE: It was maybe the most difficult Foreign Service assignment that I had. The international donor committee would sit around a huge table to coordinate food assistance to Nicaragua. There were some forty or fifty people in the room. I would listen to the honorable representative of the Republic of Albania say, "In six months, Albania will send three cans of sardines to support the Sandinista victory." In unison, everyone around the table would raise a fist in the air and shout out, "*Viva la Revolution!*" When I was the presenter, I would give And they would get around to me and I would say how many DC-6's or C-123's of rice a matter of fact accounting of the massive amount of airlift supplies we were providing on a daily basis. At the end of my presentation there would be absolute silence and angry stares, as if the U.S. had not done anything. I was the person who should not have been sitting at that table, even though the U.S. was the only donor providing consistent food assistance.

That was difficult for me. Even more difficult, the Sandinistas military wanted us to turn all of the donated U.S. food aid over to them so that they could distribute it within in their system of community block groups. Every block in the city was organized, not to make food distribution easier but so that neighbor could report on neighbor about any subversive activities.

I was told that the only organization with knowledge of where the poverty was and with the ability to deliver the food to where it was needed was the military working through the block groups. The Sandinista demand was that I work through the military. However, my instructions were to work through the International Committee for the Red Cross and other nongovernmental groups.

That difference in approach made my life hell for those months that I was assigned to Managua. There were daily word battles, and the pressure was tremendous from both sides – for me to find ways to work with the Sandinistas but at the same time to not give in to their block system. My job was to convince the military that working through the

international system was better for the country and better for the U.S. – Nicaragua relationship.

In my prior service, I had not been so much in the middle of a difficult political situation. It was a no-win situation that was very difficult for me. Fortunately it was short – a little more than two months.

Prior to being sent to Nicaragua, I had been accepted for a mid-career long term training program at Stanford University. That was curtailed for a while so that I could negotiate with the Sandinistas. It started to look like I would be assigned full time to the U.S. embassy in Nicaragua and that my long term training would be cancelled. I fought pretty hard to be as successful as I could be in Nicaragua and then leave, even though late, for my stint at Stanford University.

I did eventually win the argument and arrived safe and sound but late to my authorized long-term non-degree training assignment in the Communication Department. I arrived probably at the end of September 1980.

Q: By that time, what was your impression of Nicaragua and the Sandinista rule?

WHITE: My impression was shaped mainly from those difficult negotiations. The Sandinistas were not interested in anything that the U.S. had except for our food aid and our money. They did not want U.S. technical assistance – just give us the money and we'll figure out how best to use it. I did not see any willing to compromise on any of the vexing issues we that we faced. The Sandinistas had come to power through the help of Cuba and Russia and revolutionary movements around the world. As I bade farewell to the beauty of Nicaragua and the wonderful 'gallo-pinto' breakfasts, I was sure that the Sandinista government was going to be a sore in the U.S. side for a long time

Q: Did you find that there was a sort of feeling of cynicism on the part of others like yourself, who were involved in this food program, sort of what the hell are we doing with these people? Why not let them stew in their own juice?

WHITE: There was some of that but also some of the opposite as well. As I recall, there was another AID person who had been involved in the seminary with one of these Sandinistas. He probably had the opposite view – that all we needed to do was work with the Sandinistas to show them our good intentions and that they would eventually come around and find a compromise position to which we could accommodate.

But among the people that I most closely worked with, I believe the attitude was to give it our best effort but that even doing so would not be enough to sway anyone.

Q: Well, then, you're off to Stanford? What were you studying?

WHITE: Yes, I went to Stanford from 1980 to 1981. I enrolled in the Communication and Social Change in the Third World program established by Eric Shramm. It was a

good program as there were a number of students from the Third World and a few Europeans as well as classmates. There were maybe 16 of us in the course. We discussed how communications technology can be used to bring about social and economic development in the Third World. That was right in line with what I'd been doing in Laos, Cambodia and Panama.

There was a strong left bias among the professors at Stanford. I remember taking a couple of education course from Martin Carnoy. He had to be a card-carrying communist or a good imitation of one. Even in the communications program, there were professors who approached everything from a radical point of view. I was surprised at how left-leaning the university was.

Q: Because Stanford housed the Hoover Institute, which was a right wing

WHITE: Right in the shadow of the Hoover Institute there was a large coven of left-leaning professors.

Q: As a political-social phenomenon, you were probably the beneficiary, with the professors, of so many radical students ended up getting their PhDs to duck the Vietnam.

WHITE: I had not thought of that that way. That's an interesting comment. There were some interesting debates about things. I remember getting in a lot of arguments, especially when a professors would start talking about the Vietnam War itself or what we were doing there, I could put my hand up and say, "I was there and that's not the way it was." No one ever shut me down so at least that was good but I didn't get a lot of sympathy or understanding of my positions.

I befriended a Peruvian student and his wife - Alejandro Toledo. When I left Stanford my next assignment was Peru.

Q: Paul, in 1981 you were off to Peru. What was your job?

WHITE: In Peru I was the Deputy in the Health, Education and Nutrition Office. I worked in education sector. I managed a preschool education project in Cuzco and Puno, a technical vocation education project in several places in the north – Chiclayo and Trujillo, and I developed a decentralized education planning project for Cuzco.

Q: In 1981, what was the political situation in Peru?

WHITE: The *Sendero Luminoso* was just starting to really wreak havoc in the countryside and some peri-urban areas. When I went out to Cuzco and Puno to work in the schools, I would find on the blackboard the remnants of the *Sendero* education programs. They had been there the night before working with the community. The teachers would always try to erase everything from the board. So the *Sendero* was starting to shape programs in the hinterlands and perhaps in the cities as well. One day

they tossed a grenade over the wall at the Ambassador's residence in Lima, right onto the tennis courts. They also were starting to blow up power lines to get attention.

I arrived in Peru right after the end of the military government and at the beginning of the second government of President Belaúnde. The military government had devastated Peru.

Q: How had the military done that?

WHITE: The military had many bad practices – favoritism, political cronyism, all practices that almost shut down the private sector and greatly damaged the economy. Things were really bad. When I first arrived, there was a prohibition against beef – you could not buy meat in the market for 15 days a month. You had to eat fish or chicken - and the chicken tasted like fish because they had been fed on fishmeal. The economy was at rock bottom.

Q: You were in the health, education department. How did the bureaucrats respond? Did they talk to you about how the government had been?

WHITE: Not a lot. There's a new crew in, eager to do things better, rather than looking back at the past. And we did something in AID that was rather unique for AID, and that is, we negotiated our agreements with the state governments and regional entities rather than with Lima. So we didn't get tied up in the bureaucracy in Lima. So in the preschool education project there were direct agreements with the state governments of Cuzco and Puno. We had an educational planning project that was also out in that area and they were all decentralized projects and not many times that AID has tried that. It was quite successful because you get down to the level where people want to make a difference and they can see what they're doing, as opposed to the people in the capital city.

Q: Could you describe the government's approach to education. Was it highly centralized, every teacher was on the same page at the same hour, was it of that nature?

WHITE: Somewhat like that and the whole idea of decentralized planning was to move away from the kind of state controlled planning where they set the same curriculum for the Indian areas in Cuzco and Puno that they set for the Latino areas. The whole idea was to try to bring about some variation in the curriculum to reflect local needs. And it was reasonably successful but that's always a hard thing to do.

Q: This was your first time in that sort of area. How did you find the Indian population? Had they been overlooked or was there a cultural attitude towards education? What did you find?

WHITE: It was hard with the Indian population. A visit to Machu Picchu reveals the most incredible irrigation canals and other tremendous public works projects that were developed at some point in the distant past. But then if you were to compare that with the people who were living there, it would be hard to imagine that they could build an outhouse. What happened? But, yes - , education is difficult when a people have been as

marginalized as have been the Peruvian Indians in the highlands. They were challenged with just eking out a daily living and while there was a hope that boys would attend school, that was not true for girls. They dropped out early on. The Indians were living off the land, just barely surviving. There did not seem to be a lot of ambition to force change. People seemed to wait for top down change (which was not happening) rather than strongly demanding more attention and services.

Q: Were you trying, was our program but specifically you, trying to break this ... attitude?

WHITE: The idea behind the decentralized educational planning project was that of trying to make the education system relevant for the area and people receiving the education. The idea was that you could drive interest in education if the educational itself was relevant. Teaching Andean Indians about the Moors in Spain perhaps was a reason for disinterest. But teaching about how to improve agriculture in the Cuzco valley might be on interest. It would be something that the kid and the parents would see a benefit in learn to value. So the broad intention of that project was to decentralize educational planning away from the Central Ministry and put such planning in the hands of the provincial authorities.

The problem is, even with the cooperation of the Ministry, was that such an approach is a long road involving training, infrastructure, and so much more. Long-term goals are hard to achieve when you are dealing with an AID program that only approves three to five years projects.

Q: You're fairly new to AID at this point.

WHITE: I was not new to AID. I'd been with AID for quite a while. But I had been in Southeast Asia, not doing this kind of project-based AID work. I'd been working with refugees in the field and working in political programs that were not project based.

Q: How did you find the AID with Latin American characteristics?

WHITE: Well, interesting, because when you looked at AID in those days, the Latin American Bureau was touted as being the best of all the bureaus in terms of designing projects, in terms of speaking Spanish and understanding local customs and fitting the programs to the needs of the country and the beneficiaries.

So I can respond at several levels. At the mission level, in Peru, I found a group of AID officers who did speak the language. Many of the men had Latina wives so they knew the language and the culture well. They were 'area-specialists' who were very dedicated. Moving to Washington's Latin America Bureau, there were AID officers who had come from the field experience and therefore well understood the countries and culture of the region. I think that set Latin America apart from Asia or Africa. Those regions were language and culture diverse and the bureaucracy in Washington was formed from people who were not as close to the languages and cultures as were the Latin Americanists who

benefited from a more ‘common’ shared culture and language in their host countries (Haiti and to a lesser extent Brazil being major exceptions).

In the Latin America Bureau there was a feeling that it was the elite bureau in AID and that what the Bureau was making a difference in the economy of the region and in the lives of the people.

There was always social unrest and upheaval somewhere in the region. Often, in many of the countries, things would move ahead and then be set back for various reasons. In Peru, the military government set progress back. In Bolivia and several other countries, coups were frequent. In Peru, the *Sendero* was causing problems during my period there. There were project areas that I could not visit because of political unrest. Some did not want to cooperate for fear of reprisal from the leftists.

I am of the view that development happens when there is a long period of stability. When you have many starts and stops, ups and downs, development doesn’t come easily because people forget very fast. Starting over time and time again is not copacetic to development.

Q: Well did you find Peru had sort of the traditional difference between the Indian population and the Spanish descent population? Was that pretty apparent or had changed?

WHITE: That hadn’t changed at all. I worked with the Indian populations in Panama first and then my second place to do so was in Peru. Later, I also worked with the Mayan population in Guatemala and even later in Mexico. Over my career I acquired a lot of experience working with Indian populations, observing their interface with Latino populations and vise-a-versa.

In all of those countries the relationship was similar - *Indios y gatos, animales ingratos*; “Indians and cats are ungrateful animals.” Of course, not everyone felt that way but it seemed to be a generalized Latino attitude towards the Indians. The Indian attitude towards Latinos was that Ladinos were out to get whatever they could get. Ladinos were tricksters. They might look like they were trying to work with you but there was always an ulterior motive, trying to get something of yours. By the way, that is the exact same attitude that many in Latin America had towards ‘gringos’ – Americans.

Q: Well how did they feel towards you, you and the people in AID?

WHITE: Probably the same way. Most direct counterparts in ministries were pretty more sophisticated. Perhaps had been educated in the U.S. or in Europe; maybe they had more open attitudes because of their broader exposure to other cultures. People in the *campo*, in the rural areas, almost always seemed to have a certain sense of mistrust. They often had the suspicion that there was something else behind whatever it was that you were doing. It was hard to accept that people did things from ‘the goodness of their hearts’ with no self-attainment motives.

Q: How about, the educational programs, kids going to school. Did they quite early and did they pay much attention to their work or...

WHITE: The education issues often were not so much with the kids; rather, it was with the teachers. Many teachers weren't very well prepared, especially rural teachers. AID was working with rural primary teachers in teacher training programs. The combination of poorly trained and equipped teachers, poor facilities and in addition, having all of the pressure of an agricultural society with its work cycle resulted in early drop out from the system.

Usually, girls dropped out first; often after the second grade. By the fourth grade the boys were dropping out to work in agriculture on their home plots. Another problem was the paucity of schools in rural areas. By the time a rural student entered the third grade, it was probable that they had to leave home and attend school in a nearby town. That meant spending all week in a boarding facility of some kind or with relatives.

Everything seemed to be stacked against the most rural populations in terms of getting a good education. When a rural child attained a good education, they probably had a lot of perseverance and a strong desire to succeed. It was not easy.

Q: Prior to that, were there opportunities for Indians who were achievers to move into or did things sort of stop them from going anywhere?

WHITE: There were probably not many opportunities, certainly before the mid-Eighties. Where there were opportunities, they were often in a small religious school, either Catholic school or even Protestant. The public education system did its best but was poorly represented in the most rural areas.

I think that we will talk about this issue again when we get to my assignment in Washington. AID was trying to reach out to social and economically disadvantaged Central Americans and provide them with better quality education in their countries and through scholarships to the United States. Prior to the large Kissinger Commission program in scholarships and education, AID's programming was similar to that of USIA (U.S. Information Agency). USIA's Fulbright Programs were for the elite, sending individuals for Masters or PhDs training. AID's programs reached the next lower level – professionals already working in their field. We provided these technical people with enhanced technical training or advanced degree training. There were relatively few scholarship programs for the less advantaged in society.

Q: It sounds like the teachers were the key. Did you get very far with the teachers? Who were they?

WHITE: Some teachers were recruited from rural areas, trained, and then they returned to serve in rural villages. But for the most part, the formal system tended to need teachers in towns and cities, so many of the best teachers ended up teaching in more urban

environments. Of course, there were intern programs which ‘force-assigned’ teachers to rural areas for one or two or three years. Those stints somewhere out in a rural village were difficult for the teachers and for the students as well.

AID certainly worked hard on teacher training with a focus on rural education. But that was difficult. Teachers are unionized everywhere; they’re stubborn and resistant to change. They wanted to teach exactly the way they had learned and that was in a highly top-down, centralized European model.

The idea, for instance, of decentralized educational planning; of working with a local team to develop a curriculum responsive to the local needs of an area was not only alien to most of the teachers but was ‘wrong-headed.’ Teachers were comfortable looking at their notes and teaching as they had been taught. Introducing change in an entrenched system is not easy.

In a situation like that, I found that the best approach was to identify a few champions who understood and believed in the program you were trying to introduce. The hope would be that they could take the lead, fight the battles in a culture and context that they best understood, and that at some point, that they would overcome the resistance. The job of the development AID donor would be to provide support. Being the direct ‘agent of change’ did not seem to work very well.

An AID donor, whether working in a U.S. program, a UN program or another bilateral or multilateral donor, must provide resources, expand horizons of thinking, support action programs that advance an agenda, but not be in the driver’s seat. Changes seem to happen when it comes from inside rather than from outside. The donor becomes the “facilitator” – but seldom can directly affect major change.

That is a lesson that perhaps is counterintuitive. Many foreign aid failures result from the donor forcing a change. It sometimes appears to occur for the length of a project’s funding – but that is artificial. Real change depends mostly on the action of others, not on the direct action of the AID donor or Peace Corps volunteer or the nongovernmental agency officer. That sometimes is a source of great frustrations.

Moreover, even when a great team of really good locals has been assembled that fully understand s the project concept and the changes required to solidify that concept, there are many obstacles that seem to pop up at the most unexpected times. My direct counterpart for one project in Peru was the ‘Directora General’ for pre-school education in Cuzco. She fully understood the project and her superiors in the Ministry of Education in Lima backed the project. There were other Peruvian authorities in key positions such as the in the Ministry of Planning (where the budget was approved) who understood the project and its intended benefits.

The problem was that even with a great team and support from some in power, we were a small minority of people here and there trying to impact a gigantic system that had a lot of built-in inertia. It never seemed possible to get all of the people aligned on any issue at

just the right time to make a positive action happen. Of course, there were always small successes – the closer to the local level, the more success. But, taking those small successes to scale, which was the ultimate project goal, was a slow and torturous path that yielded more frustrations than successes.

That is why I have long been a proponent of our U.S. Government family – AID, STATE, USIA and other government agencies working closely together. That is so easy to say but so difficult to do. When the weight of all of the USG programs are pulling in the same direction it does move things. Having the voice of the Ambassador and the AID Director and the USIA Director pulling or pushing in the same direction at the same time with their diverse constituencies and counterparts always results in getting more done than any single agency working either along or swimming against a stream.

I felt that over many of my assignments, the Embassy had a certain set of things that it worked on. Those programs occupied the Ambassador's attention. The AID mission was doing another set of things; the military yet another set of activities. There were often disconnects in programs, or differing goals and objectives. Often, the entire program did not come together in a coherent manner.

I don't know the history of the 'Country Team Concept' but I was a strong supporter, even when it meant modifying my AID objectives to fit a larger U.S. program goal, and of course, if working well, I would expect that other agencies would also modify their specific programs and objectives to better fit with AID for the good of the whole.

Frank Ortiz was the Ambassador to Peru during my time there [Ed: served from November 1981 to October 1983]. I don't recall him being actively involved in AID affairs but I was not at a level in the system where I would have been privy to that. I was down in the bowels of AID at the time, dealing with local technical rather than political issues.

Q: Well did you get out in the villages much?

WHITE: Quite a bit.

Q: Can you describe a village, what it was like when you'd get out there?

WHITE: If I went by myself it was one thing. If I went with the Mission Director or with visitors from Washington, the visits became 'dog and pony' shows. When I went by myself, which was usually the case, I would travel with local officials from Cuzco, Puno or wherever I was. They would make contact at the village level and set up my visits. For sure, the villagers would know in advance that I was coming. Surprise visits were not welcomed and often turned out to be counterproductive.

The visit would start with a meeting with the village headman and sometimes with village elders (whatever the local Indian tribal organization was). Usually there would be a discussion with him (always male) about why we were there, what we wanted to

accomplish, and how long we planned to stay. This group would then accompany us to the school or to the health clinic or to visit related projects in the community.

Sometimes there was an overnight. I always enjoyed those visits because they provided an opportunity to spend time with the ‘folk’ – going into houses and talk to the villagers rather than just to the leaders. I tried to spend nights when I could, to get a better feel for what was going on in the village. When I did spend the night, villagers were pretty open to my sitting down and talking with them, having an evening meal with them, sitting on dirt floor around a fire and drinking the local concoction.

People were pretty frank, talking about their life and times, about the project, about their problems and issues, and about the *Sendero* and what was going on politically. Of course, there were few, if any English speakers and though most men spoke broken Spanish, the conversations were usually in Indian dialect with a translator (Indian-Spanish) involved to help me understand. Often a 4 or 5 minute reply would get a 3 or 4 sentence translation. I spent a lot of time wondering how much I was ‘missing’ and wishing that I had time to learn one of the Indian dialogues.

Q: How was the Sendero Luminoso, how was it seen in these villages? What I gather, this was a bunch of Peruvian intellectuals coming out of extreme, almost like the Khmer Rouge type. How was this fitting in these villages?

WHITE: I found that villagers were trying to understand what was happening around them politically. The situation in Peru was almost a throwback to something I mentioned earlier. When I was in Laos, out in villages talking to people, at one point one of the villagers said, “Why are you so interested in our culture and our language? When the *Pathet Lao* are here they talk about what a bright future we’re going to have when we overthrow the French and the Americans and all of the foreigners who are polluting our beautiful country.”

It was the same in Peru. The *Sendero* was carrying out ‘education’ programs in every village. They held community classes at night. Villagers would be brought into the school. They were educated because they used the blackboard to explain their new theory of government and how it should work for the people. They were encouraging the people to rise up and overthrow the authorities. They were promising a better life at the other end of the struggle, which they assured the people that they would win.

Yes, it looked and felt a lot like something I had seen before.

Somehow, the *Sendero* seemed a little like AID. Change agents were parachuting into the village and practicing top-down techniques. The uprising was not from the bottom-up as they would have us believe. It was being imposed from the outside. Of course, AID officers and the *Sendero* had differing theories about how villagers could achieve a better life and both were working to ‘impose’ their ideas on a population fairly resistant to any change. At least, the AID program offered agricultural tools and seeds, school books and medicine, training and other support. The *Sendero* offered words and promises.... – and

hope. Moreover, they were in direct conversation with the people while at least I, as an AID officer, was in dialogue with the leadership structure and most often not with the people themselves. They were sitting down and dialoging with people.

That was a big difference.

When a small group of *Sendero* was able to demonstrate their power by disrupting electricity to a city by blowing up power lines or cutting off road traffic by blowing up a bridge, they were able to show how weak the system was and how unable to protect people it really was. I don't know if the *Sendero* were actually convincing people intellectually or philosophically – but sheer power speaks mountains. They certainly were able to demonstrate that they could cause trouble almost whenever and wherever they wanted to do so.

Q: One of the problems often has been these left wing movements come out of the universities and are heavily, sort of extreme Marxist, left wing students out of the university usually aren't brothers to the Indians. I would think that this was not a good fit?

WHITE: I agree that that certainly was a problem in general with leftist movements and specifically with what was going on in the mountains of Peru. Indian villagers are like people often say about the Thai people - they will bend with the wind whichever way the wind is blowing. They will sit and listen but it's pretty hard to convince them to change things, even their opinions. It helps when there are indigenous change agents but if you are an outsider, like a university student from Lima or an AID worker from Indiana, chance are slim that you will convince a diehard rural dweller to change anything about his or her life.

Once I was in an Indian village. My AID assignment was to find out about 'women and development' in that village and culture as a prelude to developing a strategy for helping Indian women achieve better lives. I was sitting in the 'long house' with the village headman, the *cacique*, and all of the elder men of the tribe. The village women were all gathered around the outside of the 'long house' listening at the windows because they knew that I was there to talk about them.

I was going through my list of questions, probably developed by some Ivy League anthropologist. The village elders were having trouble understanding my Spanish and the questions and the reason for my asking in the first place. But they were politely responding, usually without saying anything of significance. In the anonymity of their location, the women would often howl with laughter at the question or the answer.

Finally at some point a woman yelled in the window, "If you really want to find out what our life as a woman is this village is like, come and live here for several years; marry one of us. You will come to understand it." I still laugh when I think of the absurdity of the situation. All of those old men sitting there speaking for the village women, all of the village women listening in the 'peanut gallery' and my asking such absurd questions.

I was an outsider there on an impossible mission that so went against the culture and tradition that it had no chance of success just like any AID project coming out of such an absurdity would have to be destined to failure. That was the situation that leftist college and university students must have found sitting in rural schools in the mountains of Cuzco and Puno, writing in Spanish to educate the largely illiterate Indians about the wonders of Mao Tze Tung and the glories of communism.

Q: How about the Catholic Church, or the Protestant Church? Did they play any particular role in Peru at that time?

WHITE: The Protestant Church did not seem to be as active as I had noticed from my experience in Panama, but I may just have missed that. The Catholic Church was involved with our project because they had a number of vocational and technical education schools. *Fe y Alegría* is a Catholic technical, vocational skills training group active in many Latin American countries. They often say that their projects start where the pavement ends.

The Church was in a lot of places providing educational services. It was strapped by not having a lot of wherewithal to do so in the Indian areas. Also, the educators were strapped by the deeper tradition of the Church. Many priests were focused on saving souls and ceremony rather than on supporting education other than religious education. The religious educators seemed to be fighting an uphill battle within their own Church and also struggling to find the wherewithal to do more.

Q: Did you find that you, in education or in any programs, were going head to head with the church or were you on the same side?

WHITE: I think in Peru probably I didn't see that conflict as much as I did earlier when I was in Panama. In Panama, AID decided in all of its wisdom, to develop a Central America-wide primary education school book program. The existing textbooks were atrocious in every country and since they were all in Spanish, the idea was to hire master teachers from all of the countries who would work together to produce text books that would reflect the goals of primary education across the region and also that would reflect all of the cultures of the region.

AID came into direct clashes not only with the teachers and the unions but also with the Church. The Church was satisfied with the traditional education system as in most countries it had been developed over time and in conjunction with the Church.

AID produced beautiful text books from that multi-national team of teachers. They were didactically perfect, they reflected each country, they were beautifully printed and they were rejected everywhere. Those books never saw the light of day and may still be warehoused in Mexico if they haven't rotted away.

The teachers and the church were aligned against that innovative AID project. I recall one of the arguments from the Church. The text books had a story about ants and how hard they worked. Church officials said that AID had fallen under communist influence

because that story pointed out the sacrifice that the individual must make for the collective. The arguments were bogus but the resistance was real.

Of course, AID has always had family planning programs. The Church has been an active opponent of those programs in every Latin American country.

Q: Did the military play a role in Peru? Some militaries spend an awful lot of time putting their people out and doing rural development of one kind or another. How about the Peruvian military?

WHITE: The Peruvian military had ‘civic action’ programs – but in areas other than those where I worked. They were out working in rural areas - building roads and bridges, building dams, constructing rural water supply projects, etc. One such area was Pichis Pacalzu – a high drug producing valley. Were they there for community development or for other reasons? I don’t know the answer. But the Peruvian military was working in rural areas, including the Amazon area where there’s a lot of gold and mineral wealth.

In those days, AID was suspicious of military-based civic action programs. There was not a lot of cooperation. There has always been an internal discussion within AID about whether we should align ourselves with or even use the U.S. or with indigenous military when carrying out development in rural or in contested areas.

AID generally has been against that although in recent years that has changed. The funding of development through the DOD in Iraq has changed the equation and brought about much more cooperation between AID and DOD.

Q: Was the teachers’ union sort of a nut you couldn’t crack?

WHITE: Teachers unions are always a nut hard to crack. AID did not try. We would approach the unions but not do battle with them. The unions were far larger, far stronger, far more ‘connected,’ probably better funded and definitely more powerful than AID. AID funded many innovative programs, for instance, we introduced automation. I recall that in the days before computers, we introduced programmed learning and also microfiche into the education systems of Latin America.

The teachers’ unions were informed of and even supported some of these initiatives. In Peru, AID set up a new technology – satellite ground stations that enabled the introduction of master teachers from Lima and other cities to train teachers in distant areas such as Tarapoto in the high jungle. The master teachers could either teach classes directly or train teachers. AID did not encounter resistance from the unions on this program because we were only the technology provider. AID was not involved in the educational content of the program.

However, there were always problems with basic teacher training when AID wanted to be involved with curriculum development. There was always a very narrow line to follow and when AID strayed from that line trouble erupted. AID was convinced that education could only improve through teacher training and curriculum development programs.

That put us into conflict with unions. With care, our programs were developed in ways that did not lead to open confrontation because our counterparts would not allow us to move into sensitive or forbidden territory. If AID was trying to push something that would not fly with the unions, the battle would be between us and our counterparts and not between AID and the unions. And the counterparts most often won or reshaped the activity to make it more acceptable.

AID brings in outside experts as technical advisors. AID officers in its earliest days were technical but over time the AID officers became managers, supervising contractors. Those advisors frequently become the direct contact with the technical counterparts in the host government. That of course creates a situation. The AID officers are very aware of the relationship with host country individuals and institutions. The contractors and advisors usually are much more focused on a particular technical area and are there to seek change. Often, they had less concern about political ramifications of what they were doing or proposing. So many conflicts were between AID and the AID-funded contractor, rather than with local authorities.

Those conflicts limited the amount of innovation that we could introduce into systems.

Q: Were there Indian teachers, many?

WHITE: There were a few, and the number was increasing. However, many if not most of the teachers beyond the first and second grade were from metropolitan Peru and were assigned in two or three year internships or 'service' programs out in the Indian area. Once having completed that service, they would receive 'good assignment' in a town or city environment.

Q: Was this done with good will or not particularly good will?

WHITE: It was done I am sure, with good intentions. The purpose was to assure some quality education in Indian areas. The problem was that such assignments were really difficult for the teachers and for the students. Often, those teachers had to leave after a few weeks or they would go back to Lima on Saturday, Sunday and that would spill over to leaving on Friday morning and returning on Monday evening. Then there would be middle of the week holidays and soon the school barely saw the teacher. At best, the program produced only partial teaching – and that was not the aim.

Q: How about the universities? Were they doing anything about trying to reach out to the Indian population?

WHITE: They may have. I was not aware of programs but I am sure that universities had such programs. I certainly saw universities with robust programs for Indians and in Indian areas in Guatemala and Mexico. In Peru, I may not have been as involved as I could have been in exploring that aspect of the system.

In those days the universities were extremely leftist. Americans were not welcomed, even to attend meetings on a university campus. There were a few small private or Catholic universities in each country that were a bit more open, but it was virtually impossible to work with the large public university. The universities were extremely ideological.

Q: How did you view what you were doing in the time you were there? What would you point to as a success?

WHITE: My view then was very different than my view today. When I was there, I believed that the AID effort was making significant inroads. I felt that the changes that I could see happening would ‘stick’ because the counterparts I worked with were enthusiastic and dedicated to the ‘cause’ – whatever that particular cause was – bilingual education, decentralized educational planning, enhanced vocational education programming, etc. It was exhilarating to see teachers using new techniques and students benefitting from changes introduced by the projects.

But looking back on it in hindsight, it is clear that as long as the program money was flowing everybody stayed on course. The real acid test for a program was at the time that AID money dried up. Would the government continue the program with its own funding? Would the teachers continue to pursue the innovations or would a lack of resources or pressure from the system pull them back to where they were prior to the project. In many but not in all cases, programs declined or died after AID funding ceased. But, it would take more careful analysis to assess the true impact; what residual positive impact remained, how did the project change things not over the near-term but with a longer term view?

Q: Given this exposure did you want to stay in Latin America after your time?

WHITE: That’s a good question. I was first and foremost an Asia hand. I was a born and bred Asia hand. I found Panama interesting because I was working with the Indians. I found Peru interesting, although not nearly as much so as was Panama. My relationship with the Indian culture in Peru was limited by geography – Cuzco and Puno were distant. In order to get to go to Puno and Cuzco I had to take a plane and spend several nights away from my family at a difficult time.

By the end of my assignment in Peru, I was ready to say “I’m done with Latin America. That is why I accepted my first Washington assignment. That was a real step as I’d never had nor desired in the past becoming an AID official at Headquarters.

Q: How’d your wife find Latin society, particularly in Peru?

WHITE: Lima was tough. My mother was living with us as well. They were alone a lot because I traveled quite a bit. All of my projects were out in the hinterland. I would be in Lima for a week or ten days and then be gone for a week. Neither my wife nor my mother spoke Spanish, although they both learned market Spanish as a necessity.

We're not a very socially active family. When I was traveling, my wife and mother did not want to attend embassy parties or get involved with the other AID or embassy wives. They were mostly Latina and often Spanish was the language spoken rather than English in those womanly get-togethers. As a result, my wife and mother felt very isolated and lonely in Peru. They were so lonely that they did join the Women's Diplomatic Society. They volunteered as candy strippers and participated in other activities, but those things were not their 'cup of tea' and for my wife, Latin America was a very different place. She missed Asia.

Q: You didn't find any similarities?

WHITE: Certainly there were many similarities. The rural areas looked and felt like rural areas anywhere, including Southeast Asia. When I could, my wife and mother would travel with me. Both felt more at home when we were in rural Peru. My mother felt that it was just like her Indian upbringing in Alabama at the turn of the 1900s. My wife felt that the life style was what she was used to at her home.

My wife did not like Latin society. She never adjusted to what she described as 'artificial throwing arms around people and kissing them on the cheeks' even when they were strangers. She didn't like the closeness of people when they talked, invading her personal space. She didn't like the dancing and loudness that seemed everywhere. There were many small things about Latin society that didn't fit well with her. She was happy when we were in rural areas. Of course, my constant traveling was not a plus in her book.

Q: So in 1983 you are off to a Washington assignment. What were you doing?

WHITE: I was in Washington from 1983 to 1986. I was Office Director for AID's Education, Training, Energy and Environment Office for Latin America and the Caribbean. That was an interesting move for me. I'd never dealt with energy and environment before but those two disciplines were packaged together in that office. That gave me an opportunity to work in fields that I had not worked in before. Learning is always good.

Early on in my tenure, the famous Kissinger Commission for Central America was formed. Coordinating with that Commission and its products would become a major part of my Washington assignment. [Ed: The Commission was announced in July 1983 and submitted its report in January 1984].

The Commission went to Central America to determine what was going wrong - why Central America was going so far to the left. John Silber, President of Boston University, was the education sector person on the Kissinger Commission. He produced what I called the 'X' curve. Training for Central Americans sponsored by the Soviet Union had increased from a few hundred students a year up to almost ten thousand a year. Over the same time period, training sponsored by the U.S. for Central America had declined from some seven or eight thousand down to less than two thousand. When these numbers were put on a graph a very dramatic 'X' figure resulted.

The Soviets were increasingly working in Central American universities. They not only provided scholarships for long-term academic training in Russia, they were specifically targeting training programs for high school-level students and for undergraduates. The U.S., on the other hand, was supporting scholarships for the elite - for graduate studies in the U.S. The Kissinger Commission made a 'hard' recommendation – that the U.S. develop a major new training program that would target socially and economically disadvantaged Central Americans. I was assigned to develop the broad outlines of such a program, and then the specific implementation details. That became my major activity in the mid-Eighties – conceptualizing and then developing and implementing what I called the Central American Peace Scholarships Project.

Q: Before we move to the Kissinger project, you said you had energy. What is this, how would energy and education and health fit?

WHITE: Well, they didn't necessarily fit. I was the office chief for one of the technical 'cones.' There was also a Health, Nutrition and Family Planning Office. So the idea was to group all of the technical activities under two Office Directors. I was one of the two. It was not that energy and environment were groups with education and training to gain synergies – it was more like a bifurcated office where I had two different portfolios under my oversight. I had education and training staff and also energy and environmental officers.

Q: Did you find the energy people knew what they were doing and just went about it?

WHITE: Yes. The energy officers and environment officers were very capable and also very independent. They knew what they wanted to do and they did not necessarily want any supervision from me. I was good at securing budget and doing the bureaucratic things necessary to justify and defend their programs, but they did not appreciate me getting very involved with the technical subject matter of their portfolios.

At that point in time, the Environment Office was not that large. AID was just starting to ratchet up its environment program and was not yet into Global Climate Change. One of the major activities that we supported for the field was the design and conduct of the environmental impact statements that were required during project design for all projects across all technical areas. So my time was not needed to any large degree for that part of my portfolio as the officer was extremely talented.

Energy was a different story. The head of the National Security Council (NSC) was navy admiral with great interest in the energy sector [Ed: Rear Admiral John M. Poindexter]. He believed that the U.S. should be involved with thermal energy development in Central America. The area is 'blessed' with volcanoes and thermal activity. The NSC Director was bound and determined that AID should be involved and he worked hard to have Congressional earmarking of funds to AID to develop thermal energy projects all around Central America.

Prior to his involvement, AID had worked with portable generation of power, with small alternative energy projects (wind, water and solar) and had worked with the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) on cooperative rural electrification projects in some countries. But during my tenure, a struggle developed between AID and the NSC over the fundamental nature of our program. It was largely a political debate that was over my head but I and my Energy Office had to spend a lot of time writing briefing papers.

The energy and environment sectors were interesting. I learned a lot. For the most part, however, they were areas that I only was involved in on the margins – largely in internal budgetary and occasionally on political issues as described above. The technicians were like all technicians, they did not want non-technical people fiddling around with their inner most secrets.

Q: Well on the educational side, did you find that the sort of the educational apparatus in Washington really understood the situation down in Central America?

WHITE: No. I saw in the Kissinger Commission Report a tremendous opportunity to secure funding to do the kind of programs that I believed were needed and that would make a real difference not only in education in Central America but also in the political relationship between America and our neighbors. I met with almost immediately and ferocious opposition from our large cadre of education and training officers across the region.

First of all, these technical officers rejected the idea of targeting the socially and economically disadvantaged. AID's institutional culture strongly believed that people selected for training should already be working in a technical field. AID's job was to provide technical training to help these professionals working in development fields to better carry out their job responsibilities. That is a very different mindset than recruiting trainees in high school or undergraduate programs who have never been and are not in the work force. Rather than training to improve a job skill that will impact the social or economic development of a country, that approach would be providing training for people who, if they returned to their country, might do something – undetermined.

AID officers strongly argued that such unstructured training delinked from direct development impact is laudable, but that it is USIA's role, not AID's role. I heard over and over that AID takes people that are already working and helps them do their job better, and the sectors that benefit are chosen because they are keys to development.

There was also serious concern with receiving 'political' money where the main reason for support was the political objective of 'combating Soviet influence' rather than a position more comfortable to AID - the social and economic development of the host country. I found that even though I could use the Kissinger Commission Report to leverage many hundreds of millions dollars in support of AID education and training programs in Central America, that my charges in the field were not interested.

After my first round of travels to Central America countries to talk-up the program, I learned that my natural allies were the U.S. Ambassadors in each country and that my own AID Mission Directors and the cadre of education and training officers were in rebellion against the program. After the first trip, I developed a new sales approach. I would first pay a courtesy visit to the Ambassador. Afterward that meeting, I would talk to the AID Mission because I knew that I would get a warm and friendly ear in the Ambassador's office and that he would also use the idea of this programming in Country Team and elsewhere to bring about changes in attitude.

That inherent conflict in the way the program was viewed in AID caused some delays as in the end, buy in is far more important than top-down imposition. The program start up was slow and the pressure from Congress was tremendous. In many of the early meetings, I was working directly with interested Congressional staffers, with STATE and the NSC, with the GAO, and John Silber and members of the Kissinger Commission. These players were not the more familiar beltway technical assistance firms that AID normally turned to when developing new initiatives.

There was the opportunity to shape a program to train ten thousand people over five years at U.S. universities and also to develop and implement formal education programs in the country to impact teacher training, curriculum development, to introduce American texts into Central American universities and public schools, and to create innovative university-to-university linkage programs that would not only assist the Central American universities but also the U.S. partners. I was excited. My colleagues were not, in large part because of the political justification for the money – combating Soviet influence.

Q: Was your eye sort of fixed on what the Soviets had done and this was something you had encountered?

WHITE: My eye was fixed on the impact of Soviet influence as that was the argument that would generate the funding and also, to some extent, the diminishing of the influence would be one way the program would be evaluated by the GAO. There was no doubt that the hostility toward Americans on Central America public university campuses was brought about because of the heavy hand of leftist organizations.

There was no doubt in my mind that Central American youth were being plucked from those countries and sent to the Soviet Union for language training, undergraduate and then graduate training and that the Soviet programs greatly dwarfed U.S. scholarship efforts and were targeted on a different segment of those countries. I believed that AID was not being asked to counter the Soviets on a one-on-one basis but rather that we had the opportunity, through designing programs that would strengthen education and provide opportunities for scholarships, to change the sector for the better and also restore and build good will for our country. To me, it was a 'win-win' situation.

The scholarship program would require training at the undergraduate level, reaching out to high school students and Indian communities and dealing with non-traditional clients. AID colleagues made arguments to use a small part of the funding on such 'experimental' activities but argued for programming the bulk of the money in traditional AID

modalities. That put me in the middle in a running battle with the Congress and the GAO who were insistent that the program stay true to the Kissinger recommendations.

Congressional staffers are funny. Like me, they were opportunists. When it appeared that I was having trouble turning my colleagues around and getting them to 'buy-in,' a couple of staffers took the opportunity to set aside a major chunk of funding to Georgetown University. The 'set-aside' was described as a way to compete with AID as to who could do a better job in implementing the Kissinger Commission recommendations.

I learned about this one morning when I read in the Washington Post that Georgetown University was receiving a large 'set-aside' from the budget that I was supposed to implement. Georgetown was to implement a Kissinger recommendation-compliant program. After a couple of years, the Congress would compare the Georgetown program with the AID program and make decisions about further funding. There was the possibility that all funding would be transferred from AID to programs like the Georgetown program if it was able to train more people at a lower cost.

There was a lot of politics involved with the scholarship program, not only between me and the AID missions - getting them to participate in a politically-inspired rather than a technically-inspired program, but there was also politics at the federal level between AID and the Congress and now a new player, Georgetown University. None of this had been anticipated by me when I accepted the Washington assignment. I found it to be tremendously exciting. In the field, I had been dealing with ethnic minority montagnards and Indians. Now, for the first time, I was in the 'nerve center' dealing with bureaucrats, politicians and other interesting players. I loved it.

Q: One of the urban myths about AID over the years is that essentially it's a welfare program for the middle class American technicians. In other words, an awful lot of the money goes to Americans. The University of Michigan sends people out to Ethiopia to do law studies and this is great support for the University of Michigan. Were you seeing that?

WHITE: Certainly, but there are two sides to every argument. We often made the argument that out of every AID dollar, seventy or eighty per cent comes back to the U.S. to buy farm products or to hire technical assistance staff from our universities. That argument defends the foreign AID budget. But the same argument can be used as well to argue against the program. I definitely fall into the category of saying that the more money the AID program can spend in a country directly with the country, the better our programs are.

When in Panama, dealing with how we could make development more local and how we could put planning and implementation more in the hands of the locals, I spearheaded a program to hire local anthropologists and economists to conduct the impact studies that were required for AID projects. The locals, with their native language and cultural understanding brought to the table things that university contractor could not. I argued that the more that AID relied on local technical capacity and local universities and the

more we built local capacity, the more we were contributing to the sustainable development of the country. Strengthening U.S. universities or U.S. NGO's is also a laudable goal. Where possible, I urged partnership programs to get the best of both worlds.

There was a large camp of people who were wed to bringing in elite U.S. universities and elite technical firms to design elite programs that were cutting edge but also that would go way beyond the capacity of the host country. For instance, a computer simulation model would be developed for agriculture in Kenya or Korea. That could be done by mining the data and could be done without even talking to a local. Will the simulation be of use – perhaps, but if no one in the country understands it, if there is no capacity to maintain the system and meet its operations costs beyond the AID funding, then that project has benefitted the PhD students implementing it and the university receiving the overhead, but one could argue that the country only received minimal if any benefit.

I did not come from nor did I encourage this 'academic' appreciation program. I came from an appreciation for the wisdom and vision of the locals. Many AID officers came up through the Peace Corps and similar experiences. For those folk, the heavy academic involvement in project development was a phase that AID was in for many years. Perhaps there were areas where outside expertise was the right approach. For me, the more locally based our support, the more valuable it was and the more likely that it would in the end be successful in promoting sustainable change.

Q: During your time in AID, who was winning?

WHITE: During my time in AID, it's a tossup. More than any other characteristic, AID is painted as a tremendously decentralized agency. Every AID Mission had its own character and its own nature and its own programming. The good news is that it made at least some programs very local in nature. The bad news is that it made it almost impossible for Washington AID officials to go to Capitol Hill and describe what AID does in simple, clear terms because every program's different.

I spent seven years with the Japanese aid program later in my career. The Japanese aid program was a cookie cutter. No matter where you go in the world the program was exactly the same. That makes it really easy to describe and to characterize. It makes putting numbers on the program very simple. But such a cookie-cutter approach makes the development very top-down and very sterile. The AID program is extremely rich because of its decentralized diversity. In one Mission, the Director wants to see local development happen. He or she channels the budget to local NGO's, to local universities and local technical assistance. Right next door in a neighboring country, the AID Director has large contracts with the Michigan States of the world.

It has been hard to characterize AID, even with the most controlling top-down Administrators, the field has had an inertia that enables many AID Missions in the world to last through the constant political changes in Washington that advocate for one or another approach.

Q: I've had people say, you get an AID director who comes out of the cattle breeding business or something and develops a very significant cattle breeding thing in say Uganda or something like that. He leaves, the cattle die and somebody else is in forestation or something like that.

WHITE: That's exactly what I was saying. There is good and bad in that. Continuity leads to sustainable development. In the AID world, where time flows in 3- to 5-year projects and with the constant transfers in and out, it is hard to achieve continuity. Perhaps that is an argument for the old British Foreign Service approach – assign a person to a place and leave them there.

Q: In other words, there isn't much continuity in this, which means an awful lot of projects that just don't have a long life.

WHITE: Probably in the late Seventies and through the Eighties, AID developed a new approach – the CDSS (Country Development Strategy Statement). Every AID country was required to develop a base document that spoke to that country's critical development needs. The documents were most often developed by conducting a series of rather elaborate and very expensive sector assessments across all key sectors. Those assessments gave wonderful amounts of money to contractors and universities.

The result was a Bible that set forth what the U.S. government's strategy should be for development in the country. The Bible was theoretically reviewed and approved with the Embassy and the State Department in Washington, and within the technical AID Bureau. AID officers instinctively know that if you load documents up with an over abundance of technical verbiage, the politicians and statement will not read it. The CDSS evolved into a series of technical documents that few would wade through. STATE often did not do its due diligence, feeling that the document was just 'an AID thing.'

The idea of a CDSS was wonderful. If properly implemented, it could be used to put more coherence, order and continuity into a country's development strategy. That would have been the solution that you are indicating. Over time, we have gone through various variations on the CDSS theme.

As I approached retirement, I saw a new initiative. It was a STATE program that required every Embassy to develop a country strategy. The document was a much simpler document than the AID CDSS. It set was developed in the Country Team. The document set out the broad outlines of U.S. support to the country with an eye towards cooperation and synergy among the various elements of the Country Team.

I was a strong supporter of this program. I would venture to guess that many AID officers were not. However, the problem that I saw with this approach had to do with the sections on development. I was in Mexico as the AID Director when this initiative started. In addition to AID, there are other agencies involved in development. For instance, the Drug Enforcement Agency, the people dealing with counterterrorism, the Department of

Energy officer, the Environmental Protection officer, the Treasury officer - all touch elements of the development portfolio. Because AID has a small program, some fifty or sixty million dollars, AID was a minor player - an add-on. Rather than a serious exploration of how the sixty million dollars of AID funding might contribute, it got lost in the shuffle with better funded programs.

That has been a major argument for a long time. How do you get AID more under the big umbrella? Had he had his way, (Senator) Jesse Helms would just have become a part of STATE. I personally felt that that may have been a good thing in many countries, but not in all. Those people involved in these discussions, and most AID people, felt that it would result with the AID program being subverted to short term political objectives at the expense of longer-term but slower and less visible development initiatives. I've hear it said that AID should not be asked to put out fires; we should be focused on planting the forests that are going to grow and be productive in 15 or more years.

Q: The trouble is administrations change. I think it was the Carter Administration was more short term and concerned about famine in the Sahel and trying to fix things quickly.

WHITE: Yeah, every administration has its own character as well. One of the things that I found is, in looking at administrations and how AID changes, is that Republican Administrations have been more on the side long term economic and rule of law development; Democratic Administrations have been more focused on short-term objectives. I believe that Republican Administrations have by far and away provided the most funding support for AID. Every time there was a big funding increase for foreign aid, while you would think it would come from Democrats, it has not. It seems that Republican Administrations have led that charge but it often has been done under Democrat-controlled Congresses – so both sides get credit.

Q: AID was amalgamated into the ARA group wasn't it, at that time, or not, or was this just in name?

WHITE: Perhaps mostly in name but that was above my pay grade. There was certainly, at some point where AID was brought more into the umbrella at the highest level in ARA. The AID Administrator was his own man but also attended the Secretary's meetings. That had, as far as I know, little impact further down the Agency but I may be wrong about that. One of the issues was coordinating the Economic Support Funds (ESF). Those funds went to STATE for politically purposes but some funds were then channeled to AID for programs that AID was better prepared to design and implement. That required lots of coordination in Washington between ARA and the LAC Bureau of AID.

But my sense is that AID has mostly done what it wants to do in spite of many attempts from AID and STATE to coordinate from the top. Out in the field one would find an Ambassador interested in AID. For instance, when I was in Guatemala, Ambassador Jim Michael was very interested in the AID program. He could talk about what AID was

doing in clearer terms that either I as the Deputy Director or the Director could. In fact, Ambassador Michael liked AID so much that he eventually came over to AID and even went to the OECD's DAC (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee) in Paris as a foreign assistance guru.

When an Ambassador has a sincere interest in the program, STATE-AID cooperation is good for both programs. That was the case in Guatemala.

Q: How was this working? In their time the Soviets were taking large numbers of people. Were we able to bring a significant number of Central Americans to the United States for training?

WHITE: AID brought more than 15,000 Central Americans to the States in several programs. One was a junior college program that brought them for a couple of years (Georgetown University). One was a four-year university program, or five years if you added English on. AID finally convinced the Congress, and this was a huge battle, that if we really wanted to start reaching the socially and economically disadvantaged, we couldn't bring them all for university training. Short term training was required for some groups – like bringing tremendous numbers of highland Indians from Guatemala. We started two-month courses or three-month courses for special groups.

AID introduced several new elements into the scholarship initiative. I called one new element 'Experience America.' I found that AID scholarship recipients often spent all of their time in their dorm or in the library, studying and going to class. They did not make friends and did not get invited to go to a Thanksgiving parade or to a football game. They were seldom invited to a family dinner at someone's house. They did not learn much about America. Interaction beyond the classroom was programmed because only in a few cases did that happen naturally. In many cases it did not happen at all so the 'Experience America' component was designed and funded.

AID scholarships generally had the attitude when the training is over the job is done. I started a concept called "Follow Through." The idea of 'Follow Through' was to say that the training job was not over until the trained person returns home and was actually using that training in some productive way. That meant programming resources for in-country activities once the trainees had returned home.

Another change was an enhanced priority on training women. AID's overall scholarship statistics worldwide was 20% female and 80% male because the selection process was taking professionals on the job and up-grading their training. There were fewer women in that category. With the Central America Peace Project design, I committed to training 50% women. The reviewers felt that was not possible. I believe that they required me to reduce it to 40% in order to gain approval. However, at the end of the CAPS project, we had achieved 50% women trainees.

Those were big changes in the way that AID implemented training programs. While those changes were only for Central America, some of the changes spilled over into the AID-wide training and scholarship program.

Q: Central America at this time was, the war was on, wasn't it?

WHITE: The war was rather hot in El Salvador and in Nicaragua and Guatemala as well. The Sandinistas had taken control in Nicaragua. It was difficult working there. But there were some things that really turned around our relationship with the leftist universities in most if not all of the countries.

For many years AID had funded RTAC - the Regional Technical Assistance Cooperation project. It produced American textbooks translated into Spanish for Latin American universities. This highly successful program had extended well beyond the normal AID project life. AID doesn't like programs that don't have a clearly-defined end point. At some point with RTAC, the authorities decided that even though it was a highly demanded project, that it should be terminated. "It's been going on 12 years or 15 years, we have to stop it."

It was a bureaucratic struggle to get AID to agree to reinstate the program but with the able assistance of Tom Donneley, who had run the previous RTAC program, we were successful. We started working with McGraw Hill producing textbooks in Spanish. We opened bookstores in the public universities throughout Central America and those books were for sale there at cost. And all of a sudden we were able to go back onto the campuses and literally we couldn't, I remember at the University of Panama the ambassador for some reason had to go to the university and as soon as he got in and got out to his meeting the students turned his car over and set it on fire. That was kind of the way all of those public universities were.

By the end of the Eighties we were back in the universities. The bookstores were a tremendous success. The recruiting for long-term training, one of the places we focused on was the universities. All of that opened doors. This is the good part. It was not only that AID was doing that through the CAPS program, the Central American Peace Scholarships program; USIA developed a companion program called CAMPUS and the two programs worked together. In fact, in many countries when a person applied to a program the application came to AID and to USIA. We had a committee to meet to decide which program it fit better into and in some countries, like Costa Rica, all of the

program documentation was the same. Such collaboration had not happened in the past. The Central America program started to change the way that the U.S. agency cooperated in an Embassy setting.

Before I leave this topic, I do want to say that the Kissinger Commission funded regular education programming as well. I was fortunate to have a very talented Deputy who was an Education Officer. Most of the regular education programming was delegated to her – Marcia Bernbaum. My management style was to fully delegate to the Energy and Environment officers, and to my Education officer. Marcia was very talented, intelligent and dedicated. She conducted the studies to revive our education programming in Central America, including introducing new and innovative programming in partnership with the private sector.

In Panama, Marcia had been an International Development Intern (IDI) working under my supervision. There were three other IDIs – Abby Bloom in health, Marcia and Don Enos in education, and Jane Stanley in environment. I knew Marcia's skills well and had full confidence in her ability. I focused on the university-level programs and the scholarship funding; Marcia worked on the primary education programs. With her classic approach, using expert consultants to conduct feasibility studies and with a focus on more traditional AID approaches to education, Marcia was very successful and very well respected by the education officers in the field. We made an excellent team.

The Kissinger Commission assignment was not planned but it was a major chapter in my AID life.

Q: After that period, you left Washington when?

WHITE: Probably in 1986.

Q: What were you trying to do? Get back to Asia?

WHITE: No, when I worked in Laos, I worked as the Deputy to Anthony Cauterucci. I was the refugee officer in Luang Prabang and he was the Area Coordinator. When I transferred from SE Asia to Panama in the mid-seventies, Tony was the head of the office and I was his Deputy. In 1986, Tony was the Mission Director in Guatemala. He asked that I come and for the third time serve as his Deputy. I did so as he had been an excellent mentor and guide for me within the complex AID project system. Guatemala made a ‘hat trick’ – we worked together in the Sixties and Seventies, and then again in the Eighties.

Tony and I were very good friends. While I was interested in returning to Asia, I decided to give Latin America one more round by working with Tony in Guatemala.

Q: So you're in Guatemala from '86 to '89. What was the situation in Guatemala at the time?

WHITE: Guatemala was a very tense place – somewhat like the wild-wild west. The Guatemalan military seemed somewhat out of control and there was a lot of tension between the Indians and the government. There was a tenuous peace process in process but with so many different moving parts, Guatemala seemed to be a dangerous place. Many people carried weapons. It was an uneasy place to be.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WHITE: Ambassador Piedra was the Ambassador. He was an interesting Ambassador. He was [**a member of**] Opus Dei so the AID family planning program was not among his favorite programs.

Q: Opus Dei being a Catholic, very disciplined Catholic order of

WHITE: Ambassador Piedra was very supportive of AID. But after him came Jim Michel. Ambassador Michel knew the AID program well and was conversant on every aspect of the program. He also could fit the program into the broader Embassy

perspective. During that period, the peace negotiations were underway in Guatemala. I was only involved with the peace process on the margins – Ambassador Michel saw a role for our Peace Scholarships program returnees – but I assume that the peace process occupied a lot of the Embassy effort in Guatemala.

Q: Who was negotiating with whom?

WHITE: There had been an on-going civil war in Guatemala for many years - between the Guatemalan government and the Marxist rebel army, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit. Trying to get the combatants to lay down their arms and convincing them that they would not be imprisoned was a part of the negotiation process. Looking for the path ahead to put Guatemala back together again was another part. A number of things were happening. Obviously the government, the Guatemalan military, and the rebels were heavily involved as was the United Nations.

The AID program itself was working in the highlands with Indians. We had some projects that were of concern. AID supported a bilingual education program with the Indians. That project was extremely controversial. Bilingual education is always controversial.

Q: When you say bilingual, is this Indian language and...

WHITE: ...and Spanish. The idea was that language issues might be a reason why the primary school dropout rates were so high. The project provided first grade teaching entirely in the Mayan language, second grade half in Mayan and half in Spanish and by the third grade students were totally integrated into Spanish education. The theory was that the comfort of having early grades in Mayan would induce students to stay in the system longer. It is probably true, that this objective was achieved but even so the program was extremely controversial, even among Indian villages.

Some villagers would say, “I don’t want my children to go to school to speak in my Indian language. I want him to go to school to learn Spanish.” The argument that starting in Mayan and moving into Spanish would enhance performance over the long run did not compute with some. Within villages and within the government, AID had probably forced this project by finding a few people who were willing to work with us to implement it.

Q: Paul, what was your portfolio? What were you dealing with?

WHITE: In Guatemala I was the Deputy Director, so I was almost entirely dealing with the internal AID bureaucracy – overseeing the operation of the Mission and the interaction among the various project officers in the Mission. My task was to make sure that projects were designed carefully and in a manner that would allow us to justify our portfolio and secure our budget requests from the LAC Bureau in Washington.

Q: When you arrived there, did you find inappropriate or not well run programming? What did you find when you went there?

WHITE: I found some project managers who I felt were not on top of their projects the way they should be. But, for the most part, that was not the case. I found some older projects that did not fit the new spirit of AID – that is, having a private sector orientation. There were large agricultural projects that were ‘out of tune’ with AID’s new directions. Part of my job was to update the portfolio and purge agricultural extension projects and to find ways to promote private sector programming.

Q: Did you see, in Guatemala, were we spending a significant amount of money actually on the country as opposed to bringing in experts?

WHITE: We certainly were spending money in the country but we also had a large group of contracted experts. While I’ve generally said I don’t like that, we tended to use personal contractors rather than large institutional contracts.

While I was there, I brought in a team of experts to conduct a forty year retrospective study of what AID had done in assistance to the highlands of Guatemala. The idea was to review all of the past records and then to travel to the area to see which projects had continued and which had disappeared over the 40 years. Which AID-funded institutions had continued to function as institutions and had perhaps grown in size and importance, becoming Guatemalan institutions, and which institutions had died after our funding stopped.

That retrospective study was extremely useful. In addition to the expats, Guatemalans experts were also contracted. I insisted on having a Guatemalan anthropologist and a couple of others cultural specialists, but the team was largely expat. The results showed that some projects that were determined to be successful because project personnel toed the line and performed as they were expected to do faded away in a few years. In many cases, no trace was left of those projects.

Q: This has been one of the great complaints about our aid program. What was the assessment that you had? What kind of worked and what didn’t work?

WHITE: The other side of the story is that some projects that were thought to be failures because they sputtered along and had lots of difficulties during implementation were now solid Guatemalan institutions providing great service after all of the years. Perhaps having project officers who had to struggle and deal with difficulties contributed to the eventual success of the projects. Those managers had to have a clear idea of what they were struggling for and the fact that they were willing to argue with the donor rather than just toeing the line meant that they were invested in success.

At the end of AID projects the evaluations often assessed the management issues and difficulties during implementation, the amount of funding that was available as

counterpart from the government, and other process concerns. A project that seemed to be a series of fights and that had not been smooth sailing was often the projects that over time proved to be successful. My conclusion was that one success factor was the willingness of the project leaders to take issue with AID, to stand up for their own principles, to defend their ideas.

Q: What type of projects seem to develop roots in that culture there?

WHITE: The institutional development projects seemed to do well. Working within an existing institution to strengthen its personnel or process seemed to introduce change that lived on beyond AID funding. On the other hand, trying to working directly with farmers to introduce a new technology, or worse yet, working through an intermediary like the agricultural extension service or a service run by a university, setting up demonstration plots and 'Potemkin' programs seemed to not have resulted in much continuing impact.

Q: Did we have like, farm agents, in other words, people who are out there to give help to a broad variety

WHITE: For instance, in Guatemala a lot of agricultural cooperatives were set up in certain projects areas. The cooperatives were overseen by agricultural extension agents. Usually those extension services were very weak institutions and often grew temporarily strong with lots of funding for training and salaries, but after the project the government could not maintain the salaries and operations expense for travel. The system would decline as would the project benefits.

All of the raining, equipment and vehicle investment, staff build up and technification would all go by the way side. The people sent to the U.S. for training would be hired by the private sector after our project funding stopped. Even those who were really dedicated would return to their institution only to find that they could not use their newly acquired skills because the institution could not support them with computers, research equipment, time to conduct research, etc. Soon, the best would be working for Ralston Purina.

So rather than working with the large government bureaucracies, success seemed to come from working more at the local level with local institutions, local cooperatives that were invested in success because they were close to the people they were servicing. The closer to the community, it seems the more likely success and sustainability over time.

Working with the local NGOs (non government organization) fills that bill well. Local NGOs who were present before the AID project, who were strengthened by the project, and who can with certainty be there beyond the AID project makes a good partner, especially if the AID project helps the NGO to do what it does better or on a larger scale. What has not been as successful is when the AID project takes the local NGO into an entirely new service concept. Working within the existing structure rather than artificially growing the scale in a way that is hard to sustain is another secret for success.

Q: What sort of NGOs were you finding, because this is a fairly new phenomenon, isn't it?

WHITE: NGOs are not that new. Working with them as a government agency is fairly new. AID started working with NGOs in the late Sixties, early Seventies and we've been expanding our support for local NGOs since then. Some are church-based. I mentioned *Fe y Alegria*, a Catholic-based, religious vocational education group. There are many different types of local NGOs.

Local NGOs tend to offer humanitarian assistance. Many exist to provide food aid or other kinds of social welfare assistance. AID generally does not like to fund social welfare projects except in areas of humanitarian crisis. As a development agency, AID likes to work in technical areas. Part of our job in host countries has been to identify local NGOs who have lots of heart and to then help them build the brains to make their heart operations more efficient and effective. AID helps NGOs to develop the management structures that will ensure smooth transition of leaders, a capacity to develop and manage sound budgets, the ability to write sound proposals so they can get funding from other donors, etc. We often tend to work with NGOs in management strengthening training activities as well as in a project support mode.

Q: I take it most of your work was with the Indians in the highlands. Well how did you find the central government, which I assume would be more Latino, dealt with the Indians?

WHITE: There was the same problems that is faced elsewhere, a lot of prejudice and suspicion on both sides. A good example of this comes from the Central American Peace Scholarships Project that I've mentioned earlier. I developed the project during my Washington assignment but I had a chance in Guatemala to actually implement the project. The program send highland Indians for shorter-term technical training in the U.S. and a few Indians were able to win long term academic training scholarships.

I recall an incident. Guatemalan Latinos were in a hotel at their training site in the U.S. A group of Guatemalan Indians were booked at the same hotel. Seeing the Indians in their hotel, the Latinos students protested. They did not want to stay at the same hotel with their Indian countrymen. That shows the extent to which feelings of superiority exist among some people.

But there were real breakthroughs as well. A close counterpart was the Minister of Planning. He had a really good sense for what AID was supporting and he was very supportive of our country program. We worked with him to ensure that there were budgetary line items in the Guatemalan budget to provide continued Guatemala government support to local NGOs and Indian assistance programs. That was successful.

AID had influence on how government funds were used because of a jointly managed local currency account with the Ministry of Planning. AID would import U.S. agricultural commodities, mainly wheat. The wheat was sold to bakers who made bread that was sold

in the Guatemalan market. Some percentage of the local currency funds generated from that activity was deposited in a jointly administered account even though the funding was in the Guatemalan budget.

That gave AID leverage to negotiate, where the local currency in the government budget would be spent. We negotiated to get the Ministry of Planning to set up line items to provide budgetary funds in local currency for specific line items for local NGOs and Indian development project support. Over time, those line items were continued by the government because the Ministry of Planning was strong enough to make those kinds of changes. Getting the government to provide direct support at the local level to NGOs and to community programs was a real achievement. Was it a lasting achievement? Perhaps it was.

Q: Was there any reflection of, I know Guatemala has an extensive border with Mexico and all. Did this make any difference?

WHITE: In those days, there was a lot of violence. Indians being hunted by the military they could escape across the border into Mexico. That created political problems along the border. That was a problem above my pay grade.

When we get to my Mexico assignment I'll talk about some of the cross-border activities that I supported through south-south cooperation with the Government of Mexico and with local environmental and health NGOS.

Q: Why was the military going after the Indians?

WHITE: Many Mayan Indians were considered to be subversive. They were suspected of cooperating with leftist rebels and also of being responsible for robberies and crime in Indian areas. But, the underlying problem revolved around land tenure. There were many issues of land use rights with the Indians feeling that landowners were taking away their traditional land holdings.

Q: Well did you have problems going into the highlands?

WHITE: No, but we worked the part of the highlands that was closest to Guatemala City. The further you got into the mountains, the more difficult was the political issues. We had a couple of sheep projects in Momocasteno and other outlying areas that were more distant, but most of our projects were in areas closer to the cities.

Q: Was there a significant produce infrastructure in Guatemala, supplying fruits and berries or whatever?

WHITE: One of our new private sector based agricultural projects provided niche market products to the U.S. – strawberries, cut flowers and asparagus were early successes. The projects were implemented through the development of local agricultural cooperatives.

Our technical advisors helped with quality control, packaging, pricing, and through access to U.S. markets.

Q: What about women? Were we trying to empower women or not?

WHITE: We were. I've already mentioned how we upped the percentage of women in the Peace Scholarships project. I set a target of fifty per cent women trainees. The target was reduced to forty percent by the project review committee. In the end, the project actually reached about 55% women trained among the 15,000 trainees.

That was a major step forward. When I arrived in Guatemala, I was told that I would never be able to convince highland Indian men to let their women go the States for training. That became a challenge that I was determined to address. I went to the highlands where we were recruiting trainees. I found that recruiting women was not a problem at all. That was just an 'old wives tale.'

AID was able to send large groups of women, sometimes ten or 15 or 20 at a time, for short-term training in the U.S. We were also able to recruit some women into undergraduate programs.

Q: Well when, let's take women, came back from this shortish training, what would they do?

WHITE: It was amazing the kinds of things that happened when they returned. They would be trained in various specific programs. For example, a village might have a candle-making craft so we would send groups up to learn how to do a better job of making candles. There was also leadership development training - the kind of thing that USIA had done in the past but this was at a much lower level.

We found was it was not necessarily the training that was given that made a difference in lives. Often it was things that they saw during their "Experience America" programs while in the States. Many Guatemalan women spent time in Florida either going to their training or returning. Some of the Experience America activities were in Miami. As a part of their training, they would be taken to a Miami flea market. Later, we found that local flea markets were popping up all over the highlands. One thing learned was that it was possible to market household items and sell them to friends and neighbors.

All of a sudden there were these new small businesses all over the highlands. I have not seen any follow up studies recently but I would guess that if we were to talk to the people trained under the CAPS programs we would see exceptional growth in such small business and entrepreneurial activities in those households, especially among the women who truly had their horizons expanded by the training.

Q: You were there during the Reagan Administration, still. What about the family planning, birth control, which a Republican Administration usually was not supportive, but how did that...

WHITE: I've seen those transitions several times. Usually the stink is raised in the U.S., with people that have strong political leanings. In the field, programs are insulated from the sudden changes that take place at political levels. There is a lot of inertia built into the system, and between the UN family planning program and all of the other donors that offer family planning, if the U.S. ceases to offer some specific commodity or program like on-demand abortion, there are twenty other ways that that program can continue without us. In the end, it is not a big deal in the field even though it's a big deal inside the Beltway.

Q: Did developments in Nicaragua, you didn't border on there but this was the one radical state in Central America. Did that play out? I mean, were there reflections in Guatemala?

WHITE: I don't know the answer to that. I didn't see any impacts. The Guatemalan woman who was my training officer got involved in the peace process. This mostly happened after I had left Guatemala but it was in process while I was there. When the peace accords were finally negotiated and the dissidents laid down their arms, AID developed a large local training program to reintroduce the rebels into society and giving them new job skills. Elvira Saenz was really excited about the results. The people she worked with were both eager to be trained and the training programs were excellent. She said that graduates were actually going into the marketplace with new job skills. I did not review the program but I did communicate a lot with Elvira when she was running it.

Going back to your question, I think people looked at Nicaragua as a model of what could happen. Somoza was overthrown and then killed. That showed that the left could bring about societal change. It might have encouraged the leftists but it may also have given encouragement to the governments to work harder to try to reach a peaceful accord. That may have pushed the peace process faster in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Q: Was there a military government when you were there?

WHITE: No, it was a civilian government.

Q: How did the military perform?

WHITE: I didn't have any dealings with the Guatemalan military. My sense was that the military was largely autonomous and that they ran large areas of the country - like up country in the highlands. It seemed like some areas were ruled by warlord or by military fiat. I could be wrong about that - it was just an impression.

Q: Well, did the military warlords impact on your programs?

WHITE: Mostly not. To some extent, the bilingual education program might have been impacted in some areas. The military really didn't like that program. The program had actually been shut down before I arrived in Guatemala and I had a sense that the military was heavily involved in shutting the program down.

The AID officer who developed that program, Frank Fairchild, was transferred to Pakistan. During my time in Guatemala he came back to Guatemala on vacation. He had worked closely with the Indians during his tenure in Guatemala. He went up country to visit some of the people he had worked with. Many had crossed over and become refugees in Mexico. Somewhere during that trip up country he was killed. His body was found floating in the ocean. Everything that could be done to track down his killers was done, using every agency in the U.S. government that we could. There was always the suspicion that he was assassinated by the military because of his previous involvement with the Indians but it could have been robbers. We were never able to gain any closure about what happened to Frank.

Q: You left there in 1989. Where'd you go then?

WHITE: I came back to Washington. I offered an excellent job that seemed to be made for me - Director of AID's Asia and South Pacific program. That was where my heart had been for a long time. I came back and took that job for a couple of years.

Q: Paul, you're the Director in AID's Office of East Asian and South Asian Affairs (ANE/ESA) in 1989. What were we doing in Asia, AID-wise?

WHITE: There were some tremendous issues. On the AID side, there was the Pressler Amendment. The Pressler Amendment said that if a country was developing a nuclear device the U.S. could not provide foreign aid. Pakistan was our largest traditional aid program. I think Egypt but a lot of Egypt's aid was not projectized. Egypt was larger in dollar sums but Pakistan was larger in traditional operations.

AID was required to shut down the Pakistan program. That meant reviewing every project to determine the right end point. A bridge project over a canyon could not be stopped halfway through the bridge. Each project had to be taken to a logical end point. There was also high time pressure from the Congress to end things as soon as we could. Pressler implementation became quite an exercise.

A second big activity was what I called the 'cross-border' programs. Two programs that probably had been run by the CIA were turned over to AID to implement by the Congress. One was Thai-Cambodian border support for the three anti-communist groups in Hun Sen's Cambodia. These pro-democracy groups required shelter and food support, and support for school teachers and medics. The other program was on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border during the Russian War. These two highly political programs were key components of my portfolio.

Q: Okay, let's talk about Pakistan first. What were you hearing from your organization and from your Pakistani colleagues?

WHITE: There was profound shock at the official level in Pakistan that we were cutting off their huge and quite successful AID program. In Pakistani eyes, right next door was India. Even though India had nuclear weapons, it seemed to not be impacted by Pressler restrictions.

Q: Well India was subject because it wasn't receiving aid, is that it?

WHITE: True. Whatever India had done to ramp up its nuclear program, it had done it quietly or before the Pressler Amendment. They were not a large aid recipient.

Troubling for me was in having to shut down some really excellent projects. The Girls' Education program was training women teachers in the frontier areas. Girls would not go to boarding school if there were men teachers and the school situation meant that after grades one or two, boarding was necessary. The AID project was successfully changing the way that Pakistanis thought about education and it was providing thousands of girls with opportunities to acquire an education.

Q: Were you sort of doing all this sort of grudgingly? What was the attitude?

WHITE: No. I think that my attitude was that the law was the law and nothing I could do would change that. There was heavy pressure from 'big guns' in Washington to do this project well and expeditiously. I had a team of people working with me. I believe that we all were implementing Pressler to the best of our abilities, working with the AID Mission in Islamabad and dealing with STATE, the Hill, the NSC and other interested players. Certainly, had we had our 'druthers,' we would not have been doing this shutdown but there were no other choices. It wasn't that I did it grudgingly, and certainly I was not trying to slow or delay it. I was not hoping for a new decision at some future point. It was clear that there wasn't going to be a change in policy.

Q: Were you feeling congressional oversight? Were staffers sort of looking over your desk or not or what

WHITE: Yes. I spent a lot of time on the Hill. Certain Congressional staffers were very actively involved in making sure that things were moving forward. I was summoned to the Hill every week to explain the status and then was admonished for not moving faster. A lot of pressure was being applied.

Q: What about girls' schools? How did that, how'd you find phasing that out?

WHITE: That was difficult because of the project's structure. It was a policy-based project. Instead of having AID contractors out in the provinces directly implementing this project, AID was passing money to the Pakistan government as a reward for mutually agreed on policy changes. When the government implemented a policy or met an agreed

on benchmark - initiating a teacher training course for women teachers or hiring so many new women teachers or developing a core curriculum for the program – they would receive a tranche of money from AID. In one way, AID was working with a few bureaucrats in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Planning rather than having to deal directly with the school systems in the project area. In some ways made the project easier to implement. It made bringing it to a close somewhat difficult.

Q: While this program was going on were you, even before the Pressler Amendment came along, were you getting complaints you might say from the fundamentalists in Pakistan about doing things with women?

WHITE: I wasn't on the ground there very much so I'm not certain. I am sure that there must have been resistance, but probably more directed towards the government of Pakistan rather than the U.S. because we had a small footprint in this project. There is always resistance to change and I am sure that the fundamentalists were not happy, but the project was being implemented smoothly by the Pakistani government. Of course, had it been a more direct involvement AID effort, the Agency would have come under fire from several elements of Pakistani society. In this case, we were a largely invisible actor. That is a good way to go when there are highly controversial programs.

Q: Within the Pakistani government there were people who really wanted to do this?

WHITE: Absolutely.

Q: I was reading a book by Bernard Lewis [What Went Wrong?: The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East] about what went wrong, how come Islam has ended up at the bottom of the heap and he mentions the social consequences if a society has women who are ill-educated or uneducated.

WHITE: Of course the traditionalist would say, "But that's how the world has always been. The men have gone out hunting, and the men have gone to school to get educated, and the women have run the household and raised the children."

However, who could ignore the fact that if you ignore the education of fifty per cent of the population, it is a penalty hard to overcome in this fast moving modern world.

Q: Were you seeing any of the projects, for example the school project, was there any follow through on the part of the Pakistanis saying, "Well, okay, if you can't do it we can."

WHITE: In some of the projects there was a heavy Pakistani commitment. In some projects, the government's counterpart funding was larger than our loan or grant funding. I am sure that those programs were continued. Since all of AID's large projects require significant counterpart funding, some more than others, those that had substantial government counterpart funding were almost certainly continued. For the girls' education project, for instance, I believe that they were committed to continuing to move forward.

The project was working in two of the most difficult states or provinces in Pakistan and the project personnel assured us that they would continue, all thought it might by necessity be at a lower level of effort.

Q: Were there sort of “no go” areas? I think of the tribal areas

WHITE: The Northwest Territories. There were “no go” areas even in those days – places ruled by war lords, dominated by marauding bands of robbers and gangs. The problem continues even now. There were areas where poppy production reigned supreme. Warlords assured the production and export of the product. Those were not places that are prime tourist spots for foreigners.

Q: How about Afghanistan? Afghanistan at this point was very much under the Taliban, wasn't it?

WHITE: By the time I arrived at the desk, the Soviets were in the process of withdrawing. AID's commitment, was to try to maintain the village school programs and the village medical programs inside of Afghanistan. The cross-border program was sending supplies and support - medical supplies and school supplies – in by mule train to keep those social programs functioning. We occasionally asked that teachers or medics and nurses come to Pakistan for training, AID sent food in by mule train as well. That was a difficult proposition. Reaching the remote areas of Afghanistan was a logistic nightmare. The food would be trucked up to the border. Then it was trans-loaded onto Afghan vehicles.

Each time there was a trans-loading, a percentage of the food would be lost. At some point in Afghanistan, it would be carried by mule trains. Each time that the food supplies would pass a provincial border or entered a new warlord's territory a fine would be paid and some percentage of the food would be lost. Particularly notorious was Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. He enjoyed intercepting our food supplies. He would take enough to feed his troops and let the rest continue to its destination. Of course, Americans could not travel in Afghanistan so there was no way to monitor all of this except to pay for monitors and then pay for monitors to monitor the monitors, and then.... you know how that story goes.

Q: Was the Taliban in control or was it iffy?

WHITE: It was iffy at that point. There were many warlords. Their allegiance was suspect. One day, they were on one side and the next day on the other. It was also unclear who was really in control in the capital. I think at that point the Taliban was in control in some rural areas but not in the capital.

Q: Were we having problems with the Pakistanis to get the food in? Were they taking a certain percentage of this?

WHITE: Everyone was taking a percentage or being paid off. The shipping arrangements were much as I have described, a number of different companies were involved with lots

of trans-loading, and each company was making money. We were working with the agreement of the Pakistani intelligence authorities and the military. I would not doubt that key officers were also capitalists – running shipping companies.

Q: The Pakistani intelligence people were sort of the rulers up there, weren't they? They were in charge of certainly the border.

WHITE: You could not move without their concurrence. We often met with them to assure that our plans were understood and had their blessing.

Q: You have any problems with them?

WHITE: No, I went out several times on TDY. While I would have liked to have talked to the people in control, I think that was above my pay grade. I usually ended up talking to lower level officials, some of whom I am sure were intelligence officials. But most often I was unable to access the people at the top. They tended to deal with their direct counterparts at the embassy and elsewhere and they ran a tight ship. For me, that was a particular problem because I like going directly to the source. The only problem I encountered was not being able to do that.

Of course, I always traveled with a great deal of trepidation. Things were really different and unfathomable. There was an active insurgency going on in the border area and there was a lot of unrest from the refugees on the Pakistan side of the border.

Q: Well in Pakistan, as we shut down the program, was the program pretty much run by contractors rather than sort of AID permanent staff?

WHITE: Yes. That is just the way of life with AID these days. AID officers are involved as managers but contractors do most of the technical work. AID officers do the programming and planning and any direct relationships with the government. The contractors are responsible for implementation rather than policy. More veteran AID officers remember when the AID direct hire officer did it all and probably long for those days because there was much more control. Working through contractors always involves a certain loss of control but it is a way of life because the direct hire staff has been reduced substantially.

Q: What were the problems of dealing with contract staff?

WHITE: A number of things. First of all, contracted staff sometimes has their own agenda separate and apart from what the AID agenda might be. If it is an NGO, say Church World Services or Catholic Relief, there might be religious overtones on top of the AID agenda. If it is Harvard University or Michigan State, they might be giving PhD students an opportunity for field research that goes beyond the AID agenda or they might have their own policy objectives that might not be directly in line with what the U.S. government wants.

With a powerhouse contractor like Harvard, if they are operating outside of the contract, or if the contract is not well written so that it gives them more flexibility than was expected, it is difficult to bring them back in line. The main issues then become managing the contractor's performance rather than managing the project and its impact on the host country beneficiaries.

Q: When we move over to Thailand and the cross border thing, you say you were sort of taking over from the CIA. Had the CIA actually essentially moved into AID territory and now were trying to get out or how would you describe the thing?

WHITE: The Agency has always had programs that were AID-like in nature to benefit the clients that they were working with. In this case, the client was the non-communist resistance in Cambodia. For whatever reason, Congress made a determination that the cross-border programs might benefit from AID oversight. All of a sudden we were working with counterparts that we traditionally had not worked with. Instead of working through a governmental institution or with NGOs, we were working with political groups.

Questions about what authority programs fell under were numerous. What kind of agreements would be best, and which counterpart should AID negotiate with. Who should sign agreements? What about the counterpart funding that is required for normal AID projects? There was one parsimonious solution - a wonderful "notwithstanding any other part of the law" that exempts agencies from the normal requirements required under the Foreign Assistance Act. For the Afghan and the Cambodian cross border programs, this special authority gave AID more flexibility than it would ordinarily have had.

Q: Well this was because of it was essentially a military operation against communist movements. What could you do? First place, what was the sort of situation on the ground? Are we talking about, was it Laos?

WHITE: AID's involvement was not military. We were providing non-lethal assistance to non-communist resistance civilians. The objective was to keep the non-communist resistance coalition alive so that it could play a powerful role in preventing, at the negotiating table if possible and on the battlefield if necessary, a return of Khmer Rouge political control in Cambodia. It certainly was a time of diplomatic see-saw maneuvers as the best path to peace was explored by many different actors.

The AID program worked from the Thai border area into Cambodia – the northwest part of Cambodia in an around Battambang Province where two non-communist groups held control. It was not an active military zone – there was no 'hot' fighting. The Khmer Rouge were also in that area of Cambodia and in a strange way, they too were seeking a return to power by either replacing or sharing power with the Vietnamese-supported communist government of Hun Sen.

That was a problem. The Khmer Rouge was fighting against the Hun Sen government and the non-communist resistance was also resisting the government. That made the non-communist resistance and the Khmer Rouge de facto "allies" as the enemies of my

enemies are my friends.” There was so general on the ground understandings with the Khmer Rouge to prevent friction between the factions but it certainly could not be called ‘cooperation.’

The Congress was very concerned about what that relationship was between the non-communist resistance and the Khmer Rouge. There was a concern that assistance being directed to the non-communist resistance might somehow bleed through and benefit the hated Khmer Rouge. There was a lot of discussion between the Administration and the Congress. Congressman Steve Solarz was a major supporter of the U.S. playing a role in helping maintain the non-Communist Resistance as a viable negotiating body and a military force if negotiations failed.

Some Congressional staff and I assume that there was strong member support as well, were concerned with the rest of Cambodia. What about the people? Shouldn’t we be providing AID development assistance to the people of Cambodia? At one point, Congress put into legislation a bill that required that the Administration through AID conduct a needs assessment in the rest of Cambodia to determine what the humanitarian needs were. That was seen as a first step towards forming a traditional AID program in Cambodia.

The Administration took the position that AID could not do travel to Cambodia to conduct the needs assessment. That put me and my office right in the middle – with the law saying that we had to conduct the assessment and the Administration saying that it would not approve of our doing so. I found a way, tapping into the large number of U.S. and international NGOs operating in Cambodia.

Q: You are saying that there were a lot of NGOs in Cambodia, even in the areas controlled by the Hun Sen Government?

WHITE: Yes, there were NGOs working in Hun Sen controlled areas of Cambodia. Most were based in Phnom Penh but they also had programs in the field. My proposal, that gained favor with the Administration and that was grudgingly accepted by a Congress that would rather have had AID ‘boots on the ground’ was to use the NGO community. I invited key international, U.S. and local NGOs to come to Thailand for a development conclave on Cambodia. At that meeting, AID picked their brains about conditions in Cambodia and subsequently I drafted a needs assessment report to the Congress about conditions in Hun Sen’s Cambodia.

That satisfied the congressional requirement. It was a good solution to the problem. As anyone would guess, the needs’ assessment showed tremendous social and economic development needs in Cambodia and humanitarian needs in all parts of the country as the people there had suffered for many decades. But the problem still remained about whether AID should provide assistance to areas controlled by that communist state and if it should, how it could do so without a physical resent in the country.

Q: And this was a period when we did not have relations with Vietnam.

WHITE: That is correct. Our assistance to the non-communist resistance was small and was quiet – it was not a formal foreign aid program to the country of Cambodia. We treated it more like assistance to a local NGO or community group. There was no need for formal agreements with the Cambodian government or any other entity. In fact, such agreements, had we wanted them, would have been impossible. AID provided food, agricultural seeds and tools, some farm animals, and minimal support for operations to the non-Communist Resistance. It was very small-scale assistance and could be offered in spite of the fact that we did not have diplomatic relations with Vietnam or Phnom Penh.

Q: Was there sort of a residue of CIA influence, wanting to pick up intelligence and I would think they would want to continue to do that.

WHITE: I am sure that the Agency continued their military contact and support relationship with the non-Communist Resistance. AID only picked up the humanitarian assistance aspects of the program. The Agency had plenty of officers working on the more political aspects of the U.S. relationship with the non-Communist Resistance so there was no need to rely on AID for intelligence activities. In fact, the shift in program support led to differing contacts than perhaps had existed before. We coordinated carefully and closely with all involved parties but there were not any particular requests for or demand on AID to provide reporting over and above what we did on the humanitarian assistance activities.

Q: Were you at all involved in immigration from, essentially Cambodia to the United States?

WHITE: I was only involved on the margins but many of the AID officers who had served in Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia were active players in resettlement issues. The large push was in the 1975-1976 period. At that time, there was huge AID involvement, both along the border and in the refugee camps, in Guam and the Philippines and also even back here in the States. AID officers were very interested in making sure that the people that we directly worked with were resettled and taken care of in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Q: What about up in Laos? Was there spillover, the Hmong and all that? Were we doing anything with them?

WHITE: AID continued to work with the Hmong because many Hmong ended up in the border camps. We continued to supply the border camps. There were trickles of people over all of those years that left the camps and came to the States, to France or other places for resettlement and there was also a trickle of people out of Laos. Hmong and Lao escaped by crossing the Mekong. Some had been U.S. government employees or dependents, or had other credentials. There was a continuing effort to resettle those people. On the other hand, a lot of Hmong refugees just remained stuck in the camps.

One of the things I worked on with the non-communist resistance was something that I also wanted to do with the refugees in border camps. It was to institute educational programs in addition to the Thai or English training that would promote job skills and democracy. We often talk about the importance of voting and a free press and the importance of the rule of law. I wanted to provide training that would give people information that would help with key future decision points so if they were ever to return to Cambodia or Laos that they would go back with perhaps a stronger sense of free markets and democracy.

Those soft programs are always hard to initiate and they must be developed with great care so that they are not top-down dogma but rather eye-opening, horizon-expanding programs. NGOs were deeply involved in the camps. The kind of programs I am talking about is not what NGOs traditionally do. NGOs are more comfortable with food distribution and humanitarian assistance, and are out of their comfort zone with more politically-focused programs.

There were also issues with the Thai government hosts. Thailand did not want to do too much in the camps - especially anything of a political nature was suspect. They also did not want to make the camps too advanced and too attractive. So even though that idea was a simple one, it was very difficult to initiate in the camps and was also difficult to start with the non-Communist Resistance groups inside of Cambodia.

Q: What about East Asian bureau? Did they have much interest in the State Department or were you sort of on your own?

WHITE: No, I was not on my own. Several times a day, or more, I would visit the EAP to discuss issues, and there was a lot of joint clearance on documents between my operation and EAP. We worked very closely together on Cambodia and on the Philippines. In some periods, I probably spent as much time at EAP as I did in my own offices.

Q: Your geographic reach straddled a couple of State regional bureau; Near Eastern for Afghanistan, Pakistan and then over to Asia...

WHITE: Yes. But I worked most closely with EAP. Somehow, even on the Afghan cross-border, I often talked to my EAP counterparts who perhaps then shared the information within the STATE system with Near East counterparts.

So on the Afghan cross border program there was not as much direct cooperation and it was done at a different level. As the Office Director, on the Cambodian side I was the key contact point with EAP, working with the various offices within EAP. However, on the Afghan program, my boss, Deputy Administrator, Carol Adelman, did most of the direct coordination with STATE.

Q: Did we have anything going in Burma?

WHITE: There was a lot of talk about Burma – very little action. There were a lot of Burmese refugees on the Thai side of the border. There was a push from the Congress to initiate a border university program in the jungle for the Burmese dissidents. I was really interested in having AID involved with a border education program for those young Burmese who were on the Thai side of the border. However, nothing ever happened.

I am sure that the politics of getting agreement with the Thai government was an issue, and of course getting the U.S. bureaucracy on board must have been an issue. In spite of heavy Congressional pressure and some ‘report language’ that pointed in that direction, there was never a strong enough push or pull to overcome the inertia in the system. I worked hard on that issue but there were no concrete steps taking to develop and implement a program.

Q: You mentioned the importance of congressional staffers. Often they were the ones who had an agenda and were driving it, weren't they?

WHITE: Yes. That seemed to be the case. On this particular case, Burma, for instance, I believe that one staffer had a Burmese wife. But for whatever reason, you are right. It sometimes was unclear where the strong Congressional interest was coming from – from the staff or from the members. There were times when a member would ask for a meeting – like Steve Solarz on the non-Communist Resistance. In some cases the member would send letters to the Secretary or on rare occasion, to the AID Administrator. That made it clear where the interest was. But on many issues that I was responsible for the issue seemed to be staff driven. Congressional staff had lots of power.

Q: You started in 1989. Of course, 1989 was the year of, the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union. Did any of that reflect itself in where you were?

WHITE: I was fortunate to have played an important role there on the AID side. The Bureau that I was assigned to was broad – covering Eastern Europe, Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the South Pacific, all in one AID Bureau (for Asia, Near East and Europe – ANE). I was the Deputy Assistant Administrator for East and South East Asia, Asia, South Asia and the South Pacific. Another Deputy Assistant Administrator covered the Middle East and a third person worked on Eastern Europe.

In the field, there was a sense about a new world. The peace dividend would permit focused attention on development all over the world. There was a sense that the communist world was collapsing. Many expected that Russian aid would dry up to Vietnam and that Vietnamese aid would then dry up to Hun Sen. It was only a matter of time before the west would march back into Phnom Penh.

There were a lot of unrealistic expectations that dominoes would start to fall.

After the successful visit of Secretary of State James Baker to Albania, AID sent a humanitarian needs assessment team to Albania. I was selected to head that team. My sector focus was on education. On the education team for Albania was Mother Teresa. In

a short time, we provided food assistance and assistance to resume a free press. There was a worldwide initiative to develop Albania texts from preprimary through university. The longer term U.S. assistance that resulted from the visit concentrated on broad-based economic growth, strengthening democratic institution, and the rule of law.

I count that opportunity as one of the highlights of my career.

Q: What about the Pacific islands? Did you get involved in anything there?

WHITE: Only on the margins because the other aspects of my portfolio were large and dominating. AID's program in the South Pacific was small. What I haven't talked about is the Philippines base negotiations. AID played an important role in the support to the new Aquino Government and in the U.S. military base conversion into free trade zones.

Q: What about the Philippine base negotiation? First, what was the situation and then what were you doing?

WHITE: In the wake of the Marcos departure and the entrance of a new government under Corazon Aquino, AID was helped fund a program with Elliott Richardson on the U.S. side and Bert Villanueva on the Philippine side to strengthen private sector involvement with the national economy. I traveled with the AID Administrator to the Philippines to meet with President Aquino. During the base negotiations, the U.S.-Philippine private sector initiative moved in the direction of using the infrastructure on the bases to support free trade zones as a way to offset the loss of revenue from the U.S. departure. AID was deeply involved in planning for a future beyond the base discussions.

Q: Did it seem in the cards that we're truly getting out? We'd gone through base negotiation after base negotiation, but this time, this is it?

WHITE: At my level the sense was that it would happen this time and that we should be forward in the planning process. Our Assistant Administrator, Carol Adelman was very close to the State negotiator Richard Armitage. AID was one of the players in this important chapter of our history with the Philippines.

Q: Mount Pinatubo, had it erupted?

WHITE: It had not erupted at the time that most of that planning was occurring, but close to the final decisions the eruption occurred - in mid-June 1991. It put the planned use of Clark field infrastructure a non-starter as volcanic dust blanked the air base. There was a sense among the people who were opposed to Philippine take-over of the bases that the volcanic eruption brought about a justice as it rendered that air force base largely unusable for a long time.

There is another story in this – about the success of AID. It is true that one seldom gets credit for prevention. AID was not touted in all of this but the Mount Pinatbo eruption

was the second largest volcanic eruption of the century yet deaths were minimal even though tens of thousands lived around the volcano. AID's support over many years with training for scientists and for technical assistance to the Institute for the Philippine Institute for Volcanology and Seismology, the active volcano monitoring that was done, and the AID Office of Disaster Relief's proactive development with Philippine counterparts of village-by-village evacuation plans made this large eruption one known for its destruction of facilities on a base rather than for human death.

I am proud that AID has been on the forefront of disaster prevention and mitigation around the world, working silently and quietly in the shadows without acclaim or accolades. I am also proud of the fact that AID assistance is always the first on the scene around the world when there is a disaster and is always the most responsive to the situation. Most often, it is also the largest support provided by donors.

Q: What were you getting, sort of from your contacts on the Philippine side? Was there a feeling that, in a way, thank God you're leaving or were we the milk cow that they wanted to stay on or what?

WHITE: AID, to some extent, probably not as much as the Embassy, has tended to deal with counterparts who are like-minded people. AID counterparts generally were very sad that we were turning the bases over to the Philippine government. They felt that that was not the way that things should be, but that there was a force out there, the Philippine people, who were making the reversion happen. I believe that there was a hope in the minds of many counterparts that this would all turn around at the last minute. It did not.

Q: How did we view the Philippines? Did we feel that they were a mature enough country that they could take care of their own problems?

WHITE: I can only speak about my view. Having dealt with the Philippines on many different issues over the years, I knew that Filipinos are extremely talented people, very educated people, very passionate and dedicated. That impression is enhanced because so many Filipinos speak English so language competence is not an issue as it is in many places where AID works. That alone makes the Philippines seem very to be a step above most AID recipient countries.

At the same time, that education and polish is largely at the upper levels of society. Among the common people, things were much the same as they were elsewhere in the developing world. Having a very educated and sophisticated upper crust and a country that has incredible resources are good things, but seeing that it does not all result in a 'tiger' is another. For whatever reason, the Philippines had not taken off the way one would expect that it would so our leaving seemed a bit premature.

Q: During the Vietnam War, in the high point of AID, we were all over the place, then all of a sudden you're shrunk down to a few places, in a way, aren't you?

WHITE: Another way to look at that is that a large percentage of our U.S. development assistance money was going to a few very strategic places around the world. Those places were Egypt and Israel, Vietnam and Pakistan, and a few other countries. Other than that, our foreign aid program was small and fragmented for the rest of the world.

If you were not posted to one of those key, strategic programs, the feeling was that you were in a 'backwater' that deserved more support than it was getting as the large and politically visible strategic programs were taking more than their fair share. If you were working on those strategic programs, then it was a very different. You could see how much that aid was needed and you could look at the rest of the world and say, "Out of all these years of basic education, or primary health care, or agriculture support, why hasn't that country progressed?"

Q: Getting to Pakistan and Afghanistan, did you see Islam as being a problem?

WHITE: Yes. My personally view was that Islam was a problem for me. I had invested years learning about Asia, studying the languages and then working to understand Latin culture and language – a much easier task. For me, the Islamic world was a mystery. I was not antagonistic to it – I just did not understand it. I also knew that I did not have the band width to try to study and absorb yet another major world culture, language and religion.

I recognized on my first trip to Pakistan, especially when I went up country and saw all of the women shrouded in black burkas from head to foot that I was in another world. I had been to Islamic countries before, like Bangladesh and Indonesia. But they were more open societies. I realized that there the Islamic Middle East was not only a place that I had never been posted but also was a place where I never wanted to be posted because I did not have the strength to invest in the learning required to make me fluent in the culture and the language.

In my AID Country Program Oversight officer, I felt that there I was, trying to run programs in a places that I did not understanding at all. I was not comfortable with that. Of course, there are due diligence things that can be done – reading and understanding a specific context or event. But that deeper understanding was absent.

AID had people 'on the ground' that one would assume had those deeper understandings but in a world where an officer was moved around every 2 or 3 years, that ceases to be a criteria for assignment. But for me, I am uncomfortable working in an area where it's so clear that I don't understand what is going on around me.

Later in my career, State was seeking to appoint Ambassadors from AID and USIA. I was proposed to serve as Ambassador to Chad. I had never been posted to Africa and even though I spent years in "French-Indochina" I did not speak French – I had opted to learn Lao and Cambodian instead. Because I knew that I would not be comfortable in a cultural and linguistic unfamiliar setting, I declined the nomination. So it was not just about Islam, it was a broader feeling that I have about myself and my comfort zone.

I do believe that more generally, there was a sense that things were happening in the world of Islam. When working on Afghanistan cross border programs, for instance, at some point Osama bin Laden surfaced. He was a very wealthy 'donor' supporting programs much like my AID cross border effort. He was supporting the school systems and the medical programs inside of Afghanistan just like we were. At that time, I remember hearing - "We don't know who he is or why he's doing this but he is providing Islamic aid to help the same people we are working with."

Over time, that image of him has changed a lot.

Q: You say you were doing this for a couple of years, we get up to 1991, 1992. Then what?

WHITE: A couple of things happened. First of all, the person in AID who ran Asia, Near East, South Asia, Pacific Bureau [Assistant Administrator Carol Adelman] was faced with a 'split.' The Bureau was split into an Asia bureau and a Middle East and Eastern Europe Bureau. Carol Adelman argued strongly for maintaining all of the 'political' programs under her because of her close connections with senior Administration officials who were interested in AID's involvement with those political programs. Even though the Asia Bureau was moved to Henrietta Holsman, Carol Adelman successfully made the case within AID that the political programs should stay with her. The programs that I oversaw - the Philippines, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Cambodia - stayed with Carol Adelman. A date was set for the eventual transition of my programs to the Asia Bureau. I decided that at the point when those programs were moved to the Asia bureau, I would move on.

Before that date certain, AID decided that it wanted to post a senior officer to Japan to help coordinate U.S. foreign assistance programming worldwide with the Japanese aid program which at that time was the largest bilateral donor program in the world. My name came out of the computer as someone having had Japanese experience and interest. I was approached, I was interested, and I accepted the Development Counselor post at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. In 1991, as those Asia programs were leaving for the new Asia Bureau, I started a new chapter of my life, serving at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo from 1991 to 1998.

Q: Wow! What were you doing?

WHITE: A good question that I also asked myself often. When I arrived, the Director General of the Japanese aid program, based in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, made it clear that I was in Japan at his request. He said that Japanese aid officials were having trouble coordinating with AID because the AID program was too decentralized. He wanted a single source for coordination, in Tokyo because all decision for Japan's program were made in Tokyo, not in the field. My job, he informed me, was to

advise him on how to approach AID, who to work with on the various sector and country programs, and to also help him work on making the Japanese aid program more effective and efficient.

That was his perspective. From the U.S. perspective, I was posted there for several reasons that were compatible with the Japanese Director's view but also went well beyond his views. The Japanese aid program was largely centered on infrastructure and equipment provision. The program did almost nothing in the softer areas or within the policy arena to leverage policy change in recipient countries.

On the soft aid side, that is in democracy, women in development, environment, biodiversity protection, HIV/AIDS, population, HIV, rule of law, teachers training and curriculum development, health policy, etc, Japan's program was absent. Those areas were just covered in their aid program as they were focused almost exclusively on building buildings and supplying equipment. The Japanese program also was almost exclusively government-to-government with no NGO involvement, and it was mostly loan rather than grant aid.

My job was to try to move the Japanese aid program more towards a program that would look more like our program. I was to be a 'change agent.'

Early on, I spent most of my day learning about the program. An early lesson was that I learned that JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency) was not AID's natural counterpart. All policy decision about Japanese foreign aid was made in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Economic Cooperation Bureau. Their State Department ran their foreign aid program. JICA was more like a consultant doing the technical work once decisions were made about what would be done. JICA was not considered to be part of the government of Japan. My key counterpart, then, was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. That is where I spent every day, either trying to figure out what they were doing and why, or seeing how I might leverage change in their approach to foreign aid.

Q: What was your impression of the Japanese aid structure?

WHITE: Before I went there, my impression was that JICA, their grant aid group, was the natural AID counterpart. I quickly learned that their aid structure was very different. JICA was one player but there were many other Ministries involved - the Ministries of Trade and Industry, Fisheries, Finance and Agriculture, to name a few. That was very different from anything I had confronted before. Almost immediately I started thinking in terms of, if AID ever were to become part of the State Department, our foreign aid program might start to look a lot more like the Japanese program. While my task was to find ways to change their program to look more like our own, I saw that down the pike it was possibly that we might change to look more like Japan's program.

Another big difference was in the role of private firms. Since Japan's program was largely infrastructure building and equipment provision, the main players were the Japanese trading firms (sogo shosha). Mitsubishi, Marubeni, Mitsui, Sumitomo, Itochu

and others played a key role. Up front, the firms had officers very familiar with their key markets – China experts, India experts, Indonesian experts, etc. When there was a new project possibility, the experts would advise the recipient country officials on what to request and how to request it. Japan's aid program was host country request based so this initial step was critical and it almost seemed that the Trading Companies cooperated to assure a minimum of actual competition among them about foreign aid.

Once a request was made, the trading companies would work with the Japanese aid officials to flesh out any details of equipment needs and budgets. Once approved, the trading companies became the main arm of Japanese assistance with 'turn-key' operations. The companies build the buildings, roads and bridges, supplied the vehicles and equipment, and oversaw implementation. I spent significant time getting to understand this system which thrived under Japan's 'tied aid' policy that restricted Japanese Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding to procuring from Japanese companies. One of my tasks was to find ways to 'open' Japan's ODA procurements to foreign bidders.

Q: How about your counterparts? Would they have a different attitude than you did, did you find or

WHITE: Certainly they had a different viewpoint and attitude.

Japanese aid started as war reparations in the Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere where Japan had ravaged cultures and people. Japan was paying back Korea, China, Indonesia, Thailand and other east and Southeast Asian countries. My Japanese counterparts saw Japanese aid in concentric circle. Most of the aid funds would be concentrated on immediate neighbors in East Asia. After that were more distant Asian countries – South Asia. Just a little money and attention was trickled off to Africa and South America, and these programs were primarily to satisfy the international community pressure to cover the world.

East Asia had always been and remained the primary target for Japan's program. My counterparts could never understand why the U.S. didn't have that same philosophy. To them, our natural aid recipients should have been the Latin American and Caribbean countries. I was often questions about our view that we had a worldwide mandate and in fact directed most of our aid funding to Asia and the Middle East, not to Latin America.

The issue 'hard aid' (equipment and buildings) was another big difference in our programs. Japan built things and equipped things. That resulted in many 'white elephant' projects. Often their buildings went empty and the equipment broke down when the countries could not keep up with operating expenses. But my Japanese counterparts could not understand why we provided "soft" assistance (curriculum reform, teacher training, democracy and rule of law assistance, biodiversity protection, HIV/AIDs and family planning programs).

To the Japanese, those ‘soft’ aid programs seemed like donor interferences into the internal affairs of the recipient countries. My counterparts argued that Japan’s aid was in direct support of the programs of the recipient countries. It was apolitical and non-controversial. The Japanese buildings and equipment provided the wherewithal for recipient country institutions so that they could better do their jobs. They were not interfering with the basic structures of any country.

To make a long story short – our programs were at opposite poles of development.

Q: Did you make any difference, you feel, or did they make any difference with you?

WHITE: Both. I believe that my presence made a huge difference on the Japanese aid program. Their program now looks similar to ours. I first arrived in Japan during the (George H.W.) Bush Administration. At that time, there was an existent program for U.S. – Japan development assistance cooperation. This ‘Global Partnership Initiative’ had supported a few really large joint cooperation projects, in India, Thailand, Jamaica and a few other places. I tried to build on that success by working to develop a few more mega projects.

To kill two birds with one stone, the first area that I choose to work with Japan on was biodiversity conservation. Japan had no bilateral projects in that sector. After a difficult negotiation, we agreed to jointly develop and implement a biodiversity project in Indonesia. I was able to leverage the AID Mission in Indonesia to put in ten million dollars; Japan agreed to match that with ten million dollars, and Indonesia agreed to put up ten million dollars in counterpart funding. This broad concept to cooperate on a thirty million dollar project did not just happen – it was hammered out with lots of blood and sweat.

This was where I learned how the Japanese program really worked. Japan organized a ‘project identification team’ to travel from Tokyo to negotiate with the Indonesian government. I was successful in working with a Japanese environmental NGO and successfully was able for the first time ever to convince the Japanese government to put an NGO on its project identification team. I was also able to recruit a couple of experts to join me – Robert Orr who was a Japanese ODA specialist then working on the Stanford program in Kyoto and Lorie Forman from the Nature Conservancy.

In the end, after a lot of back and forth, the project became parallel rather than joint. Japan ended up building and equipping a biodiversity research center in Bogor and AID funds were used on technical assistance and research – both donors were in their comfort zones but had very little true interaction.

But that was the general ideal – I used AID funding and project leverage to move Japan into fields that they had not previously worked in. The Global Partnership ended rather quickly when the Bush Administration ended and the Clinton Administration began. The question was what to do with Japan cooperation. I suggested that we change the name but continue in the direction that we were already moving. That was accepted. The Global

Partnership became the U.S.-Japan Common Agenda for Cooperation in Global Perspective.

Some of my hard work was paying off. In July 1993, the Common Agenda was launched with the purpose of addressing global problems such as environmental degradation, population pressure, and natural disasters. The four pillars reflected a change in Japan's aid content as they included health and human development, challenges to global stability, protecting the global environment and advancing science and technology cooperation. The first three pillars were all 'soft' assistance areas that were new to Japan's program. The Common Agenda also recognized the "growing role played by nongovernmental organizations" and suggested 'strengthened coordination with NGOs' as a part of the joint cooperation. This was another huge victory.

Under the Common Agenda, Japan committed to provide nine billion dollars to work with the U.S. on HIV/AIDS and population. That up-front commitment of funding for global health was a major move forward as it gave us leverage to use with AID Missions. At the same time, Japan made it clear that it had no prior experience with bilateral funding in these areas and had few if any experts that it could rely on. Therefore, for Japan, the cooperation with AID and others would be critical to success.

Over time, under the Common Agenda, the U.S. and Japan developed a long list of positive cooperation, including Parks in Peril activities in Latin America and a Coral Reef Research Center on Palau, and many other Women in Development, NGO and democracy initiatives around the world. To answer your question, under those two major cooperation initiatives and also through a high-level policy dialogue project that brought senior AID and Japanese policy makers together once a year in Honolulu to discuss policy coherence and cooperation, Japan's program changed significantly.

Q: Was the Japanese society, the universities, producing sort of committed do-gooders? I'm using the term in the best sense of the word. I mean people who really wanted to help, because it's such an enclosed society I think it would be hard to bring these people to the fore.

WHITE: Japanese colleagues had real trouble understanding the way that the U.S. had such a sense of responsibility for the world. On the surface, Japan appears to be a much more inward-looking society. However, looking deeper, there is another side to the issue. The Japanese Peace Corps was doing great things – and was attracting young Japanese dedicated to improving the lives of people at the grassroots level in countries just as our volunteers were trying to do. As the Japanese Peace Corps people began to return to Japan from Africa or Bangladesh, the South Pacific or Burma, and engaged in society again at a university or by founding an NGO, they were changing attitudes.

Another change was in the Japanese government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, before my posting to Japan, had wonderful programs to involve the Japanese people in Japan's ODA program. It involved ordinary Japanese citizens, local governments, local NGOs

and universities. From the top down Japanese aid officials were involving citizens in really interesting ways – in ways that we don't pursue in the west.

For instance, Japan would organize local community members, NGOs and universities as an evaluation group. Twenty or thirty people from a cross section of society would be funded to travel together overseas, say to Indonesia, to look at the Indonesia Biodiversity project and evaluate it. The group may have a movie star or a famous baseball player in it as well. The group would return to Japan to talk and write about what they had seen and to give their observations about the value of Japanese aid. The broader Japanese public would learn about the Japanese aid program through these evaluation visits. That is one reason why 85 per cent of the general public supports Japan's aid program. In our country, the support rate is well under 20 percent.

Q: As an observer, did the Japanese become involved with the South Koreans particularly and the Chinese? These are two rather dynamic societies but coming from obviously different backgrounds. How did this work out?

WHITE: Interesting. The Japanese often would ask me, "What do you think the biggest AID success story is in the world?" I would always say "Korea." The response would be "How can that be? Korea is not in South America, it is in Asia?"

I would say, "When AID started working in Korea, the country was among the poorest in the world. It was poorer than many of the African countries. It had been devastated by the Korean War. Now Korea is the 12th leading economy in the world.

"What did AID do?" I explained that those were the days prior to the Congressional mandate that changed AID from a loan to a grant Agency. In those days, AID's program looked like Japan's program does now – we built infrastructure – buildings, roads and bridges. We funded cement factories in Korea and built the North-South Highway. With the investment that we made in Korea it's really turned around."

Japan sees Korea as their success story. This was always followed by a question about why I was trying to convince Japan to move away from infrastructure support. My answer was that we were doing that before the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. Now, with major Bank funding, there is a role for bilateral donors on the grant side.

Back to your question, Japan had a difficult time in Korea. When they occupied Korea, Japan changed Korean culture. Japan required Koreans to paint the Korean names off the grave markers of their ancestors and replace them with Japanese characters. There was a lot of resentment in Korea about the way that Japan ruled during the occupation. The "comfort woman" issue bubbles up from time to time. A discussion about Korea always brought out really interesting things.

Japan feels that it more than made up for the abuse with the economic cooperation that it has provided. The same is true of China. There was also a lot of resentment about the

Japanese occupation of China and a feeling on Japan's part that it has provided significant aid to China. Japanese aid officials would readily admit that one objective of the foreign aid program to Asia was to get those countries to forget about the comfort women and the mistreatment of people under Japanese occupation. Officials would say that they were making headway. In part, that was because as older generations die out, the direct memories are lost. Younger people have less knowledge about what happened.

Q: What about North Korea?

WHITE: I had some conversations with Japanese about North Korea, Burma, Iran, Iraq and other difficult places. I often communicated State talking points to the Japanese foreign aid officials when they involved questions about Japan's aid intentions. Often the talking points were to convince Japan not to provide assistance. On North Korea, I would occasionally take a look at what Japan was doing. It was not doing much there.

As the communist world started to disintegrate, there were opportunities to get the Japanese to take a leadership role in coordinating aid to that country. It is Asian, where Japan feels that it has a natural leadership role. It did not take much pushing for Japan to host a donor coordination group for Mongolia instead of holding it in a more traditional place like Paris, France. Japan accepted that challenge. That was a first. Japan now takes the lead on a number of issues, including hosting annual donor coordination meetings on African development.

Q: You'd had that Japanese experience early on, which had turned you off. Did you feel that you were looking at a new Japanese person, in a way, or were you seeing one develop, or not?

WHITE: I really appreciated the opportunity to go full circle, returning to my original first love – Japan. And it was good to do so not as a poor noodle-eating university student with no position in society. Being in the top five highest ranking officer in the Embassy meant that by position alone I commanded a lot of respect. It was not so much that I saw a new Japanese attitude, rather I was in a different social position, and that made a difference.

I was treated very differently the second time around. But I don't want to take away the fact that I also saw developing sophistication and confidence on the part of Japan – but personal and institutional. When I asked my AID colleagues in AID mission what they thought of Japan, I would often hear, "Oh, Hashimoto-san goes to the meetings but he sits over in a corner of the room and smokes a cigarette. He writes lots of notes but never says anything." By the time I left Japan, not because of me but just because of the way things were changing, that same Hashimoto-san was probably an active participant in those meetings because he had something to say.

Japan was implementing the kinds of programs that other donors supported. That put them more 'in the mix.'" The Hashimotos who were sent overseas with little if any

English had been replaced by younger Japanese who had excellent command of English. I must say their Foreign Service – whether Japan’s or ours - is superb, in terms of producing people with excellent foreign language skills.

Japan does many things that we don’t do in our program. Early on the system identifies officers who are going to be China hands or French hands, or whatever. They send those officers to university for several years in the country where they are going to specialize in their career. Then they are given them several language assignments that enable them to use those language skills in varying position. That is why you find in the Japanese Foreign Service some people who are exceptional at the highest levels.

Q: During the time you were there was a difficult time in terms of the Japanese bubble and Thai bubble, they all popped, burst. How did you find that?

WHITE: The economy affected the Japanese tremendously. Japan felt that its development model had worked. After all, ‘tigers’ were popping up all over Asia and Japan was taking credit for having made that happen. On the other hand, my Japanese colleagues would often point to West as having a failed development model because Africa and Latin America were still poor. Japan felt that its investment in Asian infrastructure was the factor that made a difference.

Japan commissioned the World Bank and the IMF to do a study of the East Asian miracle, expecting it to say that Japan’s development model led to the Asian miracle. But, this was right at the time when bubbles were beginning to burst all over the place. The study said that these countries made right economic decisions. It gave little or no credit to the Japanese aid program. That was a crushing blow.

In Japan it had two effects. The fact that Japan itself was experiencing large financial difficulties made some question why Japan needed to be the leading development assistance donor in the world. Japan was ten or twelve billion dollars a year; the U.S. was at eight billion. Japan had a much larger program than the rest of the bilateral donors. In Japanese, there is a saying that the tallest nail gets hammered. Everyone was coming to Japan to ask for development dollars. A lot of domestic pressure was put on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance to reduce the size of the Japanese aid program. They eventually did so.

In terms of living in Japan, one of the things that I continued to be amazed at was that every restaurant you had waiting lines. I could not detect a negative impact on the way that people lived in that very expensive country. Certainly, newspapers reported on changing life styles and there were big changes like the reduction in aid. But in terms of the way people lived, I didn’t notice any major changes.

Q: How’d you find living in Japan and Japanese society?

WHITE: The second time around I loved it. Japanese were very gracious and generous. I traveled all over the country giving speeches, some for USIA and some on my own or

sponsored by Japanese NGOs or by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I taught comparative development assistance at Yokohama National University's graduate school, comparing the UN system, Japan's ODA and the U.S. system. I also went to other universities as a visiting professor.

I did see that the Japanese still found it hard to accept a foreigner who has more than a superficial understanding of Japan and Japanese. My conclusion is that Japanese like to be secretive. They believe that Japan is a special society unlike any other in the world. I remember during the negotiations to try to open Japan's rice market to Louisiana rice, Japanese were making the argument that the Japanese intestine is are not like foreign intestines and cannot easily digest foreign rice.

They really do have a worldview and a self view that is unique.

I used to go to a Baskin-Robbins in the Ginza - an American ice cream franchise. I would say, "I'll have one scoop of vanilla and one scoop of chocolate, please." The clerk's hands would start to sweat and shake because that is not on the menu. The clerk would ask the manager if it was okay to put a scoop of chocolate together with a scoop of vanilla. It's a society that lives by rules. Everything is a routine. Going outside of the routine makes people uneasy. Once that is understood you understand that and once you understand the routines, Japan is understandable and not nearly so inscrutable.

Q: Who was the ambassador during your tour?

WHITE: When I first went there it was Ambassador Armacost [Ed: served from May 1989 to July 1993]. He was absolutely wonderful. Ambassador Armacost received AID into the embassy with open arms. He was very supportive in every way, even if the GSO and others were not as welcoming. After him, Ambassador Mondale arrived [Ed: served from September 1993 to December 1996]. He too was super.

I got along really well with both Ambassadors, but especially with Ambassador Mondlae. Anytime I asked him to go support my program with a speech or a visit, he would do so and was always superb in what he did. We even performed a magic show together at an Embassy talent show. What a wonderful photo op that was!

As I was leaving, a new Ambassador arrived - Tom Foley [Ed: served from November 1997 to April 2001]. Although I only overlapped with him for a period, of several months, it was a privilege getting to know him. Ambassador Foley was on a steep learning curve. As far as I could tell, Ambassador Mondale did not have a learning curve - he was a natural. Ambassador Foley struggled a bit at the beginning, in just learning what an ambassador's role was and how to do it. But all three ambassadors were a delight to work for and to get to know.

Q: How'd you find the rest of the embassy? Japan is not a country where AID, since MacArthur's time, has had much of a presence. All of a sudden you're there?

WHITE: I was really well accepted in the Embassy community. There a big issue at the outset, should I have an independent office or should I be folded into one of the traditional embassy sections? The Embassy decided to locate me in the Econ office so that I could have access to classified documents. An independent office would not have that access. Also, the Econ section had the assignment to monitor Japan's aid program. There was an FSN who did that on a full-time basis before I arrived.

That generated another issue – should the Econ section continue to monitor the program or not? Should that FSN report to me or to the Econ Counselor? Another issue was about my rank. Should I be listed as a Minister/Counselor, co-equal with the Minister/Counselor for Econ? The Embassy decided that I should be listed as a Counselor for Development even though my personal rank was Minister Counselor. That was fine with me.

I worked in partnership with the U.S. economists and also the local economist who worked on Japan ODA. We became a team of Japan ODA (Official Development Assistance) experts. I did not have any problems in the Econ section but I recognized that at times I inadvertently stepped into the turf of other Embassy offices – like Foreign Commercial Service or the Political Section or Treasury. I was working in areas that also touched on their areas of interest. As I learned more about their operations, the times that we had turf issues diminished considerably. They quickly saw me as an aid expert who was knowledgeable about the subject matter. Eventually, I was well accepted all over the Embassy.

Eventually, the Econ Minister/Counselor was transferred. When he left, I used the opportunity to establish a separate AID office [Ed: The State Department publication “Key officers of the Foreign Service lists Mr. White as a separate AID office in its Fall 1994 and July 1995 booklets]. That move was good and bad. It came about because of space issues, shared secretaries and other bureaucratic issues. I did not initiate the move but was supportive of establishing a separate office. The bad news was that because I no longer sat in the classified section of the embassy, I had difficulty accessing the classified cable traffic and I had no place to store my own classified cables.

The embassy expedited the move and in general my life in the Embassy was fabulous. Of course, like every officer, there were GSO issues. That is unavoidable.

Q: General services office, those are housekeeping matters. You mentioned the Foreign Commercial Service. Did we get into any problems between Japanese aid and American aid, the difference between John Deere and Kubota or something, different types of tractors or anything like that?

WHITE: One of my original mandates was to work on untying Japanese tied aid. Japan used all Japanese suppliers. Its bidding process was not open to the international community. That was largely a Commerce issue. I had many meetings with the

Department of Commerce before departing for Japan. I was told that the FCS officers at the Embassy did not have time to work on the issue and that I should take the lead. I did.

At that time, the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD was heavily engaged with getting all donors to untie their aid. The argument was that for loan aid, where a country had to repay the loan, the country itself rather than the donor should determine if it wants John Deere or Kubota tractors.

Over time we got the Japanese gradually began to untie their loan aid. The argument that if there is a loan to India, it is Indian money because it has to be repaid helped because AID is a grant agency. AID had 'buy America' provisions but grant programs were handled differently than loans. Even so, it made it harder for me to argue for open procurement when our own grant program was largely tied to American procurement.

Every time there was a large new Japanese loan program, say for telecommunications in India, the telecom people would contact me to see how that procurement might be opened up. I would sometimes go with the FCS officer; sometimes I would deliver talking points on my own. Another 'hot' area was railways. Japan funded a lot of railway projects that ended up buying lots of diesel-electric engines. General Electric and General Motors would immediately come to Tokyo to meet with me, to meet with Foreign Commercial Service, and to make the rounds of all the procurement agents in Japan, I spent a lot of time on Commerce issues about 'tied aid' but this was also an area of high interest to AID because of the OECD position on the subject. Tied aid was the most contentious area that I worked with in terms of my relationship with Japan's aid program.

Q: Another thing that was happening during the time you were there was essentially the collapse of the Soviet Union, particularly in Asia. Were the Japanese involved there?

WHITE: Japan had its own problems with Russia - the Northern Islands. The relationship between Japan and Russia was a difficult. Some interesting things happened while I was in Japan.

We often talk about U.S. diplomacy with China starting through ping-pong diplomacy. I call Japanese-Russia diplomacy as growing from wild bird diplomacy. Japanese NGO - the Wild Bird Society - found that certain birds migrate from the Northern Islands in Russia down to Japan. The NGO started a dialogue between Japan and Russia about wild birds. That eventually bloomed into a more robust political relationship.

A second area was an issue from the NSC - Karl Jackson was fiercely interested in leveraging Japanese assistance for environmental clean-up in Eastern Europe. He wanted me to negotiate that as a first item of priority. I tried hard. I had a lot of forward meeting. Karl Jackson even came to Japan for meetings. The big stumbling block was that the Eastern European countries were not categorized as official development assistance recipient countries. Japan was adamant that it could not provide ODA funds to non-ODA recipient countries. We were never able to get around that stumbling block.

Another area that I worked on that involved Europe was what I came to call trilateral projects. I discovered that when the U.S. and Japan were cooperating on a project it neutralized a lot of the negative feelings either towards the U.S. in certain places or towards Japan. So we were able to do some joint projects in a trilateral mode that we could not have supported bilaterally because of difficult relationships among the players.

Q: When the Soviet Union broke up and all the “sans” emerged, the Central Asian countries. Were the Japanese interested in this or not?

WHITE: Japan was very interested. This was at a time after the Mongolia Consultative Group met in Tokyo. That meeting was a big success. It propelled Japan into a donor coordination leadership role. Japan decided to continue that role for the ‘stans.’

Japan vied for consultative group host instead of France and was successful. As I said earlier, every Japanese trading company interested in trade had specialists. Japan had ‘stan’ specialists in the trading companies. There were significant interests in oil pipelines and selling their Kubota tractors and Toyota Land Rovers. Japan took a big interest in being actively involved in what was going on there economically, and politically as well. After those countries became independent, Japan took the lead in the consultative group meetings and took the lead in being the number one donor in dollar terms for many of those countries.

Q: Were the Japanese doing anything in Latin America; there was a large Japanese immigrant community in Brazil, and the president of Peru was Fujimori. Was there much going on there?

WHITE: Traditionally, the Japanese aid program had a funding category called “overseas Japanese support.” Japan ODA was directed to Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador and Brazil where there had been large migrations of Japanese in the past. The program provided funding that allowed those communities to return to Japan for an education and included USIA kinds of fellowships and grants. Japan also provided bilateral assistance to Latin America. The old formula was seventy per cent of Japanese aid should go to East Asia and ten per cent to South Asia, ten percent to Africa and ten per cent to Latin America. That was the traditional allocation. A lot of pressure was put on Japan to do more in Africa and at certain points to do more in Latin America.

States ARA Director (the Latin America Affairs Bureau) came to Japan a number of times to lever Japanese aid. He developed a good working relationship with the Japanese. His interest was the Partnership for Development and Democracy in Latin America – a State Department initiative that fit well under the Common Agenda. There was hope that Japan’s aid program would join AID and others to support the initiative’s democracy programming. That became a major activity for me. Japan finally took a leadership role for one of the working groups under this PDD. Japan also upped its assistance to Latin America and supported new areas for Japan like environment and democracy.

While Japan did not increase its program significantly, they did respond positively to the repeated requests to increase their funding for Latin America.

Q: You'd been with AID a long time, was there a growing international aid group, I mean were the individual donors coalescing, rather than everybody doing their thing and did you find yourself in a way part of this jointness as a representative in Japan?

WHITE: There was a belief in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee that if donors would cooperate more and harmonize their programming, more could be accomplished. Ambassador Jim Michel was a key person pressing that issue. However, it was the Common Agenda that made donor cooperation a reality. The Common Agenda was U.S.-Japan cooperation but it encouraged many other donors to join us or to develop cooperation with other donors.

AID again was again a quiet, silent hero. In addition to the donor cooperation we fostered by stationing me in Japan, we stationed a person in Rome to coordinate with the World Food Program and another person in Geneva to coordinate with the UN agencies. Out of these three assignments, donor cooperation went from being a 'good intent' in scholarly documents to be a working, living activity within donor programs.

While philosophically it was easy for donors to agree about donor cooperation, when it got down to the 'rubber meeting the road' most donors continued to do their 'own thing.' The requirements for developing projects and the way they are funded are very different processes for different donors. That makes cooperation difficult.

That of course is the argument used. Donors say that they would cooperate but that it is difficult to do because we have different funding schemes, different priorities, different requirements from our political support, and different reporting requirement. That is usually where attempts to push donor coordination have failed. The Development Assistance Committee's effort to develop standard reporting and budget formats is a major step in the right direction. AID's assignment of Donor Cooperation experts to key posts is another major effort to move cooperation from paper to reality.

Q: Well in 1998 you left.

WHITE: By 1998 I had planned to depart post and retire. Two things happened, I guess. I started getting pressure from the State Department to accept a nomination to be ambassador to Laos. I also had a strong invitation to go to the embassy in Mexico and run the foreign aid program at the embassy there, in a way similar to what I'd done in Japan. I went to Mexico but the contact continued by State to serve as Ambassador.

I started the process with State, traveling to Washington twice for interviews and briefings. It started to seem real when Lao were contacting me to congratulate me. Apparently, they had been part of the 'vetting' process. For many reasons, I decided that though the greatest honor I ever could imagine, being Ambassador to Laos was not in the cards for me. It was a very difficult decision, maybe the most difficult decision I've ever

had to make. The decision to decline the nomination was based on a whole series of factors, some personal; some policy related.

I stayed in Mexico as the Development Counselor from 1998 through 2002 when I retired from the Foreign Service.

Q: What were you doing in Mexico?

WHITE: In Mexico we had a very small aid program. I was sent there to close out the program. AID has always been a difficult issue for Mexico to accept. Mexico is a very proud country that doesn't like to admit that it receives foreign aid from another country. Over the history of our aid program to Mexico, the U.S. has never run a government to government program. Rather, we have tended to work with and through NGOs to identify, develop and implement projects with vulnerable populations or in the poorest parts of Mexico.

When I arrived in Mexico, the whole country was on fire. Those fires were generating smoke all the way from Chiapas up across Mexico and into the United States. Looking at a satellite photos it was clear that Mexican smoke was causing health alerts in Houston, Dallas and many towns and cities deeper into the U.S.

Q: So this was real fire. What was the problem?

WHITE: After a number of very dry years, the traditional agricultural fires used to burn away the old crop or to clear new land for planting had gotten out of control due to the availability of very dry brush and forests. Also, storms and lightning were setting fires in the dry forests away from agricultural lands. Place that had never burned before, like the rain forest in Chiapas that had always been so wet that it would no burn extensively, were on fire. Because an increasing number of U.S. cities were posting environmental health alerts, the U.S. Congress began to pressure the Embassy to take action to assist Mexico control the fires. As the Embassy Disaster Officer, and also the AID Mission Director, finding a solution fell on my shoulders.

In order to declare a disaster and release the U.S. Government's ample disaster funding and supplies, the Government of Mexico needed to submit an 'official request for disaster assistance' to the Ambassador. The Mexican Government was unwilling to make that request for help. After many attempts at differing levels to convince Mexico to request assistance, I came upon a formula that would work. I negotiated to have the Mexican Environment Ministry (SEMARNAP) send a letter to the Ambassador agreeing to accept our assistance. Though a subtle difference, that change in approach was acceptable. The letter was sent and I was then able to work with the U.S. Forest Service and AID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) to provide funding, U.S. firefighter assistance, and U.S. Forest Service experts to begin planning for recovery after the fires were extinguished.

My introduction to Mexico was in fighting bureaucratic and real fires.

Out of that episode grew the first agreement between the U.S. and the Government of Mexico on foreign assistance. Again, that was not easy, and even though the agreement was signed at the governmental level, eventually ways were found to channel the funding through nongovernmental channels as the Government of Mexico was not ready nor did it have systems that would support direct funding transfers from a foreign government.

A Mexican environmental nongovernmental organization (*Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature (FMCN)*) was identified as a partner with the technical expertise and the management capacity to work with AID, and it was also acceptable as a partner to the Government of Mexico. A trilateral agreement for a five year project to fight the ongoing fires disaster and then, and very important, to work on restoration of fire-damaged protected and special areas of Mexico was negotiated, signed and implemented. Funding provided by AID was channeled through the Ministry (SEMARNAP) to the Fondo (FMCN).

This innovate program established many firsts: a bilateral agreement with the Mexican Government on foreign aid, an agreement between the Government of Mexico and a local NGO to work on policy and implementation issues; funding agreements between the Fondo and local NGOs in and around protected areas to involve those local organizations and communities in protected area projects; and exploration of the concept of ‘endowment funding’ as a way to provide a continuous source of funding for environment conservation and restoration. Many of those features continue in Mexico, making NGO cooperation in environment a worldwide recognized success.

The next area that came rushing at me like a downhill bound freight train, and prevented the mission of closing out the AID program in Mexico, also originated with the U.S. Congress. Tuberculosis in Mexico was a major health problem. Treatment was not available in most of Mexico but a solution was found – people afflicted with TB found that they could cross the border into the U.S. and receive expert treatment in Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and California at no cost to the Government of Mexico or to the individuals involved because of the U.S. law that requires health facilities to treat everyone who comes through the door, whether they have insurance or not, whether they have the capacity to pay or are indigent. Thousands of Mexicans crossed the borders to be treated on an unreimbursed basis, driving many U.S. hospitals and health clinics to the brink of financial collapse.

In response to pressure from health facilities and from political leaders in the U.S. Border States, the U.S. Congress demanded that AID explore the possibility of strengthening the Government of Mexico’s capacity to treat TB in Mexico so that people would not have to cross the border to get treated in the U.S. Again, a government-to-government relationship was being urged by the Congress with funding to attract the interest of a reluctant Mexico – not for the program but for entering into foreign aid agreements with the United States.

An existing political alliance was used to pursue TB cooperation. The U.S. – Mexico Binational Commission was formalized in 1981 by Presidents Reagan and Lopez Portillo to serve as a forum for meetings between cabinet-level officials from the two countries. Taking advantage of that, TB cooperation was put on this high-level agenda and a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by Presidents Bill Clinton and Ernesto Zedillo. That MOU demonstrated the political will to cooperate but the negotiations were just beginning at the bureaucratic level. Over the next year, with a lot of hard-work, a Strategic Objective Grant Agreement (SOAG) between the Governments of the United States and Mexico was signed for a \$16 million initiative.

The SOAG was a step-forward. However, unlike the environmental cooperation that was greatly facilitated by finding an NGO who could become the true implementation partner for USAID and the Government of Mexico, thus freeing the two governments from almost paralyzing rules, regulations and protocol, in TB cooperation it was the two governments face-to-face. Over the next couple of years, very difficult implementation arrangements were worked out which were necessary for eventual project success.

Once cooperative mechanisms were in place, the project managed to provide extensive laboratory equipment, human resource capacity development at the national, state and district levels in Mexico, initiated programs for social mobilization, improved the health information system and focused on drug resistant TB diagnosis and case management. It was evaluated as having successfully increased the capacity of the Mexican Government to provide TB diagnosis and treatment. The project was also a major success as it put the two governments together in a complex but mutually beneficial relationship that was positive for citizens on both sides of the border.

USAID funded other programs in Mexico as well. Our most sensitive area was in the area of Democracy. There, we were able to work directly with the key players in Mexico's congress and judicial systems while channeling funding through nongovernment groups. The program addressed freedom of information by promoting a new freedom of information law similar to the U.S. law, and it worked with the Mexican Congress to strengthen their capacities to conduct and utilize research and staff work.

In addition to TB, AID supported population programs through a number of different nongovernmental groups and also had a large HIV/AIDS initiative. It was a full-service and vibrant assistance program. In the end, rather than being the person to shut the AID office in Mexico down as was originally intended, I increased the program in size and quality, and established bilateral agreements that were the first of their kind in our foreign aid relationship with Mexico.

Q: Now, you talk about democracy programs. This is just about the time when the PRI (Spanish: Partido Revolucionario Institucional) lost a real election [July 2000]. Did we have our fingers in that pie?

WHITE: There was support from our program. We worked with NGOs and others by training election watchers. I think that AID also funded President Carter and other

election observers to come down and observe the election. The PRI was swept out of power after sixty or seventy years of power. President (Vicente) Fox came in with a real desire to improve relations with the United States. That opened the door for a while but the forward momentum was perhaps shut down a bit after 9/11 as U.S. interests turned elsewhere.

Q: How did you find dealing with the Mexican government, the officials there?

WHITE; in the beginning it was difficult. Mexico's a very proud place. It required being very careful with how words were used. I recall that early in my tenure a Mexican Government official gained access to the AID/Washington website. The Mexico program was described as the U.S. providing assistance for poverty areas in Mexico like Chiapas. That official edited the entire webpage. He sent it to me and said, "If you want to talk about Mexico, look at my language. He had taken out every mention of poverty or assistance or foreign aid. That made it difficult to work in Mexico. Mexican officials were very sensitive to what was done and how it was done.

There seemed to be a sense among some government officials that 'gringos' always have an ulterior motive. We would say, "We will help you fight the fires. We have U.S. firefighters and equipment, we have aerial combat aircraft and we can share with you satellite images of the progress of fires, etc." The response would be, "Yes, but what do you really want? I'm sure you want to take aerial photos of the Chiapas forest for your own military purposes."

No matter how simple or how complex the matter, it seemed as if many if not most counterparts would find an ulterior motive that would make the issue a challenge.

Q: How did you find the NGO organizations in Mexico? Was it evolving or was it relatively mature or

WHITE: Mexico was NGO-rich when compared to many countries where AID worked. There were a number of NGOs that AID had worked with over many years. They were strong and valued partners. Often, we had partnered the local NGOs with international NGOs through our funding arrangements. That alone, served to build their capacity and ability to function as development partners with other donors and with the Mexican Government as well.

AID had developed strong relationships between the Nature Conservancy U.S. and the Nature Conservancy Mexico or Conservation International U.S. and Conservation International Mexico. There were other NGOs who were not as strong, but one on my priorities was to find ways to channel funding through the stronger Mexican NGOs to the smaller and weaker NGOs so that local capacity was being built. That was a key aim, for instance of the Fundo Meicano fire and restoration program.

The Mexican government policy towards NGOs was medieval but changing for the better. Many officials felt that NGOs represented an unseen guiding hand from the North that was trying to influence events in Mexico. For those officials, NGOs were seen as

being a subversive force. Where I could, I tried to use my funding to build relationships between Mexican officialdom and NGO implementers. Of course, there was suspicion from the NGO side as well. Many believed that the Mexican Government never had the interest of local people in mind when developing policies or action programs.

Helping the two sides to better understand one another was a major part of what I set out to accomplish in Mexico. I believe that I was successful in doing so.

But I think Mexican NGOs, like NGOs everywhere, had a lot of ‘heart’ but perhaps not so much ‘brain.’ That is, they did not take the time or make the effort to focus on the day-to-day business of development - how to keep records and books; how to write good information reports to donors; how to conduct evaluations or write proposals; etc. They were out there doing the best they could do and were often the most direct interface with rural people. It was in everyone’s interest to try to strengthen them.

Q: One of the things about our relations with both Canada and Mexico is that you got government to government, Washington to Ottawa or Washington to Mexico City and then the practical relationship, which is cross borders and governors of states call governors of states or police chiefs call police chiefs or almost any little, did you find yourself and particularly NGO or AID things, that sort of thing happening?

WHITE: In our democracy program we funded a lot of exchanges of mayors, for instance. We focused on identifying key people working on similar issues and facilitated putting them together to compare approaches and to learn from one another. On the Caribbean coast area, municipalities were working on flood control keeping the bay from flooding the city. AID would fund local mayors and their environmental committees or local NGOs working with them on that issue to visit a town in Florida of a similar size and make up. The mayors would develop a relationship; the technical people would observe how the problem was approached; and perhaps an idea or two would surface that could be used in one or the other location or in both. In some cases, a North delegation would then visit the local counterpart in Mexico with a technical team. In the early days of our Democracy program, when we were trying to establish our bona fides and good intent, we funded many such exchanges, with mayors, with governors, with judges and others.

NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) was before my time, but during the negotiation of NAFTA someone recognized that environment was not being discussed. Out of that recognition, a large sum of money – perhaps thirty million or fifty million dollars, was leveraged. AID used that funding to create a new Mexican NGO who would work on environmental issues, with the funding placed in an endowment fund so that it was not exhausted. That endowment funding could be used by the new NGO (Mexican Fund for the Conservation of Nature (FMCN) to fund local NGOs working at the community level in and around protected areas.

Taking advantage of the fact that Mexico was in a partnership with the U.S. and Canada under NAFTA, and with the U.S – Mexico Binational Commission as a mechanism that

could express political will and the need for cooperation, even on foreign aid, I was able to build up rather than close down the AID program in Mexico. We were working on a higher order of development issues in Mexico than we would have been working on in Nigeria or Bangladesh or elsewhere. Mexico was an Advanced Developing Country – that opened new avenues for cooperation that made the assignment exciting as we were working more as partners rather than in a ‘donor-recipient’ modality.

Q: Did you find yourself working against the entrenched power of the unions? I think of the teachers union or the petroleum workers union, I’m sure there are others, after all this is where PRI’s power comes from

WHITE: AID was not working in areas that would have brought us into conflict with the unions. An area of cooperation that I did not mention was the area of Global Climate Change, clean energy, renewable energy sources, etc. But in those areas, our assistance was small, exploratory and research-based. Our activities were fully supported by the government and did not take us into conflict with the unions.

Certainly, unions are very powerful in Mexico just like they are here. They often keep innovation from happening because they tend to be traditional and protective – they don’t like change.

Q: Is there any other area we haven’t talked about in Mexico?

WHITE: The population area, I guess, only because that was such an interesting area. AID had worked in the population area since its very beginnings in Mexico. We had always worked through NGOs. There were some serious issue between the population NGOs, the Government of Mexico population program, and the Church. AID worked directly with the international (and a few local) NGOs. The NGOs worked directly with the Government. That sheltered AID from direct action in most cases. In the battles with the Church, AID again was protected even though we were sometimes the quiet funding source of programs.

Our battles were often with the U.S. Congress. There were some Congressmen who did not support AID’s population program. They would continually write letters to the Ambassador, and congressional inquires always carry a lot of weight. Perhaps the Senator or Congressman, through his or her staff, had talked to a couple of Indian women from Chiapas who had abortions and complications from the abortions. Was AID money involved? There always was a hot political issue on the table with the population program.

AID had worked in population from the beginning. The Mexican government had always been a good partner and it was doing a really good job with its large nationwide program. When I was assigned to Mexico, hoping to use the very successful U.S.-Japan partnership approach, and even hoping to benefit from some of the \$12 billion in funding that we had in U.S. – Japan cooperation for programs in Mexico, I found that the Latin America Bureau’s goal for me in Mexico was to phase out our population program in Mexico. I

wanted to continue the program but the phase out was too far along for me to turn it around.

In a sense, we held a ‘graduation ceremony’ for Mexico. The Mexican government was in general agreement with the phase out but it was concerned over one big issue. AID had been a source for condom procurement for many years. The Government of Mexico was willing to provide the funds but wanted AID to continue to make its condom supply channel available. We were able to do that and our ‘graduation’ of this program was one of those very happy circumstances where AID was giving the Mexican government a lot of face and credit as an AID graduate.

Another area of success impacted the health system in its entirety. There were a lot of different players in the Government’s population program - the Mexican Social Security system, the Mexican Ministry of Health, the private sector social security system – all partners with us but with separate systems that did not coordinate one with the other. As a part of our wind down to ‘graduation,’ we started having meetings bringing together all of the players in the same room at the same time. It became obvious to all that there was no overarching policy and program that brought the diverse groups together. As a part of this graduation exercise, the different players started to coalesce around common causes. Our exercised programmed joint visits to each other’s projects as a team, and joint evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of each program. That set into place a kind of coordination committee that continues to work on overall sector coherence.

I feel good about that, as I do about our establishing an endowment fund that supported local NGOs and about so many other things that happened over my career.

I have one final comment on Mexico, again taking advantage of the Binational Commission process. George Bush was the new U.S. President; Vicente Fox was the new Mexican President. They were coming together in Merida. Everyone was looking for ‘deliverables’ – new initiatives that could be announced. This was an opportunity for me to tie several elements of my career into one package – I proposed a major U.S. – Mexico scholarship program (similar to my Kissinger Commission Central America Peace Scholarship and University Linkages project) building on the university-private sector-government partnerships that I had built in Japan under the U.S. – Japan Common Agenda, and with some targeted programs for disadvantaged Indian teachers.

The idea was accepted and the TIES project was born (Training, Internships, Exchanges and Scholarships). The program, announced by the two Presidents, supported university to university linkages with significant private sector partner involvement along with governments and NGOs. It focused on but was not limited to development issues such as micro-finance, watershed management and border health – reflecting our own AID portfolio priorities. In addition to the specific partnership activities, a number of short-term technical programs were supported in the U.S. for rural indigenous teachers and for Mexican youth who would return to their communities to utilize the new skills acquired and lead community projects as repayment for their scholarship program.

The TIES project was an apt way to end my Foreign Service career. It combined many of the lessons I had learned in the trenches and in leadership over an almost 40 year period of service. When as a relatively junior officer I was given what seemed like an awesome responsibility of developing the Central America Peace Scholarships project, Henry Kissinger gave me some advice, “Make it your passion instead of your job and you will be successful.”

I did make every assignment I’ve had, large and small, my passion over all of these years. I tell people that I am one of the fortunate people who have never had a job because I have loved every assignment. I always add - I would have paid to be able to do what I have been paid to do over my career.

Q: In 2002 you retired.

WHITE: I did retire with a heart full of wonderful memories. I became a volunteer and then joined the Foreign Service with the words of John F. Kennedy ringing in me – that with U.S. dollars, U.S. technical assistance, and with U.S. good will, our generation could change the world. As I look back, I changed a few things here and there for the better and I touched the lives of many people in positive ways.

Most of all, the world changed me. The Foreign Service was a life-changing experience that I will always treasure.

Q: That was a very fruitful career, thank you very much.

End of interview