

## ALGERIA

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**THOMAS S. ESTES**  
**Political Advisor**  
**Algiers (1942-1943)**

*Thomas Estes was posted to Greece, Washington, DC, and the Upper Volta as a Foreign Service officer. He was interviewed in 1988 by Ambassador Dwight Dickinson.*

ESTES: I was off to Algiers. It was there, incidentally, that I was commissioned an FSO, having passed the oral examination while in the Department. Allied Force Headquarters, of course, was a totally military organization with no previous experience in dealing with a civilian section (We became known as POLAD -- Political Adviser). Fortunately, Ambassador Robert Murphy was General Eisenhower's political adviser and he arranged for us to have places to live and to draw rations. If you want me to go on with this a bit...

Q: *Yes, tell us something about...*

ESTES: In Algiers we were bombed by the Germans and the Italians. In Bangkok we'd been bombed by the British -- a unique experience, being bombed by both sides. I shared an apartment with J. Holbrooke Chapman, an FSO who had been my immediate supervisor in Bangkok, and at night during an air raid we would get up and go to a shelter across the street. Aside from these raids it was fairly routine work for me as the junior officer. As you can recall, the junior officer did all the administrative work in those days.

**WILLIAM R. TYLER**  
**Chief of Press Wireless Bureau, USIS**  
**Algiers (1943-1944)**

*William Tyler was born in Paris, France in 1920. He served with the United States Information Agency in France and Washington, DC. He then entered the Foreign Service and served in Washington, DC, the Netherlands, France, and Germany. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1987.*

TYLER: John Houseman called me up and said you are going to Allied Force Head Quarters in Algiers in charge of Radio. He said "I was going but that has been indefinitely postponed." I said, "Why did you pick me?" He said, "well I'll tell you, there were 3 or 4 people on the short list, anyone of whom might have gone, but we wanted somebody that had qualities, somebody who we thought not only well qualified but also a son-of-a-bitch." He used those words. I said

thanks for the compliment. He said, "well you know what I mean." And I said, "alright, I'll do what I can." Then he said, "get your uniform and don't talk, don't tell anyone where you are going", and I said I wouldn't. I didn't even tell my wife. She was in Boston, we were living in Dedham. Houseman said that when the time comes, you will have at the most 36 hours notice before you leave. That will give you a chance to see your wife if she doesn't come down to see you before you go. I was staying at the Seymore hotel on 44th street.

*Q: When you went to Africa, you were stationed in Oran?*

TYLER: No, I arrived in Oran. I was there for a couple of days then was flown to Algiers.

*Q: What was your position in Algiers?*

TYLER: Well, in charge of the Radio Division. The Radio Division was the psychological branch of the Allied Forces Head Quarters.

*Q: Was there a difference in the type of work you were doing there than what you were doing in New York? Was the radio work in Algiers tactical more than strategic?*

TYLER: No, the same issues. It was continuing the same work.

*Q: Was it also aimed at the same Western European countries, say Spain, Italy and France?*

TYLER: It was the Western Mediterranean area, which included Spain, Italy, France, but not Greece. But the record is fuzzy in my recollection, whatever the programming was, it was aimed immediately at two targets, one the local population in the country and another, the German troops, anything that could effect their morale and diminish their fighting spirit.

*Q: So in this regard you were performing more of a tactical type of radio as opposed to talking to the populace at large?*

TYLER: I was in the theater of operations. I was being bombed in Algiers, until after the Sicilian landings when the German airbases had to withdraw. But until July-August 1943, when I arrived in Algiers, we were under wartime, blackout conditions.

*Q: What type of people did you have working for you there.*

TYLER: A lot of former colleagues from the OWI. And there were people who I thought were simply devoted heart and soul to the Allied cause in support of our positions and our policies. I myself never concealed the fact that I was very strongly in support of de Gaulle, not as a political figure but as the one rallying point in France for resistance that could have in due course a determining effect on French opinion. Bob Murphy was there, and he was a friend, my father knew him when he was consul in Paris. Bob Murphy naturally was an official of the State Department, and I was OWI. There were the OSS people, Ridgway Knight, Julius Holmes, Harry Woodrow, Selden Chapin and Robert McBride, people like them. I was not with the OSS. They were civil affairs officers. We were all for the government but they were in the government

framework. I was OWI, but I was not responsible to them.

*Q: What about the coordination, you were in the military command, we have an overall, sort of a dual political structure with MacMillan and Murphy, Harold MacMillan being the British administrator, Murphy being the U.S. advisor. Who gave you orders?*

TYLER: That's a very good question. The answer is I can't remember. I tell you, by the time we got our directives from the OWI in Washington, very often those directives were no longer topical. After a delay of several days, so in a sense, I was in charge of radio, I broadcast myself a few times but my administrative responsibility was for script writing, so I gave up broadcasting in French. Actually looking back on it its staggering the latitude I had.

*Q: I think this is true in any wartime situation, it happens. Did you attend staff meetings?*

TYLER: I had my own meetings in the building, the Maison de l'Agriculture in the Boulevard Bourbon in Algiers. I had the Radio Office staff meetings, but small meetings of the people in charge of units. But, I don't remember there being any conflict in policy except that I knew Bob Murphy where he stood was somebody who was naturally carrying out very closely and rightly the President's policy after all he was our President. I never conflicted with his policy but I always insisted on emphasizing as much as possible, not de Gaulle's military roles but the importance of supporting de Gaulle as the spirit of France.

*Q: What about Giraud?*

TYLER: Well, that of course, I saw Giraud in Algiers I was present at the first meeting with him and de Gaulle with the press present.

*Q: The wonderful handshake picture.*

TYLER: I was there. Well, Giraud was made mincemeat of by de Gaulle. Giraud I think is an honorable and patriotic man who just didn't have what it took to create a position of leadership, a rallying point. In a way I was too close to it all to have a true perspective on it. But it is quite clear that Giraud would not be able to rally enough support to withstand the strong and increasing role of de Gaulle.

*Q: Then in Algiers, dealing with German or Italian troops...*

TYLER: We had interrogation teams.

*Q: You would get information from them?*

TYLER: Oh Yes.

*Q: It is always difficult in broadcasting, where you're sending out, you dream things up in your head and you try to use your knowledge of the country and all that but how did you measure your effectiveness?*

TYLER: I had no means.

*Q: How about prisoner interrogation did you get anything from them?*

TYLER: Yes, occasionally we received reports. What we were doing in North Africa was peanuts compared with what BBC was doing and Voice of America was doing from the states. But we did have the advantage of broadcasting from these two antennae, they were balloon rigged antennas, there was Hippo and I forget the other name, rigged up outside of Algiers. So, our medium wave broadcasting from Algiers only had the advantage that it was a voice coming from nearer than from across the Atlantic, but it was a very small beer compared to the mass of information coming from Britain and the United States.

*Q: With the BBC, was there was much cooperation, did you feel it was a role model or a rival?*

TYLER: Oh I never felt it was a rival. I never felt any competition. BBC was so infinitely better, covering the whole of Europe.

*Q: To go back a bit, was the Voice Of America under the OWI?*

TYLER: Yes.

*Q: Were you called the Voice Of America?*

TYLER: No. We called ourselves the Voice of the United Nations Radio Allied Force Head Quarters in Algiers.

*Q: But when you were in New York you called yourself Voice Of America?*

TYLER: Yes. Until December 1943, I was in charge of Radio Allied Force Headquarters, and I used to go regularly go to AFHQ, I forgot the name of the hotel in Algiers where General Eisenhower was. But then of course, he moved to London, AFHQ moved to London for preparations for Overlord (the invasion of Northern France). The void created by the move was immediately taken over by Seventh Army Planning HQ for "Operation Anvil", which was to take place in the south of France following (the landing of Salerno). Salerno followed after the conquest of Sicily.

General McChristal was the US army officer in charge of psychological warfare branch of the HQ; he succeeded Colonel Hazeltine. And General McChristal called me up and said, "I'd like to see you", and I said, "General I'm on my way." And he said, "I'm taking you up to Bouzarea, above Algiers to the west and I'm going to introduce you to the officers and staff in planning HQ for these landings in Southern France." Later on I met General Patch the Seventh Army commander and his senior staff. My particular military anchor was then Colonel Quinn, who later became a lieutenant general, and a mighty fine Irishman. Under him was his deputy, Bob Bruskin. General McChristal said to all the people, he made me stand up there with him and said,

"I want you all to know Bill Tyler, because he will be working under Colonel Quinn and Colonel Bruskin for the public affairs, psychological warfare side of the preparation of the landings and for the landings themselves." I got the fullest cooperation. There I was, a measly civilian, but they gave me full cooperation. I was in charge in drawing up the plan for the press, radio and leaflet side of the preparation of the landings.

Q: *Was this the landing at Salerno?*

TYLER: No, the main landing in Southern France.

Q: *Oh, this was Dragoon?*

TYLER: Well, it started out by being Anvil then ended up being Dragoon. From January 1944 until our operations which followed of course much later than Overlord, the final landing was August 15.

Q: *After the landings did you go into France?*

TYLER: Yes, but much after the landings. It was a great disappointment to me being the fellow in charge of the whole thing I had the enormous interest and responsibility of planning the preparations, I had been given the fine sounding title of Chief Psychological Warfare, West Mediterranean. I was in charge of leaflets as well as radio, and also the plans for the public affairs side of the landing. All the hardware, the number of men, all the people of the press side, the radio side that had to go in following the landing. I worked on them of course, then I went to Caserta [outside Naples] where the Headquarters was and I saw General de Lattre de Tassigny, we had become friends. Eve Curie, the daughter of the Curies, was on his staff. Its incredible looking back on it, I can hardly believe it all happened. I went to see General de Lattre de Tassigny, in Naples. I also had to arrange work with the French commissioner for information who was Henri Bonnet in the provisional government in Algiers. Henri Bonnet was in charge of the whole press and special relations side. Again, my odd background helped because Bonnet knew my father. I knew Rene Massigli, the commissioner of the interior, I had contacts, easy contact, between their headquarters and its successor, the planning headquarters of the French on nonmilitary matters.

**GEORGE F. BOGARDUS**  
**Vice Consul**  
**Algiers (1948-1950)**

*George F. Bogardus was born in Iowa in 1917 and graduated from Harvard University in 1939. He served in the U.S. Army in 1941 and joined the Foreign Service in 1941. In addition to Algeria, Mr. Bogardus served in Canada, Kenya, Czechoslovakia, Algeria, Germany, and Vietnam. He was interviewed on April 10, 1996 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: This would have still been 1948?*

BOGARDUS: That's right. It was still a French regime at that point. In fact, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia were -- Algeria was technically part of France. Morocco was a kingdom and Tunisia a republic. My stay there in Algiers was very -- We spoke French with everybody, of course, whereas we had been speaking mainly German or English in Prague. My stay there was cut short, less than two years until 1950 for the following reasons. Following general instructions from the Department, USAID was a potential around the world, especially in an underdeveloped country. They had encouraged us, not only for that reason, but just in general, to make contact with the opposition. The opposition in North Africa were the Arab and the Muslim potential rebels. The French in charge were the very right wing pieds noirs. Consul General George Tait authorized me to meet twice with the most moderate of the Muslim opposition, Ferhat Abbas, who had a French wife. He was also a dentist with a French education. So, he wasn't really rabid. There were several others who were really rabid about pushing the French into the ocean. But I had a couple of talks with his aide in my home next to the St. George Hotel regarding USAID potential and how it might be used and that sort of thing, very innocuous and never a commitment. Then, however, finally, there was a small notice in *Le Monde* newspaper in Paris about "What's going on with this secret meeting of this American Vice Consul in Algiers?" Elim O'Shaughnessy, who was the desk officer at that point, was hyper-sensitive about it, I thought, but he told me later that it came across his desk that they were looking for people for economic training, and I had indicated an eventual interest. So, he put me in for that.

The other thing that happened was that I had scored what I thought was a real intelligence coup regarding foreign cryptography of another government and bucked that in with the label "top secret." I thought top secret was the absolute top. Well, it turned out that there were more copies of top secret things going around Washington than you might think. It never possibly occurred to me at that point that going as high as that there was really no danger at all. The word came back, "Leave that to the CIA." We did have a CIA man there and I turned it over to him. I won't be any more precise than that, but when I got back, Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, who was Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, sent for me. He chewed me out for doing that, of all things. He said, "Never ever mention this again." Well, I haven't mentioned the core of it, not really even told you. But that's what it was. I haven't said anything to anybody all these years. It wouldn't matter at all now.

**LAURENT E. MORIN**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Algiers (1948-1950)**

*Laurent Morin was born in Augusta, Maine in 1920. As a Foreign Service officer, he served in France, Japan, Washington, DC, and Iraq. He was interviewed in 1992 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Your first assignment was to Algiers. Was that right?*



MORIN: Yes.

Q: *From 1948-50?*

MORIN: Yes. I might introduce that by saying that at the commencement exercise we had before we graduated from the basic officers course, General Marshall, who was then Secretary of State, was the speaker. He also gave out the diplomas. As I went through the line, he shook my hand, gave me my diploma, and said, "Son, where are you going?"

I said, "I've been assigned to Algiers, sir."

And he said, "Algiers hey, that's the St. George Hotel. Good luck to you." Well it was for me because I ended up living there. The St. George had been the headquarters for the American military in North Africa...Eisenhower's headquarters, etc.

I must say it was a fancy hotel but difficult because we were quite poor in those days. We didn't have many of the allowances that you have now. We had a little girl at that time and we couldn't go downtown for supper because it was too late for her, but we couldn't afford to eat in the dining hall at the St. George, as it was just too expensive for us. But we developed a scheme. We would order room service and the waiter would come up, bring in his table (we had a suite), and lay out the linens, plates, etc. and then he would ask, "Madam, are you going to have the soup tonight?" We always ordered the *menu fixe*, just one meal every night for the two of us. That was all we could afford. And the waiter would dish it out, very formally, one course, to Ann and the next to me.

We found Algiers was a real colony in those days. This was a complete French society on the backs of the native population. The French had everything. It was not like in many of the other colonies I have been to. The French had all the jobs all the way down. You found the garage mechanics, the waiters, the ushers, all those little jobs, were all taken over by French. The Algerians, themselves, had nothing but jobs as day laborers, maids, street car conductors, and taxi drivers. Everything else was French.

I found that my first few days confirmed my expectations that I was getting into an interesting kind of life. We hadn't been there more than three or four days when we were invited to a big gala. The whole consular corps was going to this theater. I was told to go, get myself a tux and get your wife dressed up. Off we went in a consulate car. The theater was lit up like a Hollywood premier. The Spahis, mounted Algerian troops in colorful uniforms, were there. We got out of the car onto a red carpet which went up into the theater. The theater had sweeping stairways like an opera house. On the way out it was the same way. Your car was called by loudspeaker. Algiers in those days was great for photographs of officialdom and flash bulbs were flashing everywhere.

The next weekend or so, the political officer, George Bogardus, who was a red head, called me in and asked if I would go down to a nationalist party meeting at a theater across town and observe what was happening. He couldn't go, he would be too conspicuous. He thought maybe I would be dark enough not to stand out. Thinking of every spy movie I had ever seen, I put on a

nondescript suit, didn't shave that day, and hopped on a street car and went down to Bab el Oued, a workers quarter on the other side of the Casbah from the St. George. I was a little early and walked around observing people trying to be as inconspicuous as possible. Finally to use up time, I went to a bar. There was a pinball machine by the window, and I started playing it looking out all the time waiting for the meeting to start. While looking out whom do I see walking by, looking very nondescript, slinking along trying to be inconspicuous, but the British vice consul!

My first early experiences sort of bore out the feeling that I was really into something.

*Q: I can't remember the exact time when the situation turned around, but were you there then?*

MORIN: No, that was later. I was there during the middle period, a lull. There had been a very bad situation there in Setif in 1945 on VE Day when the French bombed a demonstration that seemed to be getting out of hand and killed anywhere, depending on whom you read, from 10 to 40 thousand people. The Algerians were very quiet in the period I was there, 1948-50. There were two major opposition movements but they were not terrorists but just held meetings. In fact those two movements, later on during the rebellion were considered rather friendly compared to the FLN. But at that time the French were very suspicious of it all, and they were suspicious of us, the US government. They had the idea that we were pushing this. The story in Algiers was that Roosevelt at the summit meeting at the Hotel Anfa in Casablanca had obtained a promise that Algeria would be given to the States. This was completely nonsense, but that is what people thought. The French were most unhappy with the thought that we were sympathetic to the natives and feared we might be doing something for them. For instance, our phones were tapped by our great allies by using equipment left behind by the US Army.

I attended Arab movies occasionally, and one day the consul general called a couple of us in and said, "Cut it out. We're getting complaints from the government about you guys showing up in Arab movie theaters."

I remember my local secretary was approached...some young fellow made up to her at a dance, and she got to like him. After a time he said, "Look, why don't you tell us what's is going on at the consulate?" She said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Oh, nothing much. Just who does what, what do they talk about and so forth?" She said, "Oh, I wouldn't do that." He got very pushy and proved to be an agent, a *deuxième bureau* agent.

*Q: The deuxième bureau is their intelligence.*

MORIN: So he said, "If you don't cooperate with us, you won't get your passport. We know you have an application to go to Italy on a trip this summer, and you are not going to get it." And she didn't get it either.

*Q: At the time the French authorities really looked with great suspicion on our consular establishment?*

MORIN: Oh, yes, very much so. We were blasted in the Paris papers. I remember one period

when there were headlines in the French press...the tabloids...saying "the American consulate at Algiers is promoting the nationalist movement."

Our political officer got caught in the middle of this. He had asked for permission to talk to one of the opposition leaders. The French government reluctantly gave him permission to go meet with these people, but they almost PNGed [persona non grata] him at the same time.

Our consul general, who was a southern gentleman of the old school, was the last person to be promoting [laughter] the rights of the "natives", but he was, in effect, eased out because of French unhappiness with him.

**ELDEN B. ERICKSON**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Algiers (1950-1954)**

*Elden Erickson was born in Kansas in 1917. He entered the Foreign Service in 1946 and served in China, Algeria, France, Laos, Japan, Lebanon, the Netherlands, Canada, and Germany. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.*

*Q: You were in Algiers from 1950-54. Is that right?*

ERICKSON: Yes.

*Q: What was the situation there?*

ERICKSON: Again it was pending revolution.

*Q: Did you have the feeling of deja vu?*

ERICKSON: Not really deja vu, but again we knew it was coming. There the second Consul General that we had was totally prepared for what happened...Lewis Clark, who had been the Minister in Nanking and who took the Embassy to Canton. At all his cocktail parties he assigned us one or two people that we were to get bio information about and it had to be turned in the next morning. His parties were for a purpose and we had to produce. Leon Dorros, coordinated it.

So, when the November 1st rebellion started we had very good files on who would probably stay, who wouldn't stay, who would do this and that.

*Q: These were the French.*

ERICKSON: We didn't have lots of Moslem contacts there because the French didn't want us to and when we traveled French police were always in the background. They knew what we were doing and were suspicious of us the whole time.

*Q: This was the French intelligence service. What was the situation when you arrived in Algiers?*

ERICKSON: The French were insisting that it was part of the Metropole, the three Departments Oran, Constantine and Algiers, and the Sahara area was separate. In spite of what had gone on in Tunisia and what was going on in Morocco in the independence movements, it was fairly slow in coming to Algeria. But you knew it was coming. However, lots of people were satisfied the way it was because the Moslem population did go back and forth to France and there were big exports from Algeria to France. And there wasn't all that much hard feeling between lots of Algerians and the French.

You had two types of French at that time. You had the Metropole French and the Algerian French, the latter being 3rd or 4th generations in many cases.

It was really a very calm situation when I arrived, but tension was under the rug all the time.

*Q: What were you doing there?*

ERICKSON: I did economic work the whole time.

*Q: What were our concerns economically there?*

ERICKSON: Well, 180 degrees from what they are now. At that time all the countries in Europe and Africa were so poor after the war that they couldn't buy anything from the US unless they had something to buy it with. So we were promoting exports from countries to the US so that they would have money. We were trying to get olive oil, briar pipes, anything they could send. Our big thing was export promotion to the US. However, the big Algerian crop was wine, which went to France, not here.

*Q: Did you get any feel that there was a difference of how we were looking at things from Algiers and how the people in our Embassy in Paris were looking at things? Later on there developed this battle of North Africa between the European Bureau and either the African Bureau or at least those parts which were in north Africa.*

ERICKSON: Our feeling in Algiers was that the Embassy really didn't know what was going on. I think that is kind of typical everywhere. But, perhaps more so there because the Embassy types would come down and they wouldn't go to restaurants and eat the food. They wouldn't eat butter because they were afraid that it was contaminated, or the lettuce unwashed. We ate everything and had no health problems. Not that this had anything to do with politics, but it was just part of their whole attitude towards this part of the country...it really isn't a place that is worth that much.

*Q: How did you find the French officials that you had to deal with?*

ERICKSON: I saw lots of French officials. I played bridge with the Governor General. I played bridge with all the top people.

*Q: You turned into a very good bridge player after Mukden, huh?*

ERICKSON: I enjoyed it. I had probably better contacts than anyone else. I was there so long. I was there four years and got to know them. I really had very good access to everyone.

I had gotten a promotion every year and a double promotion, so I went from FSS-14 to FSS-8 in Algiers.

*Q: What were some of the major developments that affected us and you in Algiers during this period?*

ERICKSON: That was the McCarthy period.

*Q: Were you getting anything from this or were you just out of the line of fire even though having been in China?*

ERICKSON: I don't think any of us in Mukden had trouble. But Clubb and many of the people we knew at other posts certainly did. We knew they were no more communists than we were. It only directly affected one person, so far as I know...no that wasn't McCarthy, that was budget cut. He had to leave in 30 days, in the first big RIF under Eisenhower.

*Q: What about in Algeria? Were there any major political developments that affected our relations?*

ERICKSON: No, other than the major undercurrents of the coming revolution. That was what we were reporting on. I went over by myself in my car every mile of national highway in Algeria and took pictures of the bridges. I didn't realize until much later that was really spying. I felt it was just reporting on the highway transportation network. That was one thing that I did which certainly made me get around and talk to people. Again, I met lots of Moslems that way too.

*Q: But it wasn't dangerous?*

ERICKSON: No, not at that time.

*Q: Were you getting echoes from what was happening in Vietnam at the time? We are talking about Dien Bien Phu in 1954.*

ERICKSON: It favored Algeria in a way. There were a number of French firms who had capital and were moving out of Southeast Asia, particularly from Vietnam, and they were investing in Algeria, etc. So financially the pullout in Southeast Asia was a boon to Algeria.

*Q: When you left, Algiers was essentially quiet.*

ERICKSON: It was quiet. I left on October 1, 1954 and November 1 was the start of the rebellion. I was transferred to Paris and one month later all hell broke loose.

**ARCHER K. BLOOD**  
**Consular Officer**  
**Algiers (1953)**

*Archer Blood was born in Illinois in 1923 and received a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia in 1943. In addition to Algeria, Mr. Blood served in Greece, Germany, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. He was interviewed in 1989 by Henry Precht.*

Q: *Then you are off to Algiers after this.*

BLOOD: Algiers. Consular officer which I think the interesting explanation that Personnel gave me to for the Algiers assignment: I had applied for Russian language training, and I had also expressed an interest in a French-speaking post on the Mediterranean. The idea of trying to get my French into better shape. And so I was assigned to Algiers which is, of course, a French-speaking post on the Mediterranean.

And I asked them why Algiers which was then part of the EUR bureau since Algiers was a part of France. And I was, even then, thought of myself as an NEA ham. And they said, "Well, you'd applied for Russian training and Algiers is part of EUR. And if we want to get you for Russian, it's easier to get you if you are serving in a European post." Which didn't strike me as a very good rationale.

But I was in Algiers only four months because within two months, the new Eisenhower Administration had come in, and they decided that the Foreign Service was over-staffed. And I think it was called Stassenization program, which was a massive cutting back of positions. There were several officers in our -- staff officers -- they had been formerly in the Foreign Service auxiliary during the war who were actually terminated. My job was terminated, but since I was an FSO, I wasn't fired. I was transferred to Bonn.

But it was a very stupid program because within months, literally, before the end of the year, the officers who had been terminated, who had been sent back at government expense to the United States with their household effects, were invited to reapply for the Foreign Service again because they needed more people. It was a very, very wasteful way of making the political show of cutting back on the size of the Service.

**WENDELL W. WOODBURY**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Algiers (1955-1957)**

*Wendell W. Woodbury was born in South Dakota in 1920. He graduated from the*

*University of Iowa in 1942 and served in the U.S. Army during World War II. Mr. Woodbury entered the Foreign Service in 1949, serving in Algeria, Japan, the Dominican Republic, Denmark, and Washington, DC. He was interviewed by Virginia Crawford on June 4, 1993.*

*Q: In 1955 you went on to Algiers?*

WOODBURY: Yes. I wanted a European post and they gave me Algiers. That turned out to be interesting because in a sense it was a colonial backwater, the last of the French Empire.

*Q: You went out there as an economic officer?*

WOODBURY: Yes, in February of 1955. This was just after the beginning of the Algerian War, on November 1, 1954. On home leave, I had seen newsreels of trucks and tanks running around in the desert, and had gotten the impression that the French had taken care of the uprising in short order. When I got there the French said that they had put it down easily, a few Frenchmen had been killed but for all that, it had been a complete fiasco, the FLN (Front Liberation Nacional) was completely defeated.

*Q: Did you have French language training before you went there?*

WOODBURY: Only in college. I could read it fairly easily but it took me about six months before I could work in it orally. I do remember, "Sétif ne bouge pas," (Setif doesn't budge) and, in English, "the Arab is like a child, when he acts up you strike him hard." These sayings dated from the uprising on VE Day in 1945, which is why most of us had never heard of it. It was followed by savage reprisals -- the shooting of hostages and bombing of civilians. Fortunately, the order to bomb Moslem towns was given by De Gaulle's communist Minister for Air, Piere Cot, for which the FLN (the rebels) never forgave them despite French efforts to tie the rebellion to the communists.

Algiers was a quiet consulate general and Algeria was part of France in those days. The slogan of the colon was "L'Algerie, c'est la France," because it was legally a part of France. The difference was that they had eight million Moslems, mostly dirt poor and primitive, and one million Europeans, of whom the French were actually a minority. There were several hundred thousand Jews many of whom were there when the Arabs came about 800 AD. The west was settled mostly by the Spanish -- Spanish was the lingua franca of the Oran area rather than French. The east, the Bone area, was predominantly Italian and Maltese. It was a very polyglot European population. The hierarchy was not based on religion or race but on the degree of civilization. The French had a civilizing mission. They were not colonists but pioneers. I have neglected the Berbers, who were pre-Arab and were about half the indigenous population. They are not Semitic. St Augustine was a Berber and, I believe, at least one Pope.

There were two electoral colleges; the first college was mostly European and the second college, mostly Moslem -- the less civilized, shall we say. From the democratic point of view they unfortunately had the equal representation in Paris and in the local assembly, but a first college vote was worth eight of the second. With their superior economic clout and education, the first

college obviously ran things. There were Moslems in the first college; a Moslem could join the first college if he would accept French law, basically the Napoleonic code, instead of Koranic law -- there were separate systems of courts, property rights, etc. There were a number of Moslems in the first college, they called them "evolué," but they could only have one wife rather than the four permitted by Koranic law. There were no restrictions on mistresses.

*Q: How did they determine what college you were in?*

WOODBURY: It was complicated but I believe that admission to the first college was restricted by level of education (in French of course) and by acceptance of French civil law as opposed to Koranic law.

*Q: Did you get a certificate or something?*

WOODBURY: Yes. If you were born to French, Italian, Jewish, or Spanish immigrants, of course, you were in the first college almost automatically. It was a very complicated situation especially for mixed marriages.

*Q: We had a consulate general there?*

WOODBURY: Yes, but we reported directly to the Department of State, through the Paris embassy. The Consul General was an old China hand. He had been an inspector, had once had the rank of ambassador, was a career minister and was supposed to have been the ambassador to Thailand. His name was sent up to the Senate but then there was a change of administration and "Wild" Bill Donovan, former head of OSS and a staunch Republican, wanted to go there so Lewis Clark's name was withdrawn. They offered him Burma, but his pride was affronted so he turned it down. He would have been retired but for the fact that he was a career minister. He had spent almost his entire career in China. He was a wise old man but here we had another split, a generational split. He was always looking for the middle ground, as the French were, looking for somebody to mediate between the two sides, but we younger officers believed the time for that was long past. It might have been possible to keep Algeria in the French commonwealth but the political strength of the colon made the necessary concessions impossible.

Ferhat Abbas, a moderate with a French wife, was one of the leaders of the nationalists who wanted a separate nation but in the French commonwealth. He could have easily gotten along with the colonial French and they could have worked out something but not as a part of France: that was an unworkable situation. When de Gaulle came in, he saw immediately that France's sophisticated and expensive social security system and its equally expensive education system could not bear the cost of the introduction of eight million poor Moslems. They were largely illiterate, had a primitive way of life and a very high birth rate. This would never be accepted by the French people. The people who wanted it, of course, were the grand colon, the big landowners, some of whom had incomes of over a million dollars a year. They had all the advantage of the high French wheat and wine subsidies. They had a vested interest in Algeria. Algeria was, however, a dreadful drain on France trying to come back after the war and with all its political upheavals. The colon and their far right allies hoped rather openly for a "South African" solution.



*Q: So the consulate actually reported to Washington instead of to the embassy in Paris as one would expect?*

WOODBURY: Yes, probably because it was so different; actually Paris never took much interest in us until they found out our reporting was calling the Department's long-range policy into question. The U.S. was desperately trying to keep France in NATO and nobody disagreed with that, but because of that they had accepted as doctrine the French view that the problem was soluble if they could just get enough troops over there with enough economic development. This may have been true early on but not by the time we arrived.

The revolt spread rapidly within the next year. Our consul general insisted that we travel -- it was a good thing that he did because we weren't able to at the end. We went all through the east in the spring and the French had lost control (at night) of many areas we had to go through to get back to Algiers. Leon Dorros was the political officer and spoke fluent French. He was very aggressive and badgered the prefect in Constantine into admitting that there was an uprising in the north along the coast where there had never had been one before. From then on it went from bad to worse.

The FLN used terrorism very effectively to get the counter-terrorists, the French colons, into action against the Moslems. Wherever there was an incident, say an ambush, any male Moslem over the age of fifteen in the area would head for the hills so as not to get shot. Many were shot (or lynched) and afterwards it was always announced that documents had been found on them that showed they were part of the rebellion. I always wondered why they carried so many documents that would sentence them to death if they were stopped, particularly since many were illiterate. We began to keep track of this unrest as it spread. A little more than a year of that and it went from the French having virtually complete control of Algeria to their being besieged in Algiers and other major cities. They went out of the city only in the daytime and then with an armed escort.

*Q: So you couldn't get out of Algiers either?*

WOODBURY: Only by flying. It was slower in spreading to the west and we were able to get to Oran and other areas until just before we left in 1957.

*Q: Were you doing anything on the economic side? What economic interests did we have there?*

WOODBURY: We had practically none by then. I concentrated on the impact of the rebellion on the Algerian economy. As my French got better I found out that in the report of the Governor General there was a balance of payments calculated between Algeria and France. It was very revealing; it showed what it cost for the subsidies, etc., which were coming into the country from France, shocking figures. I wrote a couple of reports on that and then I made a horrendous mistake at one of the few social events that we had in those days. There I met a Madame Tixier and said, "Are you connected with Monsieur Tixier, the Director of Finance for Algeria." Oh, yes, she was his wife. So I said, "I admire very much the fine report he publishes," the greatest mistake I ever made in the Foreign Service.

He came in later and said she told him that I was an admirer of his. He asked me why and I told him that I found his report very useful in understanding the economic situation. Because Algiers was an integral part of France it had taken me a while to realize that this report addressed the balance of payments between the two entities. He said, "You're right," and that was the last time they ever published it! But they didn't need to, I had gotten the main points on the magnitude of what Algeria was actually costing the French economy. It was a terrible strain and did not count the cost of the French military. They had 600,000 soldiers there by the time we left -- they had to increase the draft, call up reserve officers, pull troops out of NATO, and use American equipment designated for NATO contrary to their commitments.

Neither the consul general or his deputy understood the force of nationalism nor that this nationalism was why the French were going to lose. The French were fond of saying that there never was an Algerian nation. I always wanted to reply that there never was an Algeria until they created it by taking over in 1825 and running it as a unit. The French created nationalism and now these people from diverse tribes and peoples thought of themselves as Algerians and they were not going to be French, they didn't want to be French. The French liberals believed that there was a middle way in which Algeria could be a part of France or related to it in some way. Lewis Clark believed that too; he thought that the moderates on both sides could get together. But the colon was absolutely adamant and they largely controlled the Radical Socialist Party, a Centrist Party that was by necessity in any French government formed. The weak French governments that resulted could not act. De Gaulle faced it by saying it was either France or Algeria and as a French nationalist, he was willing to say goodbye to Algeria -- and had the strength to carry it through.

*Q: Where had this situation gotten to by the time you left in 1957?*

WOODBURY: Let me first finish on the subject of the split in the consulate. The consul general and his deputy were on one side while the junior officers almost entirely agreed that the French cause was hopeless. When we left, I stopped in Paris at the request of Jack Tuthill, Economic Minister there. He couldn't come to Algeria himself because the French were so paranoid about American interference. He asked me to tell him what was happening on the economic front -- they had discovered oil in Algeria about this time just to add complexity. There was something worth fighting over after all. The colon used to accuse the U.S. of being after oil and I used to reply, "There is no evidence that you have any oil here." The American, Dutch and British petroleum engineers had all assured me there wasn't any oil in Algeria, but they proved wrong as I was. The embassy had no idea of the economic impact of the rebellion and its drain on France. Tuthill wanted to see my report on this that I had just completed in Algiers.

In passing, Tuthill asked me what I thought of the military situation. I said, "Of course that's hopeless." He jumped up from his chair and said, "What! Do you believe that?" "Of course I believe that."

**MERRITT N. COOTES**

**Deputy Principal Officer  
Algiers (1955-1958)**

*Merritt N. Cootes was born in Virginia in 1909. Educated in France and Austria as well as at Princeton University. Mr. Cootes joined the Foreign Service in 1931 and served in the Haiti, Hong Kong, Italy, Portugal, the Soviet Union, Pakistan, Algeria, and Washington, DC. He retired in 1969. He was interviewed by Lillian Mullins in 1991-93.*

*Q: Well, the post we need to talk about now is your assignment as Deputy Chief of Mission in Algiers in 1955.*

COOTES: Well, I was doing a stint in the State Department and received orders to proceed to Algiers. I was delighted with the assignment because the wife of the Consul General was the sister of a classmate of mine at Princeton. When my wife and I got off the ship we had taken from Marseille to go to Algiers, at 6:30 AM, lo and behold, there was my Consul General, Lewis Clarke on the pier. I said, "Lewis, it's awfully decent of you, but I think it is uncalled for to come down and meet me at this hour." He said, "This isn't a call, and I'm not meeting you. I'm picking you up and taking you to the office. Last night the people involved in the revolt, which started in Oran about six months ago, blew up a dinner theater" -- which was East of us on the coast there - - "and 139 French were killed by the underground. I've got to go and do some reporting."

Well, that was a very poor time to arrive in Algiers, because, as you'll recall, the French had been in Algiers since 1830. Most of the people who came down there at that time, after the French defeat in 1870, were from what had been Alsace [a French province annexed by Germany after the Franco- Prussian War] and did not want to continue to live there under the Germans. They pulled up stakes and went down to live in Algeria, in North Africa. They turned out to be very successful colonists because they were mostly farmers by occupation. In Algeria, if you were driving through the countryside, you could see, on the left hand side, a field strewn with boulders. Well, that was a field owned by one of the Muslims, the Arabs. Meanwhile, the right hand side was a beautiful, manicured field belonging to one of these French who had come down to Algeria. That's the way they liked to do things.

The climate in Algeria is wonderful. They get four crops a year -- for example, four crops of tomatoes a year. The area around Algiers was the source of the "primeurs" [high quality, choice fruit which commanded premium prices on the metropolitan French market]. All of this came from Algeria. One of the major products of Algeria at the time was wine. Of course, it was produced in a Muslim country, so it was a little incongruous. Algerian wine is very strong and was imported into France and used to "cut" French wines from Bordeaux. Some of the Algerian wines had an alcoholic content of up to 18%. Metropolitan French wines were around 12%. So if the French wine was below 12%, it was mixed with Algerian wine. The funny part is that even after the French turned Algeria over to the Algerians to run their own country, wine continued to be a relatively big item in their economy.

Algeria was a very interesting place to be at that time. At one point we were notified at the Consulate General in Algiers that a young gentleman by the name of Ted Kennedy was coming

through. He was the brother of Senator John Kennedy, and we were told to be nice to him. Lo and behold he arrived in a white Ford Mustang, which he had driven over from Morocco, right smack through the Western coastal Departments of Algeria, where the fighting was going on. How he got through safely, we never could figure out. Well, he was a young man at the time and he said that he wanted to see some farms down in the "Petiches" area. Well, that put me on the spot. If I took him to an Arab farm, with the boulders and everything, I would have been accused by the French Government of trying to show him something awful. If I took him to a French farm, he'd say, "Wait a minute. I want to see the people of the country." Well, I hit on a wonderful solution. I took him out to the farm of a man who was the son of the chief justice in Brussels, a Belgian who had come down there and settled down outside of Algiers and had a very profitable farm. So I took him out there, so neither the French nor the Muslims could accuse me of favoring one side or the other. I believe that this farmer had about eight children and already had applied for a visa to go to the western part of the United States and raise cattle.

He and Ted Kennedy struck it off very well, and Kennedy asked him to come and stay at the Kennedy home in Hyannisport, MA. Ted Kennedy was perfectly all right. He had been to my sister's house in Washington, and I had seen him there on one occasion. We had 24" of snow in Washington that year, the heaviest snow since 1918.

I was living in Washington at the time of the 1918 snowfall and was attending Sidwell Friends School, which has come to be well known. That's where President Clinton's daughter attends school now. It's a very fine school. Anyhow, I was in Washington at the time of this heavy snowfall. The roof of a movie theater on Columbia Rd., N. W., in Washington, collapsed, and six of my classmates at Sidwell Friends were killed.

*Q: What year was that?*

COOTES: 1918. In Europe, during World War I, the winter of 1917-1918 was terrible for everyone. Well, I've strayed from Algiers, the "primeurs," and so forth.

My tour of duty in Algeria was very interesting. Most people don't remember that in 1942 De Gaulle visited Constantine, East of Algiers. At that time he said that the Muslims must be given a greater say in the administration of their country, which included several overseas departments of France. Most people forget that De Gaulle had long been in favor of a bigger role in the administration of the country for the Arabs.

*Q: Well, when you were there in 1955, were the French negotiating turning over Algeria? I can't recall exactly when that was.*

COOTES: Well, those negotiations took place a little bit later. In 1955 there were many very capable Arabs who were calling for a greater role for themselves in the administration of their country. But of course there was a certain dichotomy also, because the hill people in Algeria, the Berbers, had never been completely subdued by the French.

*Q: They are not Arabs, isn't that so?*

COOTES: They are Muslims but not Arabs. They are hill people. Anyhow, it was an interesting time because the Arabs of the lowlands who were agitating to be granted a larger role in the administration of their country were not completely in agreement with the Berbers, the hill people. As a matter of fact, at one point there was an American missionary who was kidnapped and taken up to the hills East of Algiers. We had a hard time trying to negotiate to get him out. Finally, we had word that if we'd send somebody up there, they'd turn him over. I was elected and drove through all of this country, where there had been armed activity against the government. I met the people who had been holding this American. They turned him over, and we drove back through the countryside. It was a most interesting drive. They held me up there for a time, and I met a Berber who knew all about the situation. He was very much in favor of turning over more powers to the local inhabitants, including the Berbers.

*Q: Weren't the Berbers in favor of independence?*

COOTES: As they had resisted domination by the French colonists, or by the Arabs, they were agitating for a certain amount of independence, which, of course, they never achieved. You know, the Algerians, and the Tunisians and Moroccans who live on both sides of them, were all descendants of Mohammed and his Arab followers. The Arabs moved toward the West there, culminating in their taking over Spain, which they occupied for a long while. The Moroccans were known as the warriors, the Tunisians were known as the women, and between them were the Algerians, who were known as nothing in particular. In the Maghreb, which is the northern part of Africa, they never had the outstanding character that either the Tunisians or the Moroccans had.

During the Algerian War, under General Massu, the head of the French paratroopers, including the Foreign Legion, what was the year?...

*Q: You're talking about the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt [in 1956]...*

COOTES: By the French and the British. British Prime Minister Eden was behind it. And Secretary of State Dulles would not go along with that. Since the British and French did not have U.S. support for this operation, they decided to pull out from the Suez Canal Zone. General Massu was a great friend of ours who had a charming wife and who had served in Indochina. When he came back from Suez, he said, "If they had given me another six hours, I'd have taken Cairo." He was highly disillusioned that he had had the skids pulled out from under him. That was one of the low points in Eden's career, you know.

It was an interesting period. I certainly enjoyed it very much being there. Of course, if you met someone, you had to be careful. If he was violently pro-French, you didn't want to be accused by the other people, and vice versa. So you were always on a tightrope there. Then, of course, terrorism spread there -- people were blowing up lampposts and things like that. That was one of the nastiest things there. They put a bomb in the base of a lamppost. Then, when it blew up, the gatepost acted as shrapnel, and it killed all sorts of people.

I was told by a friend of mine to come up and see Florence, because the Consul General was going to be transferred from there, and the post was going to be open. He asked me if I were

interested. Well, I was certainly interested. I had been in Rome before World War II and Trieste for a couple of years, so naturally I was interested.

**BERTHA POTTS**  
**Assistant Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Algiers (1959-1961)**

*Bertha Potts was born in California in 1915. After receiving her degree from San Jose State College, she became a member of the WACS. Her career has included Bangkok, Saigon, Lyon, Algiers, Vientiane, and Rabat. Ms. Potts was interviewed by Howell S. Teeple on February 19, 1999.*

*Q: This was 1955-56?*

POTTS: This is virtually 1959, we are almost at the end of my Lyon tour. Ladies wore a hat to lunch, especially when they went with Mr. Cody.

He said, "I have heard some good things about your work down there, Bert. Where would you like to go next?" I said, "Oh, if I had my druthers, Mr. Cody, I want to go to Algiers." He said he thought that could be set up. The next thing I knew I had orders to Algiers.

*Q: Was Algiers then under our embassy in France?*

POTTS: It was technically part of USIS Paris, but it was so isolated that we felt ourselves more a part of the consulate general.

*Q: This was before Algiers was independent?*

POTTS: Oh, yes.

*Q: What year did you go to Algiers?*

POTTS: I went to Algiers in 1959 when I finished my tour in Lyon. I was there from 1959 to 1961, right in the heart of a shooting war. It was part of the seven-year war between the Arabs and the French.

*Q: Why did you choose Algiers?*

POTTS: I have no idea. There was just something about it that intrigued me.

*Q: You wanted to see the Casbah.*

POTTS: Well, I suppose. I did see it.

*Q: But, you knew the war was going on?*

POTTS: Oh, yes. It definitely was a shooting war and a bombing war. I lived out in the country for the first year, about fifteen minutes outside the city. Then, I finally got an apartment in town right in the same building as the consulate general. I worked late because the job in Algiers was to make friends with the people and make friends I did. I taught English.

*Q: On a regular schedule or informally?*

POTTS: Informally, but I am a professional teacher and don't have to have a standard curriculum to follow. I had junior chamber of commerce people on Tuesday at the cultural center. We got so friendly that we began having meetings in our own homes and soon there were appetizers and then full dinners. Every sixth week I had to have dinner for all of these people.

*Q: Who was the public affairs officer then?*

POTTS: Howard White.

*Q: Were your relations with the consul general any better than in Lyon?*

POTTS: Yes. We had very good relations with Freddy Lyon.

*Q: Relationships often depended on the attitude of the person in charge.*

POTTS: Yes. So, bombs went off and there were bodies in the street, which was not a pleasant situation. I finished my tour and then begged to go home saying I was ready for a stateside tour.

**WOODWARD ROMINE**  
**Political Officer/Ambassador's Aide**  
**Paris, France (1959-1965)**

*Woodward Romine was born and raised in Indiana. He graduated from Wabash College and later pursued studies at the University of Geneva, Switzerland. His primary assignments in the State Department were as Political Officer in Washington and abroad. His foreign assignments, all European, include Warsaw, Paris, Strasbourg, Vienna and four posts in Germany. In Washington, Mr. Romine dealt with French relations as well as Refugee and Management matters. He is a graduate of The Industrial College of the Armed Forces. Mr. Romine was interviewed by Peter Moffat in 1998.*

*Q: Meanwhile as a background obligato, the events in Algeria were taking place. Did that impinge at all?*

ROMINE: Well, this was just a terrible and tragic thing from all points of view. Yes, they did

impinge on it, because we saw this growing. I had known a number of officers who had served in the French army and were career people and who, when it became clear what was going to happen in Algeria, finally had to resign. But I always felt that there was no great overwhelming support for staying in Algeria as long as they had to fight that war in France. It seemed to me that de Gaulle recognized this early on, even when he made his famous tour of the officers' clubs in Algeria, but of course there came the moment when the generals in Algeria came into open revolt, and that was a very dramatic moment. They marched the people down to the Ministry of the Interior not far from the Embassy there, and I remember them walking up the street there, and we were sort of hanging out of the windows and they would wave to us. I don't recall whether they were distributing arms to them -- I don't believe so. I remember frantic appeals to them to go out and tell the troops if they came to put down their arms and not to do this, but they never came. It was a sad time that divided a lot of people.

**FRANK G. WISNER**  
**Junior Officer**  
**Algiers (1962-1964)**

*Ambassador Frank G. Wisner was born in New York in 1938. He graduated from Princeton University in 1961. He was stationed in Saigon, Dinh Tuong Province, Tuyen Duc Province, Tunis, Algiers, and Dacca. He later served as Ambassador to Zambia, Egypt, the Philippines, and India. Ambassador Wisner was interviewed by Richard L. Jackson on March 22, 1998.*

*Q: Frank, at the conclusion of that, then you were assigned to Algiers, is that correct?*

WISNER: I was. The Algerian war for independence, the liberation struggle for Algeria, was winding down. The French and the Algerians had reached an accord at Evian. There was a transitional regime in Algiers as I began my studies in Tangier, and there broke out at that moment a fierce, fierce struggle between the provisional government of the Algerian Revolution which was based in Tunis and the military which had allied itself with the previous group of Algerian political leaders the French had arrested some years earlier. Algeria was for a number of months swept with internecine, bloody warfare until the provisional government was dislodged and the Ben Bella regime, backed by Boumedienne, was in charge. That was the Algiers that I arrived in. I was assigned there.

*Q: You arrived in '62?*

WISNER: In 1962. I arrived there having had some association with Algeria. As a student at Princeton, I did a senior thesis on the subject of the French army and the Algerian independence struggle. I had taken a look at French army counterinsurgency doctrine and then had looked at the Algerian revolutionary doctrines for the pursuit of an independence war and compared the two. This had taken me, in the summer of my senior year at Princeton, to the French Ecole Militaire, where I knew a number of the officers who had been part of a doctrinal revolution in the French Army's Counterinsurgency School and who eventually became dissidents, a number



of them against de Gaulle. And then, I'd gone to the Middle East and ended up in Cairo where I met for the first time the Algerians. Freddy Reinhardt, our Ambassador in Cairo, made this possible. I stayed in the Embassy in Cairo then. It turned out that my mentor in Cairo, Ibrahim Ghafa, the head of the Algerian Liberation Movement's Radio in Tangier when I got there and a lifelong friend ever since, was in the Ministry of Education during the first days of independence. So that was the setting.

The setting was further that the French had left, thousands of French residents had left the country, and the economy was absolutely flat. A new, quite radical regime was taking over, but right down to basic services in the marketplace, the plumbers, the technicians, most of them were French and they had all picked up and gone. It was very hard to get things done in Algiers. You had a modern city that didn't have the technical capacity and on top of this was layered a decision to not only declare Algerian independence, but the new leaders wanted to socialize it. There was a huge ideological struggle underway from straight Algerian nationalists to pure Algerian communists with Trotskyites and other European leftists who had come down to be part of it. The Russians and their Eastern European allies, the Cubans, the Chinese, Che Guevara arrived during all of this period with everybody wrestling for the soul of the Algerian Revolution, what was to be its course and direction.

The United States was in an anomalous position. We were regarded in a number of ways, none of them particularly friendly, of course constantly recalling that the United States, notably President Kennedy, had stood by Algeria in the later days of the revolution. Kennedy had been the first Senator to speak out for Algerian independence, but for the great majority of the Algerian War our concerns about European stability had led us to at least try to accommodate the French who were determined to maintain their role in Algeria. So we carried a bit of the memory of our association with France. Since the new Algerians of one stripe or another had decided either for national security purposes or for ideological reasons to align themselves with the then-East Bloc, the existence of the Cold War and the position of the Americans in it created a further tension. Third, there was a sort of inherent diffidence about the United States, born of the high degree of French culture that had been part of Algerian life. A diffidence about American culture, and you could hear many of the same arguments you heard in France in the late '40s or '50s about American culture and its failures coming out the mouths of Algerians. It added a patina of discomfort to the American-Algerian relationship. Fourth, Algeria was trying to make its way inside the Arab world. It had never been there really and, while I was there, Nasser came to try to put his banner of Arab nationalism on top of the Algerian puzzle. I had a chance to meet him and talk to him. Ben Bella, in fact, introduced me to him. But our tensions with Egypt, the outcome of the Suez War, our increasing estrangement from Egypt and the Arab national cause, as it was defined then, and the confrontation with Israel also played to our disadvantage; so we were battling with three strikes against us on the Algerian field of the day. We had a terrific ambassador, one of the finest Foreign Service Officers of my career's experience, William J. Porter, an Arabist, a man who'd headed the North African desk when Kennedy spoke on Algerian independence, our first Ambassador to Algeria, later Deputy Ambassador in Saigon where I also worked with him.

*Q: He also served in Morocco.*

WISNER: Correct, and went on to be Under Secretary of State, Ambassador to Canada and had very distinguished, remarkable career. A man of fine judgment, excellent ambassador. A fine DCM, John Root, who I worked for years later as head of the North African desk as well. Excellent colleagues in the embassy. Old friend Walter Cutler, others.

*Q: As Junior Officer you did a little bit of everything?*

WISNER: Junior Officers in those days did do a little bit of everything. We had no General Service Officer when I first came, and what I knew about repairing homes and electricity with fleeing French technicians, but I did that and have wonderful, humorous memories of events during that period. I ended up working as the Vice Consul in a day in which you actually interviewed in your office in a very relaxed manner visa applicants to the United States. I was in the political section toward the end of my stay and the junior officer and the leg man in the section in some absolutely fascinating times. Porter was very friendly to me and used me a lot. I delivered the President's message to Ben Bella at the time of the assassination attempt against the first Algerian Foreign Minister and was received by Ben Bella and first had a chance to meet and talk to him. I was used as the leg man around town because a lot of the Algerians who were coming back were quite young and here was an American who spoke a little Arabic and spoke some French and had some association with their struggle and I had friends throughout the Algerian establishment. The embassy found that very useful.

*Q: Were you unique in speaking Arabic, were there others on the staff?*

WISNER: No, the head of the political section was a more classical Middle Eastern hand, Peter Chase by name. But he didn't feel so comfortable with his Arabic and his rather more chaste Mashreqi Arabic just didn't sound quite right in the ears of these North Africans, not that my Arabic was all that good--it was pretty poor, but it was Algerian Arabic of the day, very heavily mixed with French and you could get away with showing the sympathetic side in trying to speak it. It was a tough time for the United States, though. We were under constant criticism with hostile intelligence operations all around us, not only sanctioned by the local regime. We were the country's major aid provider, particularly food assistance. The French were the major financial assistance provider. But we were constantly hammered in the press, criticized for sending poisoned food to Algeria.

*Q: You went from there to Vietnam and stayed for most of the rest of that decade.*

**WALTER L. CUTLER**  
**Political Officer**  
**Algiers (1962-1965)**

*Walter L. Cutler was born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1931. In addition to Algeria, he served in Cameroon, Washington, DC, Iran, Korea, Vietnam, Zaire, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia. He was interviewed in 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: You went to Algiers in 1962 as a Political Officer, where you served from '62 to '65. How did this assignment come about? Often, when you work for the Secretary of State, people in Personnel try to make sure that you get a job that you want. Were you able to choose that, or did it just sort of come?*

CUTLER: No, I was pleased with that assignment. I can't recall that I had to pull any strings, because people were not lined up to go to Algiers. Every night on the evening news you would see billowing smoke coming out of the city as the OAS and the FLN and everybody else tried to take the place apart.

*Q: I might mention here that "OAS" had a different context in those days than it does today.*

CUTLER: It was the French extremists, primarily the Pieds-noir, the right-wingers, the extremists who really did not agree with De Gaulle's policy of letting Algeria become independent. They tried to resist it, and even tried to foment a revolution within France, which didn't work. And then, when it became evident that they were not going to prevail, they decided that if they couldn't have Algeria, they would lay waste to the country. So they went around doing as much damage as they could.

I arrived in September of 1962. Actually, I was assigned out there as an Economic Officer at first, because that was the only slot available. The consulate general was going through the pains of quick growth into an embassy. And so, for bureaucratic reasons, I went out as an Economic Officer, where I did serve for several months as the only Economic Officer there. And then, when a more senior Economic Officer was assigned, I shifted over to the political section.

*Q: What was the situation in '62 when you arrived?. Had the French pulled out yet?*

CUTLER: Yes. I arrived just after independence had been granted in July of 1962. I arrived in September. The situation was, in a word, difficult.

So many French, a million French, had left so quickly that the country was virtually on its back. Security was minimal. Most of the utilities hardly worked. So many of the houses had been blown up. A huge influx of diplomats, as all countries rushed to set up embassies. And even though so many French had left, housing was very short. The embassy didn't have the facilities to handle this rather sizeable increase in personnel. The motor pool was virtually non-existent. It was probably the most difficult environment in which I had to work, or at least to move into, in my entire Foreign Service days.

*Q: What was the situation on the political side, as far as our newly created embassy? Had they been able to develop contacts with the Algerians who were taking over, or had the situation and the French excluded them from any real contacts with this group? I guess it was run by Ben Bella at the time, wasn't it?*

CUTLER: Yes. You see, there were two groups, to simplify it. There was the element in the FLN which had remained outside, had set up an exile government based in Tunis. That was Ben Bella.

And then there were what they called the Wallayists, "Wallayah" being the Arab word for a province or region, and these were the ones who stayed in the country and fought the guerrilla war for seven years.

The Ben Bella forces were the ones who arrived first to set up a government. And there was an uneasy coalition that was established. Boumedienne became the Defense Minister, and he was from this interior group. So the political situation was somewhat fragile.

The French had largely disappeared. They had an embassy there. They had a number of people who had a lot of things to sort out with the Algerians. For example, the whole question of housing, what they called the "biens vacants" and these were houses or commercial establishments that had been abandoned by the French. The French had left to save their own lives. And yet there was still a legal question as to really who owned the property. That problem persisted for years. Gradually the country began to pick itself up off the floor. It was not easy.

Ben Bella, who had been in a French jail for so long, had almost forgotten his Arabic. He used to speak down in the city square, and I remember his first speeches were more French than Arabic, then they became sort of half and half, but in due course, he regained his native tongue.

There was an effort made to make Algeria an authentic Islamic country and to rid the country of the remnants of the French. This went on all the time we were there.

*Q: What was the attitude of our embassy? Who was our Ambassador at the time?*

CUTLER: Bill Porter.

*Q: What was the attitude not only of the Ambassador, but from what we were getting there? Were there any remnants of what we used to refer to as the Battle of Africa, or the Battle of Algiers, in the department between the European Bureau, which looked after French interests and, now I guess it is the African Bureau, but those that say this decolonization is going to come about?*

CUTLER: I'm sure there was some of that in the department. I, frankly, can't recall any such competition or tension manifesting itself with respect to the department's support of the post.

The environment was difficult for us, because (and perhaps quite understandably) a number of the Algerian nationalists who had taken over had very fresh memories of very bitter fighting with the French. They tended to associate the United States, through NATO, as an ally of the French, and, therefore, they believed that we were supporting the French in many ways. As a matter of fact, some of the military equipment, they claimed, was American, obtained by the French through NATO and used or misused in Algeria.

On the other hand, I just might note that, despite this very definite reserve toward official Americans, when Kennedy died there was a tremendous outpouring of sentiment. As you recall, Kennedy stood up in the Senate and spoke in favor of Algerian independence, and this had made a tremendous impression on the Algerians.

*Q: What would you say was your attitude (I'm talking about you and maybe your fellow officers) toward the Algerian government? One of enthusiasm: Here's a new country coming up, it's difficult, but, boy, we're with you? Or one of reserve, because we were at that time worried about Nasser and Arab nationalism and what does this all mean? Or was there a mixture? What was the attitude?*

CUTLER: I think we were a little concerned as to the direction in which that first government might go. As you noted, there was a brand of Arab Socialism that was spreading in the area. And Nasser was very much the hero to the Algerians. He had been very supportive of the Algerian revolution.

When he came to Algiers, it was perhaps the greatest festive occasion during the whole three years that I was there, even though it ended in tragedy. The very day he arrived, the Foreign Minister of Algeria, a man named Khemisti, who had been shot in the head six months before in front of the parliament building and had lain in a coma for all those months, died. Nasser stayed only a brief time and then went home. The whole country had been decked out for an extended visit by Nasser, and the fervor was unmatched, really.

But, in any case, back to your question. Yes, I think there was some concern on our part as to this new government: Highly ideological in outlook on things. Highly nationalistic. Very suspicious of the West because of the experience they had had. Very heady from the standpoint of having won their independence against all odds. And highly supported by the Soviet Bloc countries.

Many of the teachers replacing the French, who had all left, were Bulgarians. Many were Egyptians. But there were a lot of East Bloc people pouring into that country, and, in those days, that was of concern to us. Algeria had a somewhat strategic location, and it had a lot of oil.

*Q: What were we, when you were there, trying to do about this?*

CUTLER: We were trying to get across to the Algerians that we in the United States wanted to work with them. We understood what they had been through. And to persuade them that, if they had to align themselves in any direction, the best way to go was with the West and not the East, to put it baldly.

*Q: How about your contact with them? Did you have trouble, or was it easy making contact with members of the Algerian government or the people themselves?*

CUTLER: Contacts were difficult in those days, very difficult. Many Algerians felt that the better part of wisdom was not to be in direct touch with any foreigners. There was a fair degree of xenophobia.

*Q: I'm told the Algerians are a rather dour people.*

CUTLER: They're different. I served in Tunisia, and I've been in Morocco. And the Algerians, perhaps because of their particular history, are different. They are very conscious of their

nationalism and very possessive of it, sometimes in a somewhat combative way.

**PHILIP BIRNBAUM**  
**Project Officer, USAID**  
**Algiers (1963-1964)**

*Philip Birnbaum was born in Union City, New Jersey. In 1950, he graduated from Rutgers University with a degree in business administration and received a Fulbright scholarship while in graduate school at Columbia University. Mr. Birnbaum received an M.A. from both Columbia University and the University of Cambridge, and Ph.D. in international economics and foreign trade from Harvard University. He then served in the U.S. Army for two years. In addition to Algeria, Mr. Birnbaum served with USAID in Tunisia and Morocco. He was interviewed by W. Haven North on February 22, 1996.*

*Q: You moved to Algeria in what year?*

BIRNBAUM: This was in the summer of 1963. Harry said, "I'd like you to come over to Algeria and join us." And we decided we would go. Actually, Harry took three people from the Tunis Mission, Leo Rasmussen, who was an excellent agricultural technician, and a woman named Joyce Mallinger, who was concerned with public health and education, bilingual; a very capable person. So we were going to make this nucleus of a great little AID program in Algeria.

*Q: Harry Lennon was the director of the program?*

BIRNBAUM: This was a year after independence. The Algerians were very xenophobic. The first thing they said was, "We're too proud to have an Aid mission, so all of you will have to be part of the embassy." So I received a commission as a foreign service officer. I was made second secretary of the embassy. They wanted an extremely low profile. So, in effect, Harry was the mission director, but that title could not be used.

It was really a state of chaos. Once Algeria was declared independent, about 1 million French people left within 7 or 8 months. The French not only controlled the whole private sector, they had all the top government positions, and more importantly, they filled all the minor positions. The guy who read the gas meter in the utility company was a Frenchman. The women who worked the switchboard in the telephone company were all French. So the economy just came to a screeching halt.

Another sign of the chaos -- our son was only just about two years old and my wife was pregnant with our second child, who was to be born within two months of our arriving in Algiers, so we were very reluctant to go into a hotel. Harry Lennon said, "Well, don't worry about that, there's plenty of housing." The standard practice was for the embassy to sign a lease, and then the house came under the protection of the US Embassy, and they would put up a sign in French and Arabic to that effect. But at that time the countryside was overrun by people who fought in the

revolution and who had weapons. They had a practice called "bien vacant." If a piece of property was empty, they just moved in, that was that. Well, that's just what happened to our house rented by the Embassy before we even got to Algiers. Some guy with a machine gun took it over, and the Embassy never got the lease money or its furniture back.

William Porter was the Ambassador, and Frank Wisner, who is now our Ambassador to India, was a very junior officer in the Embassy. We're talking about 30 years ago. At every staff meeting the Ambassador would say, "Frank, when are you going to get Birnbaum's house back? When are you going to go down to the police station and tell these guys to do their job?" And Frank would say to me, "Phil, you're never going to get that house back. You had better look for another place. The Algerian police are even afraid to go up there." So that was the situation. Frenchmen, who had sent out their families would go to work in the morning, and when they came home at night, their apartment or their houses would be occupied, and there was nothing they could do, but get on a plane and get out.

The whole situation was completely different from Tunisia. The first thing Ben Bella did was to declare Algeria an Islamic country. All the women were put into veils and no Algerian could be served alcohol in cafes, although pre-independence Algeria was the most open and "Frenchified" country in all of North Africa. Next, they decided their economic model was to be the Soviet model, with very heavy industrialization. They had the gas and oil revenues and they were going to build all these factories. Agriculture was taken for granted. The country was overrun by Russian and East Bloc technicians, and so we were in the minority. Of course, the French were not talking to them, but one very interesting fact was that the oil was treated as an external resource. All the oil and gas earnings were paid into France, and then a percentage was sent back to Algeria. But the French presence disappeared. We also had travel restrictions. You couldn't go 20 miles outside of Algiers without a permit.

So it was a very tight situation, and the question was what kind of an AID program could we mount there? There were few Algerian technicians, and they were in the process of setting up ministries. You would go to the Ministry, and you would see people typing with one finger, and an Algerian counterpart would complain to you that "I can't get a call through to a town 20 miles down the road. The operators tell me that the phones are broken, but I know she doesn't know which part of the switchboard to plug in to reach the town. The phones are not broken." It was really unbelievable.

Transportation had broken down. There were literally people starving to death in one part of Algeria in the Constantine area, where people were eating leaves and berries. In another part of the country there was wheat, but transportation was inoperative. So, we started one of the biggest feeding programs in the world with the CRS, Lutherans, and CARE. About 2 million Algerians were being fed via an enormous PL 480 food program. And we also were trying to start some agricultural projects.

I remember at a staff meeting Harry Lennon said, "Mr. Ambassador, I really think that Ben Bella doesn't realize how large a feeding program we are running. Not that he has to tell us thank-you, but he ought to be aware of what's going on, and how important this program is, for keeping this country going." Ambassador Porter was bilingual in French, and was an Arabist, so it wasn't a

question of communication. He said, "OKAY, when I see Ben Bella next, I'll make this point." And it was very interesting, although the Algerians have this love-hate relationship with the French, they always admired French sophistication. And here is Ambassador Porter explaining to Ben Bella how we're providing food for 2 million people, including food for work programs in addition to feeding of children and mothers. And all Ben Bella could say was, "Aucune objection." "I have no objection."

We were struggling to get an agricultural program going, with mixed success. My good fortune, I guess, was that I was only in Algeria for a year. Washington in its wisdom decided they had a better job for me in Washington.

*Q: But our primary purpose in Algeria was to try to offset the Soviet influence, or what were we there for?*

BIRNBAUM: That's a good question. One thing you have to keep in mind was that they had this very bloody struggle for independence from the French. Algerians remembered very well that when President Kennedy was a Senator, he came out in support of Algerian independence. The Algerians at that time were looking to demonstrate to the French that they had friends. For Americans, we felt that this was a very important country, given all those natural resources, and we knew the Soviets were very interested in getting into Algeria. It was part of the cold war syndrome. If we could establish a footing there, perhaps we could influence the government. But our relations went downhill, and they expelled the United States. I don't remember the exact time schedule, sometime in 1965-66 when we were represented by the Swiss, as the Algerians just moved more and more toward the Soviet Union. Algeria became one of the most vocal members of the North-South dialogue, heaping criticism on the industrialized countries.

*Q: Did you have much relationship with the government at all?*

BIRNBAUM: We had frequent meetings and we discussed possible projects but it was very hard to get anything off the ground because they just didn't have the staff and there was a lack of an institutional framework. Remember, they were preoccupied with getting the country going.

*Q: The food distribution program was handled by volunteers from the States?*

BIRNBAUM: Catholic Relief and Lutherans were very well organized and their management of the food for work programs was pretty impressive. The CARE program was not only a feeding program, but CARE-MEDICO tried to get one of the major hospitals running. As I said, I only had a year in Algeria.

The one thing I do remember was, as I said, there was no AID mission, we were all embassy officers. And we had to take turns as duty officer. Everyone says, you always remember where you were when President Kennedy was assassinated. Well, the day that he was assassinated, and I forgot what day of the week it was, I think it was Friday, and I was the duty officer. I was home maybe two hours when my wife answered the phone and said, "It's the Marine Sergeant who wants to talk to you." And you know how the Marines are very official. And he said, "Is this Mr. Birnbaum I'm speaking to?" And I said, "Yes." And he said, "Are you the duty officer this



week?" And I answered, "Yes," and was wondering what the hell was this about? And then he said to me, "The President has been shot." My first reaction was that it was Ben Bella who had been shot, and that didn't surprise me, because he had quite a bit of opposition. I guess the Marine could sense that I wasn't responding. So he said, "Mr. Birnbaum, I don't think you understand. President Kennedy was shot." And of course, that was a different message.

What was interesting was that all that week, and maybe for two weeks after that, we'd walk down the main street in Algiers and people would come up to us who didn't speak French or English, and would tell us in Arabic about their remorse. The Kennedy were very popular.

The Algerians fought a very bloody war of independence. They claim 1 million people were killed. Perhaps that's an exaggeration, but surely a few hundred thousand or more were killed. They were supported in the war by Nasser and by the East bloc countries, because they always made it their business to support revolutionary movements. We were supporting the French. All the equipment that the French Army had -- from napalm to fighter bombers were American. If one stood back and said, "Well, what's going to happen if they win the war, and get independence, which way are they going to go?" The chances of the US having a relationship with them were slim. It didn't take much hindsight to see that. They said, "We know who our friends are, who supported us." This was a war against colonialism, against imperialism, and in their minds, also against capitalism. So I think the die was cast. We made a noble effort, but we couldn't "compete" with their anti-west emotions.

*Q: It was quite a contrast with Tunisia, and how Tunisia got its independence without that kind of struggle.*

BIRNBAUM: Exactly. When Mendes-France was Prime Minister, France gave Tunisia independence with just a stroke of a pen. In Algeria, the French tried in every way to put down the independence movement. It was Mao Zedong who said that the village acted as a sea to support the guerrillas. Well, the French resettled half a million Algerians. They emptied out the whole eastern part of Algeria because the villagers, either by choice or by force, would support the guerrillas with food and other things. So the French decided they would make this a no man's land. The French tried every method to hold on, because they looked upon Algeria as part of metropolitan France.

**WILLIAM A. STOLTZFUS, JR**  
**Algeria Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1963-1965)**

*William A. Stoltzfus was born in Lebanon in 1924. He attended Princeton University and then entered the Naval Air Corps. He entered the Foreign Service in 1949 and his career included positions in Libya, Kuwait, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, and an ambassadorship to Kuwait. Ambassador Stoltzfus was interviewed by Lillian P Mullin in May 1994.*

STOLTZFUS: So, I was transferred to the Algerian desk. And again, that was a very interesting time. President Kennedy was assassinated while I was on the desk there. The funeral arrangements were a tremendous global affair. Many chiefs of state attended. The Emperor of Ethiopia was there. Charles De Gaulle was there. I had charge of the four representatives from Algeria. The Foreign Minister Boutaflika was one, and Abbé Berenger. I shepherded them around to the various events at the White House and Arlington cemetery, and Janet and I hosted a dinner for them at our house.

That was probably the most interesting thing that happened while I was on the desk. Such exciting events do occur at times and travel is fun, but a desk officer's duties can be humdrum as well. For example, calling up the local Embassy to ask them not to keep parking their cars illegally. And all kinds of problems with renting houses, petty legalities, that sort of thing. I assumed the Algerian staff would be revolutionary minded and Spartan and was shocked to see how lavishly they set themselves up in Washington. The Ambassador had a huge house and a lot of expensive tastes. Anyway, that was interesting.

**ROBERT B. DUNCAN**  
**Economic/Commercial Officer**  
**Algiers (1965-1967)**

*Robert B. Duncan was born in New Jersey in 1934. After receiving his bachelor's degree from Princeton University in 1957 he served in the US Army from 1958-1960. His career has included positions in Rabat, Addis Ababa, Algiers, Paris, and Bangkok. Mr. Duncan was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on April 9, 1995.*

*Q: Coming out of this job, what was your first assignment?*

DUNCAN: My first assignment was in the Office of Research and Intelligence for Africa.

*Q: That's where we met.*

DUNCAN: Yes.

*Q: What was your responsibility?*

DUNCAN: I guess the reason that I got into that particular function was that I had done my college senior thesis on French policy toward Algeria. That was what I was interested in. So, I guess it was that background that probably got me into this office. I don't know, but I assume that that was it. The Algerian Desk was taken care of by somebody else, but they gave me the Sudanese Desk. That's where I started. I do remember, as time went by, they sort of added and reduced and changed assignments. I had the feeling I was all around the continent at one time or another during the two years that I was there, except for southern Africa. At that time (This was 1960.), Algeria was European because it was French. So, that's why I didn't have Algeria.

Northern Africa at one point was in the Africa Bureau and then it was in the Middle East Bureau, but I can't remember which it was then.

*Q: I think the Middle East took care of Egypt and all the rest was in Africa for the time. It kept moving.*

DUNCAN: When we were there, North Africa, except for Algeria, was in the Africa Bureau. That's why I got the Sudan. Algeria came into the office afterwards, but it was in the Office of European Affairs.

*Q: What was your impression of the value of what you were doing?*

DUNCAN: I thought it was a very interesting time to be in the job because that was the period where we used to have like an independent country a month. You'd have people who were being assigned out there who would come in and their first question would be, "Where is it?" I guess, in many respects, you could say that we were probably one of the most well informed offices in Washington on Africa at that time. Before, it had been a European problem.

*Q: A colonial problem of which they paid very little attention to.*

DUNCAN: When I think about it in retrospect, there is one very significant thing. As the countries were becoming independent, there was commentary by the former colonial experts, Europeans, on the situation. I remember distinctly that in the Encyclopedia Britannica Yearbook for that year, there was a big article written in the book. I think the guy's name was Peron, but I can't swear to it. He was being a bit of a Cassandra in saying that "This is not going to work. Tribalism is going to tear this continent apart. The nationalism isn't strong enough to survive." I remember at the time that people who were reading some of this commentary were all saying, "Well, you know, this is on reconstructed bricks." Yet, looking back from 35 years later, I think we probably would have been well advised if we had taken some of this commentary more seriously. I don't think they were disputing the problem, but I don't think that they were viewing it as a bar.

*Q: What attracted you toward the Arabic language?*

DUNCAN: I mentioned earlier that I had done my senior thesis on French policy toward Algeria. I had minored in French, so French North Africa was a passion of mine. So, when they had this option where they had this language school that was just opening up in Tangier to teach Arabic, from my point of view, this was wonderful. So, I applied for it and was in the first class of the group.

*Q: Could you talk about this? What we call the Maghrebian Arabic school is somewhat controversial as to its history and its effectiveness and all that. What was your impression about how the school ran and how effective it was during the time you were there?*

DUNCAN: I laugh about it in retrospect, but you take the first group that we had. You had Frank Wisner, who has gone on to be ambassador to Egypt. You had Bob Pelletreau, who has gone on

to be ambassador to several places in the Middle East. Ed Peck went on to be ambassador to Mauritania. Lanham Walker went on to become ambassador to Senegal. If it had a problem, the problem was that we were learning a dialect of Arabic that was sort of extreme. In other words, if you think of Romance languages as a group, we were learning Romanian. It wasn't just that we were learning Maghrebi and that we were learning Moroccan Maghrebi, and we were learning northern Moroccan Maghrebi. I would share that view in retrospect. I would say that there is some question about whether or not it's intelligent to spend that much time on learning a dialect. We also learned (inaudible). We learned the classical language and we learned the newspaper Arabic, written Arabic, which is the same all over the Arab world. So, that part of our learning was valuable and I'm sure that the fellows that went on to become Arabists used it. The only issue that was controversial was is it intelligent to teach dialect, which even expanded. We went through a period when they were teaching all of these small African languages. We had a period where everyone was learning Swahili, which would be main line in comparison to some of the ones. In retrospect, I would say that that was probably a waste of time. There is like an Esperanto where what you do is you take classical Arabic and drop all the endings and it's the way in which educated Arabs will speak to one another where they will use the dialectical verbs and then they'll take these classical words and mix them all together. All educated Arabs will speak to one another in this sort of way, but they have these dialectical differences. I would be inclined to agree that probably all the time that we spent on learning Maghrebi Arabic was not critical. Another argument in favor of why I don't think it was wise is, I thought when I went into the Foreign Service that I would be a political officer. When I went to Rabat, I through a set of circumstances having to do with the personnel structure in the embassy, got an economic officer's job, which I did well in and enjoyed. For the rest of my career, that's what I was. I used the Moroccan in daily living in Tangier and in Rabat. I didn't use it at all in my professional work because all of the professionals in Morocco that I was dealing with on economic questions all spoke French. French was the language that we used.

When I went to Algeria, it was suspect because the Algerians themselves hadn't learned Koranic. A lot of them hadn't learned "good Arabic." In fact, other Arabs used to laugh at the Algerians because their Arabic was so "unsophisticated." So, I found when I was in Algeria that since my Arabic was better than their Arabic, they didn't want to speak it, even if we could understand one another. It's got a lot of French words in it. So then French became the language. So, from my perspective, the classical Arabic has been useful afterwards, but the Maghrebi dialect is basically something that I never used after I left Morocco. Once, when I was visiting in Egypt, I started speaking to Egyptians in my Maghrebi dialect, which was sort of part humorous and part quizzical. But then I would sort of shift from using the Maghrebi dialect into what I called the "bastardized Arabic," where I'd sort of speak to them in both. That was what we communicated in.

*Q: When did you leave Morocco?*

DUNCAN: It was a direct transfer to Algiers. We didn't come back to the States. We just went directly. They were going to have a nonalignment movement conference.

*Q: This was 1965?*

DUNCAN: Yes. They needed somebody in Algiers. They thought that I was appropriate for the job. So, Washington definitely wanted me to go and they wanted me to go right away. Ambassador Tasca did not want me to leave. So, it was a bit of a shenanigan. I said, "Tell me what you want me to do and I'll do it." That's how it was: direct transfer. We drove. It was a very interesting experience driving from Rabat to Algiers.

*Q: What were the relations between Morocco and Algiers at that time?*

DUNCAN: Very bad. They had had a war in '63. The problem is that Moroccans view the Algerians as feminine (We're talking about traditional stereotypes.). The Algerians view the Moroccans as camel drivers. So, there is this stressful relationship between the two. Morocco was the only country that wasn't under Turkish control. So, the Moroccans, whenever they would have a battle, they would always win.

*Q: We'll pick this up next time with Algeria in '65. You went primarily to look at nonaligned meeting that was going to be there.*

DUNCAN: Which didn't occur, but I was sent for that.

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

DUNCAN: I was in Algeria from 1965 (I can't remember the exact month off the top of my head) and we were there until the June 1967 war. We left during the ArabIsraeli War in 1967.

*Q: When you went there, was this just a normal followthrough assignment to what you had been doing?*

DUNCAN: I had been directly transferred from Rabat to Algiers because they were expecting that they were going to have a conference of nonaligned nations and they were going to need some additional help. So, they had, in effect, created an additional slot in Algiers and direct transferred me from Rabat to Algiers.

When I got there, I was assigned as the commercial officer in the Economic Section.

*Q: You say that your main responsibility was the nonaligned.*

DUNCAN: Originally, I was being sent there because they believed that I was going to need to help out on that meeting. I'm trying to recall... I think it was not held. The meeting was canceled. I would have to refresh my memory. I'm not sure. What I do remember is, after I got there, whatever the purpose was that I was coming for wasn't used because I worked in the Commercial Section all the while that I was there.

*Q: What was the situation in Algeria as you saw it in 1965?*

DUNCAN: Our political relations were very bad. The Algerians viewed us as not being friendly to them. There were specific exceptions. I remember during the period that I was there that the

Algerians had always had a very warm feeling for President Kennedy because they felt that Kennedy even earlier when he had been a Senator had been a very strong, vocal supporter of independence for Algeria during the Franco-Algerian War. As a consequence, they had retained great esteem for President Kennedy' (Senator Kennedy) support for them. During the time that I was there, Robert Kennedy came over to represent the family to dedicate a John F. Kennedy Square which was done by the Algerian government in memory of him. That was an exception. Generally, our political relations with Algeria were very stressed. Our political people really did not have ready access to the government. It was sort of an alliance relationship. At the same time that this was going on, our economic relations, which were basically private relations, were really rather successful. We were running a very substantial trade surplus with the country. This caused a tremendous amount of anguish for my French colleagues because, of course, the French still had very substantial aid programs there and what not. So, the French were pouring money into the country and were nevertheless running a substantial deficit because the Algerians, in effect, were running a more and more rigid trade program. We, on the other hand, had lousy political relations. We had excellent economic relations. In fact, if I look back over my whole career (Thailand was an exception because we were having excellent economic relations there.), if I had to say, of all the countries I served in, what was the country in which relations with the Americans were politically the poorest, it would have been Algeria, but where the relations proportionally speaking were excellent. So, I was lucky because while my contacts with the government officials were limited because I didn't have that much need for it directly, all my contacts for the most part were with the business community and what not. It was not a problem.

*Q: What were the forms that American commerce was taking?*

DUNCAN: The biggest American involvement in the country was in the oil and natural gas business. Shortly after I arrived, Exxon, which had been exploring in the country, took the decision to pull out. They had been a very big player in the country. The statement at the time was they decided that they were in exploration mode and they hadn't uncovered. They had tried, but hadn't gotten results that at least were satisfactory for them. Sinclair had been successful and continued to operate there. That was the biggest American operation in the country. They operated down in the Sahara and we had a chance to go down and visit their operation in the Sahara Desert. That was the single biggest operation. A lot of the American subsidiaries that had operated in Algeria had operated through their French subsidiaries because Algeria had been an integral part of France. Caterpillar had a big operation there. But it was like the French subsidiary of Caterpillar.

*Q: Were there commercial disputes and problems that you got involved in?*

DUNCAN: In terms of problems, we did have expropriation cases. We did have cases of property that had been expropriated by an independent Algerian government. They were usually individual cases. I was trying to remember if there were any major corporate expropriations. I don't recall. Most of them were individual American citizens with property rights and things like that that had been expropriated. We really did not make any progress on any of those questions. The Algerians had so many expropriation problems they had to deal with the French that from the Algerian perspective, even the settlement of a minor issue created a problem with precedent. I had similar problems with that in Morocco, but in the case of Morocco, we were able to work

them out because we had much more leverage in terms of our own aid programs and things like that. The thing I enjoyed about it is that when relations were broken during the ArabIsraeli War of '67 and the ambassador ordered that all of our files be burned, I rushed around to make sure that these dossiers with all the documents concerning these expropriation cases were preserved because they would not have created a problem if they had fallen into Algerian hands because we were dealing with a rather open issue. But it would have been extremely difficult for my successors to have had to try to reconstruct those files.

Another major issue that I had to deal with is that when Algeria became independent, right at independence they took the necessary decision of saying that existing French law would be applicable until they took an act to, in effect, substitute Algerian law. One main area from a commercial point of view where this was extremely important was American patents and trademarks which had been registered in France were protected in Algeria because Algeria was an integral part of France. So, that law, as soon as the Algerian determination that until it was changed French law would apply came up, continued to protect American trademarks and patents in Algeria as an independent country. While I was there, the Algerian government passed a law requiring that all people had to register trademarks and patents separately with the Algerian government. These were extremely important issues because patents and trademarks are extremely valuable and the fear would be, if you didn't get them registered in Algeria, then someone could come in and manufacture the product because the trademark protection wouldn't apply. So, there was a real Oklahoma land rush of all of this high priced legal talent rushing over to Algeria to try to get their patents and trademarks registered. My favorite story is of one lawyer who came into the office that represented a lot of major companies. We were discussing the problem and he said to me, "Who do you recommend as the best?" We had a list of qualified attorneys. The embassy would say, "You have to choose yourself." He said, "Who is the best?" I said, "I don't know who is the best, but there's no need to go to this one because I know that he has more business than he can handle." I said it was obvious that the guy rushed out of my office and he was going right down to that guy to see if he could outbid his time. My intent was not to say that this was the best. It was just to indicate that this was the guy that was so busy that he didn't have time. I got the absolutely diametrically opposite reaction of "Jesus, if he's got more work than he can do, that's someone I need."

*Q: How about on the business level? You're saying that at the government level your relations were not very good.*

DUNCAN: Being a commercial officer, my contacts with the government except like in the patent and trademark issue, where I had to deal with them because it was a commercial question, I was not dealing except in very specific, technical areas in the nature of my job. The general political relations, with my colleagues in the Political Division, there was a stressful relationship for them.

*Q: What about dealing with Algerian businessmen? What was your impression of them?*

DUNCAN: I thought some of them were extremely competent and intelligent. They were operating in a country which had a very strong socialist ideological underpinning. In other words, the government strongly believed that state ownership of the means of production was the right way to go and what not. But that still left many areas in which private enterprise operated.

The Algerians had a long tradition of being very good traders. I found they were no problem at all to work with. In fact, I would argue that if the Algerian government had opted for a more capitalist oriented system at that time rather than being wedded (They had close relations with the Russians and the Chinese, who were strong influences in the country. Therefore, they were, in effect, opting for their model.) I sincerely believe that if the Algerians at that time had opted more for a capitalist approach, I think the country would have done much better than it did.

*Q: Did you see a difference between the Algerians and the Moroccans?*

DUNCAN: Oh, very definitely. The Moroccans had, in my impression, a very strong sense of national identity. The French colonialism in Morocco was of more recent date than in Algeria. The French had a planned policy of building the new but preserving the old. The Sherifian government was maintained even though the political power may have been with the French. As a consequence, the Moroccan identity as an identity which was a Muslim country that had never come under Turkish control, which is what made it different, it had a lot of national pride, a lot of national identity. Arabic was widely spoken. Arabic was widely taught. The Koranic schools had always been maintained. The educated people were all bilingual. There was no question when you were in Morocco, whereas you had this modern element like the modern towns next to the old towns, there was no question but that the identity of the country was Muslim and the identity of the country was Francophone, Francophile Arabic.

In Algeria, the 130 years of French colonial rule there had, in part conscientiously but in part just the name of the game, in treating the place as an integral part of France, had really undermined, if you want to call it that, the traditional culture. In other words, there were some Koranic schools. But they were definitely not encouraged to the degree that the French were providing education, everything was being taught in French to meet the French mold. There were widespread school systems and a substantial European origin population. French influence was very deep in the country. I think it was even deeper than many of the Algerians themselves recognize. For example, I remember when I was still assigned to Tangier and I made a field trip over to Algeria, we were invited to go into the National Assembly to hear a session. At that time, the speaker of the National Assembly was Gerhard Abbas, who had been one of the nationalist leaders of independence, but he spoke no Arabic. He was strictly French speaking. So, when he got up and started to speak, he spoke in French. In fact, he apologized for the fact that he could not speak in the modern colloquial form of Fossam, which is classical Arabic, which is the formal spoken Arabic. There were a number of Arabic newspaper correspondents in the well of the Assembly. I distinctly remember some Egyptian ones. They started hollering, complaining about the fact that "This is a Muslim country and an Arabic country. You should be speaking Arabic. You shouldn't be speaking French." He sat down. Then after he had finished, Ben Nallah, who was the Prime Minister at the time, got up next to speak. He tried to speak in Arabic, but the colloquial Arabic in Algeria was not only a dialectical Arabic, but it was filled with French words. It became sort of like Creole. He's standing up there starting to speak in this Arabic where every once in a while, he'd have to think of a word. He would throw the French word in because he couldn't think of what the Arabic word was. These newspaper correspondents from these Muslim countries started to laugh at how awful his Arabic was. He came down from the podium and started a slugging match with one of the newspaper correspondents. I use this as an example of what Franz Venome, a Haitian psychologist, described the Algerians as "the



damned of the Earth." The point he was trying to make was that over the years of French colonialism, they had been ripped out from what their traditional pattern was, but the French had not really made them all 100% French. Some they had. Some they had, in effect, totally assimilated. But unfortunately, most of the ones that were the most effectively assimilated fled the country and resettled in France.

Getting back to the question of contrasting it with Morocco, the national identity of what is an Algerian, they were still working on that. I think today some of the stress in Algeria between the Islamists and the government, in a way, is even a reflection of that problem in the sense that the revolutionary force wants a nonfundamentalist, secular, if anything quasiMarxist... Women fought in the army in the revolutionary forces. Women in Algeria under the French definitely didn't wear the veil. They were very liberated. Now you have the traditionalists in the society which had no influence under the French coming back and struggling where the government doesn't want to go fundamentalists and the fundamentalists are saying the trouble in the country is this "secular," corrupt, godless government.

*Q: I'm trying to recapture the feeling at the time. You would sit in on staff meetings and also with the political officers and others. What would you say was the embassy view? I'm not talking about the American government view, but those that were dealing with the problem of the Algerian government and whither Algeria during the '65'67 period?*

DUNCAN: I think it's fair to say that they all felt it was very difficult. The people there in the embassy at the time felt that dealing with the Algerians was difficult. They felt they were dealing with a government which was basically hostile to us. The end of the period in the ArabIsraeli War of '67, we had riots outside the embassy every other night with water cannons out there holding them off. Relations were broken. We were all expelled except for a very small group that stayed as an interests section of the Swiss embassy. The period ended. In the meantime, they had broken relations with the British over the Rhodesian question. One of the big jokes was there was one point there that the Swiss ambassador was representing the Americans, the British, and the West Germans. When he used to walk into the Foreign Ministry, the question was, "Who are you coming in for today?"

*Q: How did you feel about Soviet influence there? Did you feel that the Soviets were calling the shots, or was it that the Algerians were doing this because the Algerians wanted to do this.*

DUNCAN: I think at that time that it was definitely a mutual cooperative effort. The Soviets may have been exploiting the Algerians, but the Algerians really viewed the Soviets as being their friends in the independence struggle and believed that the Marxist model, in effect, was the right way to go. For example, one of our maids, which we subsequently found out for a fact was a spy, was a person put into the household to spy on us, her brother had been trained as a jet fighter pilot in the Soviet Union. It shows you the linkages. The Chinese were more discreet than the Soviets. The Chinese and the Russians weren't necessarily on the best of terms at that particular time, but they were both operating there. The Algerians really felt that both of them had lessons to teach them. The one area in the economy where there wasn't that involvement was in the hydrocarbon area, where it had been French and American foreign run. Then they created a national oil company, Sonatrage. I suppose, in a way, you could say it was like a quasiSoviet oil

company, but it still had more capitalistic elements in it. I think it's because it still used a lot of Western technology rather than using Soviet technology.

*Q: How about Western managerial techniques?*

DUNCAN: Yes, because some of the people had been trained in the West, yes. The retail trade, which was still privately operated, was very Western French style oriented. I'm talking about in the state enterprises. In other words, agriculture was definitely not being run on a Western model. It was being run on a Soviet model, with the same catastrophic results. The steel industry, metalworking, was all being done on the Soviet model. The oil industry was state enterprise, but it was marking to the West and it was using Western technology and Western technical expertise.

*Q: I'm interested in this because this was sort of a crucial period for Algeria. It was moving much more into the socialist setting. But here was an area which under French rule had really been a very productive area. The hydrocarbons, as long as you're pumping oil and using good equipment, you pump oil. It's there or it's not there.*

DUNCAN: But even more important than that, it had as productive an agriculture as California.

*Q: When you turn to their culture, this was a major producer. It really went way back to prehistoric times practically. The French had a marvelous agricultural thing. Were you all monitoring what was happening on the agriculture side and what were you saying?*

DUNCAN: The answer to the question is, yes, we were. But by the time that I got there, if you want to call it the fundamental revolutionary shift had already occurred. The land owning, the land managing, the French Colon Latafundia operators were all gone. They had all fled. That land had all been taken over by the state and been turned over to worker management farms. They didn't break it up into individual plots. They maintained it as units. Then it was like Soviet collectivization, only it was used for war veterans. They were resettling war veterans, but seeking to run them as collective farms. The vineyards it was a Muslim country. To use a phrase, they were not good wine producers. They were starting to rapidly go downhill. They were even abandoning them, giving them up. Most of these large collective farms where they used to grow wheat and things like that, the productivity was falling way down. I think Algeria, if it was not then, became a PL480 recipient. In other words, it became a food importer. Of course, the population exploded after the end of the colonial period.

*Q: Do we ascribe this or were we monitoring this population explosion at that time?*

DUNCAN: Algeria's population explosion was no different from Morocco's. All Muslim countries have very high birthrates, or did. There are some falling now, but at that period, they all had very, very high birthrates. What I'm trying to say is that the fact that Algeria became a food importing country, part of it was attributable to the growing population. But clearly, a large part of the problem was due to the fact that the productivity of the old farms had fallen way down.

*Q: Were you catching from Algerians you would be speaking to (You would be speaking more to*

*the mercantile class.) disquiet about the socialist turn?*

DUNCAN: The expatriate group that was still in the country in personal conversations was very vocal on how the country, in effect, was falling apart under this socialist approach. The Algerian business people themselves were not in a mode to publicly criticize the government. They went about and did their business. Telephones were monitored. I told you about how we had spies assigned to our staff and what not. It was that type of state. Algerians themselves did not vocally criticize the government. The nonmembers of the socialist enterprises, the mercantile class, clearly did not welcome what was going on.

*Q: Who was the ambassador at that time?*

DUNCAN: Jurgen.

*Q: How did he run his embassy?*

DUNCAN: He was very well liked. He was very knowledgeable. He was an old Arab hand. I enjoyed working for him. He was a very pleasant person. At the end, as we were leading up to the situation where relations were broken, it was the second country, in effect, where relations were broken while he was there. He had been in Iraq previously when they were broken. It was obviously an emotional crisis for him. At the very end, it was sad. He wasn't responsible, but it was the second time in his career in which his tour of duty had led to, in effect, a deteriorating situation that ended in a rupture.

*Q: How did you all get out of there? Was there any problem getting out of there?*

DUNCAN: A fun story is that I was scheduled to leave on a regular transfer on the following Monday. My boss came back on the previous Wednesday. When he came in and I was briefing him on what the state of play was, he said, "My god, Bob, it looks like we're on the verge of relations being broken." I said, "Mike, they broke them yesterday." We had had riots outside the embassy every other day for about a weeks or so. I said to him, "Well, things are calming down. We'll wait. We'll be going out Wednesday." A little later that Wednesday, I was coming down the stairs with the chief of station. I said, "We're scheduled to leave on Monday and things seem to be calming down a little bit. I think we'll probably wait and go out on Monday." We had passage booked. He said, "Are you one of those that have to stay? Relations have already been broken." I said, "No, we're in the group that will be leaving." He said, "If I were you, I would go." So, I went back to my boss and I explained to him that the chief of station says "If you're released and free to go, my recommendation is that you go." Mike said to me, "Well, the boat that brought me back in this morning is scheduled to leave tomorrow evening. Why don't you see if there is passage on it." So, I called up and, yes, there was room. So, I got in touch with my wife. We had already had our stuff packed up. I said, "We're going to leave tomorrow." So, we all went down to get on the boat. It was right in the middle of the ArabIsraeli War and everything was really stressed. The Algerian immigration officials were very hostile examining us as we left. They swung my car up over and hung it over the smokestack on the boat. They hadn't drained the gasoline out and I thought, "Oh, my god, the damn thing is going to blow up." It was obvious that they were just being disagreeable. So, we got on the boat. The next day, we arrived

in Marseille. I had heard when I got there that the day after we left, they called the charge at two in the morning and told him that everybody and particularly the ambassador had to be out of the country within 48 hours. Then they negotiated and there was a little group that was left. If we hadn't left when we had left, we would have had to go the next day with our two suitcases. They called an Al Italia evacuation flight in, a special charter, to come in and take everybody out. It was a close call.

*Q: Particularly in the waning days of our presence there at that time, did you feel difficulty with the personal living? You had children in school and all that. Was there a problem?*

DUNCAN: In retrospect, I think one of the most vicious things was when our children were going to a nursery school not too far from where we lived. My wife went up to get them this one day. Robert was in the first grade and Susan was in nursery school. The young kids along the street were screaming, "Down with the Americans" and actually, on this one particular day, actually started throwing rocks at the kids. These were just infants. It was very, very stressful.

*Q: Speaking now in 1995, fundamentalism has become a major element and a very dangerous element in Algeria. Had fundamentalism entered into the picture?*

DUNCAN: No, not in the political sense. The only indications that there was an element coming was that under the French regime and under the revolutionary period, equality of women was a very strong characteristic. As I said, Algerian women did not wear veils, except for maybe way in the countryside. In the urban areas and the developed areas, they definitely did not. They went to school like the boys. It was a very French atmosphere. There were indications when we were still there that there was pressure, in effect, reestablishing, putting women back into a more traditional pattern. But there were still a lot of women in the government. There were significant numbers in the government. The secular creed was still dominant. In other words, in answer to your specific question, while there was some increased traditional influence in malefemale relationships, other than that, no.

*Q: How about ties not just to the Soviet Union, but with other Bloc countries, particularly the German Democratic Republic, East Germany? Were they doing their thing which they did in so many other places, setting up a very good secret service?*

DUNCAN: Oh, yes, definitely. In fact, one of our communicators was married to a German woman. She had relatives in then East Germany. The East German reps in Algeria, which were very active, tried to turn her.

*Q: What did she do? What happened?*

DUNCAN: Being German, she felt lonely. The Germans, in effect, sought her out basically as a social contact. She started associating with this person, who she probably didn't recognize was one who had targeted her. Then after they had gotten to go with one another, then they turned to try to get her to put influence on her husband to get him to provide information. He was a communicator, so he had access. Fortunately, she told her husband and her husband immediately told the security people in the embassy. Both he and she were out of the country. In other words,

there was no damage done. I think I'm right in say that what the embassy did is standard operating procedure.

*Q: I imagine it was. What was your next post?*

DUNCAN: When I left Algeria, I came back in 1967 to go to the six month economic studies course in the Foreign Service Institute, which was affectionately referred to by economic officers as Reinstein University.

*Q: I may be wrong on that. When you say you had the economic job of the bits and pieces, what were some of those?*

DUNCAN: If it didn't fall under the jurisdiction of the agricultural attaché, the Treasury representative, or the commercial counselor, I got it.

*Q: What were some of the things that you got?*

DUNCAN: I spent a great deal of time was dealing with commodity issues and energy. I guess one of my major operations there was that the issue was coming up of building a huge new natural gas pipeline from Russia into Europe. At the same time, the Europeans were looking at this as an alternative to Algeria because, particularly from the French perspective, there were risks involved in being dependent on natural gas from Algeria, even though they had a big interest there. It was a matter of national policy. We were trying to work with the Europeans to not let this natural gas pipeline, in effect, become a type of Achilles heel, where the Western Europeans would become dependent on natural gas that could be turned off. It was a major strategic issue. I was involved in that.

*Q: Can you talk about what at that time the French stand was on this and how did you deal and work with this?*

DUNCAN: They were as conscious as we were of the risks. They were probably more sympathetic to what we were trying to achieve. They were trying to approach it from a balanced point of view and trying to work out some kind of system whereby the Algerians could participate in the exercise, but in a way that was not going to pose a threat. In other words, try to develop a relationship where Algerian gas could become like an offset. It was very interesting because the bottom line in the whole exercise at the very end when the crunch came, the Belgians undermined the united position vis a vis the Algerians. I remember at the time, this French official said to me, "Bob, it's Zaire." In other words, the question was, "Why are they doing this?" There was this FrenchBelgian competition for influence in Zaire and this was a way for the Belgians to get back at the French.

**LEWIS HOFFACKER**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Algiers (1965-1969)**

*Ambassador Lewis Hoffacker was born in Pennsylvania in 1923. He received his bachelor's degree from George Washington University in 1948 and then his master's degree from Fletcher's School of Law and Diplomacy in 1949. He then served in the US Army from 1943-1946. His career has included positions in Teheran, Istanbul, Paris, Algiers, and Leopoldville and ambassadorships to both Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. Ambassador Hoffacker was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 17, 1998.*

Q: *In '65 you moved on. Whither?*

HOFFACKER: Algiers.

Q: *You were in Algiers from –*

HOFFACKER: '65 to '69. Under Jack Jernegan, our ambassador there, under whom I worked back in the early GTI days. He asked for me, and I was glad to go because I always wanted to be a DCM.

Q: *Number two, deputy chief of mission.*

HOFFACKER: And was working for someone who was compatible. So Jack asked for me. Our relations were terrible with Algeria. In '65 to '67 they went downhill, and the '67 War happened, and they broke relations with us.

Q: *In '65, when you went out there, what was the situation in Algiers?*

HOFFACKER: Ben Bella had just been gotten out of the way, and Boumedienne moved in. I was there during the Boumedienne period. The Algerians were traditionally among the more militant of the Arabs, hardheaded, and they didn't like our policies on the Middle East. When the '67 war happened, they had no choice but to break relations with us, which they did. We had anticipated it, and we had alerted the Swiss to the possibility of our being under their flag. That was done, but then Jernegan, the ambassador, had to go along with two-thirds of our staff. The rest of us stayed on for another two years, during which time relations improved gradually. We (the Algerians and me) didn't have to pretend we had mutual respect for each other. Economic business was better than it had been before because Algerian oil and gas attracted American business, and that boomed. So when I left there, it was nice to be leaving when they weren't trying to burn down the embassy, as was threatened during the Six Day War.

Q: *Going back to the '65 period, what were the disputes?*

HOFFACKER: Our policy on the Middle East, for one thing.

Q: *We are talking about with Israel.*

HOFFACKER: Yes, our policy *vis-à-vis* Israel. There were radical Arabs who didn't like our

policy, and the Algerians were among the most radical. When the '67 War happened our embassies in other places were attacked. They tore down our flag. We had to burn our files, and we had to evacuate two-thirds of our people and a lot of our non-embassy citizens. The Foreign Office said to me, "We can no longer assure the protection of your people." Governments shouldn't talk that way, because they are always responsible for the protection of foreigners, including embassies. We had to decide whether we were going to take that seriously or not, and we chose not to lose any Americans and to go. It was a good thing, because some other embassies down the way were burned. We saw that it could be bad. If we hadn't done that, they would have come after us. But once we put up that Swiss flag it was quiet. The Algerians were very difficult people. They still are.

*Q: They have no sense of humor, of course.*

HOFFACKER: No and they were sort of pirates, in a way. They take things that don't belong to them, like the houses we lived in. They would take them from us and not compensate us adequately. Politically we couldn't satisfy them. We had to evacuate our families, as I mentioned before, so that was unpleasant. We had to close down our two consulates, in Constantine and Oran. Algeria was a difficult place to work. Now they have other problems. I wouldn't want to be there now. While I was there, I was really surprised at this cable from Washington asking if I would accept the ambassadorship to Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea. I was glad to accept and I moved on.

*Q: Still going back to the '65 to '67 when John Jernegan was the ambassador, how did he operate?*

HOFFACKER: He was very good. He was an old pro. He'd been ambassador in Baghdad. He was one of the prime officers who erected the Greek-Turkish aid program. Back there in the old days when Harry Truman wanted that. I knew him very well. He was a journalist before he became a Foreign Service officer. He was very easy-going, but it really taxed him to work with the Algerians because they were always hitting him on the nose, saying things they shouldn't have said. But he handled himself very well.

During that period, '65 to '67, Senator Teddy Kennedy came to town. He wanted to make a speech to students in Algiers. We think it may have been related to the speech that John Kennedy made earlier on Algeria. The Algerian government could not accept the idea of this American senator coming and talking to students, whom they wanted to keep under their heel, and telling them things that might stir them up. We tried to change the government's mind, but they wouldn't yield on that. I don't think Kennedy forgave our ambassador, thinking he was ineffective. But you know, there are some things governments say no to, and even though you are a nice guy, you don't get them changed.

Teddy Kennedy was a very difficult person to deal with in that respect and others. I was very glad when he left. He was ungrateful for just about everything we did. You couldn't satisfy him.

*Q: During the '65 to '67 period, did you get out and travel around?*

HOFFACKER: Very little. We had to have permission to go anywhere outside of town. We didn't really have any freedom of movement. I used to take trips, but I had to tell them the itinerary and all details. We were being watched. I didn't worry about my security in Algeria, as I would now, because they were always watching us, in that crypto-commie sort of way. They were listening in on the phones; they were watching where we were. We were secure in that sense.

*Q: Going back to Roman times, it had been a prosperous area, and when the French were there, for the approximately 130 years they were there, it was a rich agricultural country.*

HOFFACKER: It was in effect a colony.

*Q: Yes, but it was a fairly prosperous one. What was the embassy doing?*

HOFFACKER: We were busy reporting on the obstreperous nature of the Algerian government, with its harsh pronouncements. They were, as we called them, "*très complexes*." They still hadn't really gotten over their revolution. They were anti-French. There was internal strife among the Algerians. They didn't like Americans or American "imperialism." They loved working with Moscow and Peking. They were very radical people, and that was worth reporting. At the same time they were glad to work with American companies, and that business went on and on. So we had more than enough to report.

*Q: What was the key to this government infatuation with the Soviet model?*

HOFFACKER: As Bandung types, they were very non-aligned. They didn't like us, except for our material side, and they liked the Soviets for ideological reasons. Socialism, they called it. And they didn't think they were going to become communist. The Algerians had enough intelligence to know that we had the technology they needed.

*Q: How did it work? Americans could go there and work without a problem?*

HOFFACKER: The businessmen who were wanted had no problems. There were no missionaries to speak of. We didn't have a Peace Corps. We had no AID program either. We had the USIS. We didn't have any other programs. CARE had a little program. We had no military program, of course. That simplified things in a way. There was no close relationship with any individual Algerian official. Talking with Algerians was not easy because the government was watching, and they didn't want fraternization to that extent. We could talk to the government, but it wouldn't get you very far. In places like that you have to use other sources, and I always made a point, wherever I was in the former French territory, to be on good terms with the French. Sometimes they'd tell you things. That's a source. Then there are the diplomats you could talk to; they had their own sources and weren't as suspect as we were. We didn't have a lot of good Algerian sources, I've got to confess, except public things. The CIA, of course, had its activities there throughout the whole period, before the break in relations and afterwards. They handled themselves discreetly, and that's fair enough.

*Q: Were you seeing any indications of the rise of the radical Islamic side? This became and*



*remains a major concern.*

HOFFACKER: No, it wasn't a problem then; it was the FLN and the military who were running the government. They weren't fighting with the Islamists at that time; that was later. Of course, these Islamic types are not always mullahs or highly religious people. The Islamic fundamentalists or the Islamic political types use that handle to try to bring down the incumbents. It's an anti-government, anti-incumbent device in the name of Islam. We see it in different forms in different countries. I think that's the pattern in Algeria. And, of course, it's the same thing in Egypt, and you might say it was the same thing in Iran. Not everybody is a cleric or a scholar. They are anti-incumbent, and then they'll set up their Islamic republic, and it will either be Islamic or quasi-Islamic.

*Q: Other than the promotion of American oil interests, were there any other American interests there?*

HOFFACKER: No, that's all there was.

*Q: Then you got this assignment in '69.*

HOFFACKER: From '69 to '72, in Cameroon and Equatorial Guinea, jointly.

**DONALD S. BROWN**  
**USAID Representative**  
**Algiers (1966-1967)**

*Donald S. Brown was raised in New York. He attended Cornell for a year and then attended Military Officer Candidate School. He finished his undergraduate degree at Antioch College. In addition to Algeria, Mr. Brown served in Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Egypt, and Zaire. He was interviewed on December 4, 1996 by W. Haven North.*

BROWN: Our first assignment after Princeton was to Algeria where I was to replace Phil Birnbaum as AID Representative (some years later I again succeeded Phil as Deputy Assistant Administrator for Africa and then again as Vice President of International Fund for Agricultural Development). We arrived at an inauspicious time-Algeria was adamantly opposed to US activity in Vietnam, leading to very cool diplomatic relations and the occurrence of a series of carefully controlled "demonstrations" in front of US offices to show the anger of "the people". Consequently, the AID program was necessarily small and limited in impact-a little PL 480 food aid, some participant training programs, support to various Algerian voluntary agencies, management of what was then called the Ambassador's Special Fund (for small but possibly politically interesting activities or those having useful small institution impact). Getting to know Algerian officials was hard because the Government sought to build a fence between Americans and socializing with Algerians. However, I did have some dealings with a young, bright Algerian official, Idriss Jazairy, who later became President of IFAD and with whom I worked for eight

years at IFAD. We also managed to build a friendship with Mohamed Shaker, who later became Ambassador to the United States and then Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa. Through our neighbors (Mme. Claude Radievski, who as a lawyer had defended Ben Bella against the French), we also enjoyed a strong friendship with an Algerian Surete official who later proved very helpful. But mostly our Algerian friends were private citizens in no way associated with government. We were fortunate to be quickly accepted into a group of very nice Algerians and international types who shared the costs of running an old beach house to which we all retreated when the weather allowed. We did manage to travel a moderate amount, despite the need for official permission for every sortie outside of Algiers, and came to love the varied beauty of Algeria. Life was made pleasant because we had a wonderful place to live at the top of the hills above Algiers which we inherited when AID Agricultural Adviser Leroy Rasmussen left Algeria. The house was small but the grounds included a small pool and a tennis court and this was one place we could bring many friends in an enjoyable but discrete setting.

Our stay was short, however. In April of 1967, as US-Algerian relations deteriorated further, it was agreed there was little prospect for a useful aid program. I was therefore asked to move on and become Deputy Mission Director in the Congo (now Zaire). Micheline stayed in Algiers to permit the children to finish the school year. But her stay ended with a bang with the Middle East Six-Day war in June, 1967, which led to a break in relations between the US and Algeria and then an evacuation of the Embassy staff. Micheline had a difficult but, in a sense, fascinating time at this period. When the war broke out she happened to be spending a weekend in Paris visiting family, with the children remaining with friends in Algiers (one of them with a prominent Jewish family, the other two with the US military attaché!). It took a lot of dealing to get back into Algiers but she succeeded, only to find our house had been sequestered and she had to spend more time getting to the right people in order to get back in and bring the family together. As soon as she got in, the evacuation order came. While she and friends tried to get some of our belongings packed, in the end she had to leave most just where they were. However, the Surete official with whom we had become friends, assured her that he would take personal responsibility to get our belongings safely and properly to us in Congo/Zaire- a promise he kept (except for Micheline's Russian-English dictionary and some of my Princeton books on Soviet history). He also came to the airport to make a public showing of seeing Micheline safely off on the evacuation flight. For reasons I will soon explain, Micheline then ended up in Paris with the children for the rest of the year. I had one chance to come up to Paris from Leopoldville (now Kinshasa) for a short visit - and when I was there the same Algerian official was in town and made it a point to invite us out to lunch to be sure all was well. How he found out where we were I do not know, but the Surete seems to know all and there he was bidding us a final farewell.

Despite all these limitations, we enjoyed our time in Algiers. Algiers itself is a beautiful city, and there were a number of other places, on the coast as well as in the desert oases, which were a delight to visit. Those Algerians we got to know were unfailingly pleasant although the tough side of Algerian personalities was certainly apparent. While the program was very small, its emphasis on small self-help projects gave me my first real opportunity to work with a range of PVOs (NGOs) and I certainly appreciated the fine work they were doing.

An amusing (but somewhat costly) experience in Algiers is that we got two telephone bills at home- one for our own regular use, the other for the Government's tap on our phone.

**RICHARD E. UNDELAND**  
**Information Officer**  
**Algiers (1966-1967)**

*Richard E. Undeland was born in 1930 in Omaha, Nebraska. He graduated from Harvard University in 1952 with a degree in English literature, received an M.B.A. from Stanford University, and studied in Egypt from 1955-1956. In addition to Algeria, Mr. Undeland served in Vietnam, Egypt, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Tunisia. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in July of 1994.*

*Q: What was the situation in Algiers, in Algeria, at that point?*

UNDELAND: Algeria was a country still very much in the throes of the aftermath of its bloody and grisly struggle for independence, which cost, the Algerians claimed, some 1.5 million killed, plus many more wounded and nearly everybody displaced. Whatever the correct figures, it was a traumatic and immense experience. In the central square of village after village, you would find whitewashed low pyramids, four or five or six feet high, with the names of the dead inscribed on it. Small, isolated villages had 20, 30 or 40 names. The only thing comparable I've seen are the French memorials for its World War I dead. The Algerians were a people striving to get out from under these horrors, but they remained a part of their lives and national psyche, if such a thing exists.

It was more than this human chaos, for the economy was in shambles, partly because of the war, but also because of the departure of the French and other Europeans, who had filled so many positions, for which no Algerians were trained or prepared to take over. Also, much of the economy had been oriented towards the *colons* to meet their needs and those of France. Algeria in those days didn't even make its own butter; it was imported from France. Having opted for a socialist model patterned on the Soviets, efficient agriculture was largely ignored and huge, inefficient factories, like the steel complex, got the emphasis. Even the considerable oil and natural gas revenues were insufficient to bring prosperity. On a lifeless, salt flat just outside Oran was a billboard with peeling paint and the slogan in huge letters, "Here is the land of socialism." How true.

The third area of confusion was political, and it had several aspects. First were the divisions in the ranks of the victors, the split between the guerrilla fighters inside Algeria who felt they deserved the top places and those in the GPRA, the provisional government, who were outside the country and won out in the post-independence power struggle. This took place before I arrived but its repercussions remained and loomed large. There were other divisions, beginning at the top with the conflict between Ben Bella and Boumedienne, the latter having won out and deposed the former. A one party state, this party could never get its act together for personal, bureaucratic and even ideological reasons. The bad effects and influence of the Soviet model contributed to this national malaise, for, whatever else, it sacrificed realism and

efficiency/effectiveness for loyalty and a slavish, grudging, all too often ineffectual kind of performance.

And still another element was the administrative disarray. Things worked badly, partly because officials were poorly trained or prepared, partly because pay was low, partly because performance was not demanded.

I had and still have the feeling that many, maybe even most, of the problems go back to the dominating nature of the French presence and the ghastly, no holds barred, nature of the independence war.

Algerian-U.S. relations were strained and difficult, despite the fact that we had not stood behind France in the war, that the then Senator Kennedy had made his famous speech in the Senate openly espousing Algerian independence, that we had an economic assistance program, that we were working with the Algerians on developing its natural gas exports, that we were openly seeking warmer relations. We were nonetheless presented and quite widely seen as the inheritor of the imperialist mantle, the opponent of independence movements, the aggressor in Vietnam, the capitalist exploiter. You couldn't call it love-hate, for there wasn't that much love, but at the same time our presence was wanted, and there was much curiosity about, and even quiet admiration for, things American. The few Algerians who had returned from studies in American universities were particularly respected; they were among the country's best technocrats, a few quite highly placed, and people realized this.

Turning to USIS, we had almost no contact with any part of the party structure, of course none with the police or military, but access was not as difficult as might be imagined with our usual main clienteles, universities and other parts of the education system, the media, professional organizations and the arts. We certainly were not isolated and at times cooperated fairly well with Algerians from these areas, except for the media. We could see editors and journalists anytime, but beyond purely cultural stuff, they weren't buying and in conversations, there was not much that could honestly be called dialogue. Nowhere were anti-American sentiments more pronounced than in the press. Radio was a little less strident, where mere silence sometimes replaced the unrelenting America-is-bad line.

The center was quite well used and I feel was appreciated. The library attracted a fair sized clientele and books were being borrowed. Our films were in considerable demand. We put on, with co-sponsors, several concerts and an exhibit, which were reasonably well attended and, incidentally, got us that rarity of positive press coverage. IV and other exchange programs found ready acceptance. The activities were there, some attitudes were, we believed, being influenced, albeit only privately, but the political situation was further deteriorating all the time. .

A personal vignette may not be wholly out of place on where we stood in Algeria. I arrived planning to order a new car as soon as I had my diplomatic status. Time went on without my accreditation coming through, with no reason given for the delay. The Zodiac Estate Wagon of the British Ambassador, kicked out over Rhodesia, was available and its owner, Sir Thomas Bottomley III, was pressuring his Embassy to sell it and get him his money. I agreed to buy it, provided I had written permission to drive it with its present plates until my status was approved,

and I could get my own. I rather liked the respect I got with His Nibs CMD plates, being waved into special parking places and this sort of thing, and it went on for months. At last we learned that no more American diplomats, starting with me, would be approved until we cut down on the number of our military attachés. We balked on principle, although what possible use there could be for individual army, naval and air attachés who could neither travel around the country nor meet with the Algerian military was a good question. Meanwhile, I drove on without incident, although perhaps causing consternation to our British colleagues and maybe wounding their *amour propre*. (They formally protested a 4th of July exhibit I put together and mounted at the residence, which mentioned ever so lightly the Brit surrender at Yorktown.) The Algerians of course knew I was using a defrocked ambassador's plates, but didn't do anything about it. The car was apparently immaterial to them, as was I, but clipping the wings of the Embassy had significance. That it took us months even to learn what the problem was is indicative of our relations.

Then there was the mission impossible of Averell Harriman. He came to try to get the Algerian government to intercede with the North Vietnamese on behalf of American prisoners. To indicate where the Algerians stood, the North Vietnamese representative had been given the place of honor just to the right of President Boumedienne on the reviewing stand for the Algerian independence day parade. Anyway, Harriman called on the young, touchy, abrasive Foreign Minister, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, a meeting we thought might last ten or fifteen minutes before he was shown the door, but in fact it went on for some two hours or more. He finally emerged -- it was just the two of them plus interpreters -- at least somewhat pleased, for although he didn't get anything on the prisoners, it had been the most cordial session any American had had with Bouteflika. Harriman had seized the initiative at the outset by noting to Bouteflika that he, now in his 70s, had been ambassador to Russia, senator and governor of New York, presidential candidate, and a senior official, and now at the end of his career had never risen to the rank of the Secretary of State or Foreign Minister. "And you're only 29 years old. What are you going to do with the rest of your life?" Harriman told us this broke the ice, and they cordially talked about all sorts of things, personal, policy, government, Vietnam, ending with an uncharacteristically cordial Bouteflika hoping they would meet again. In the weeks which followed, we found the customs people and other parts of officialdom a little more cooperative and forthcoming. Of course, it didn't last for long.

We had something in ways similar with the branch PAO in Oran, where we had a small center. He was black and often frustrated by restrictions and problems. He would then go to the governor or his deputy, explain his problem and say, "I have to assume that the only reason this is happening is because I'm black." They would vigorously deny this charge of racism and for a short while things indeed would get better, but soon reverted to the old obstructionist ways. Later, something else would drive him to repeat the performance with exactly the same results.

Speaking of centers, we also had one in Constantine that the authorities abruptly and permanently closed down, when a copy of the Agency's film on Ben Bella's official trip to Washington, which, after he was deposed, had supposedly been destroyed, but wasn't and inadvertently got loaned out. The Algerians wouldn't accept our apology and even consider permitting the center to be reopened.

Algeria was the toughest place to operate in of any of my assignments. They were so suspicious, and even when you thought Algerians had gotten to accept you and some of the barriers were lowered, this might not mean much. There was still almost always a large distance, a lack of getting on the same wave length. For example, when you made a call on an official, you could not be sure whether he was giving you his real name or not. However, there was a recognized signal of at least minimum approval and that your interlocutor was open to further contacts, if he said, "oh by the way, you can always reach me at this number." You then knew you had gotten over the first hurdle. If it was a private number, it was an invitation. Still, you might not have his real name. An Algerian official once explained it to me as follows: "You've got to look back at and understand where we have come from. So many of us were killed. We were displaced or had to sneak around to avoid arrest or were being chased and hunted down. We were torn out of our villages. If we cooperated with the French, the Algerians killed us, and vice versa. Families were broken up. Everybody has had a member of their family killed or tortured or both. The only way we could exist was to hide our identities. Now, the war is over, but it is going to take a long time for these habits and our fears to disappear." Though it doesn't really fit in with the point I was making, he went on: "Of course, we needed a reason for continuing to struggle and suffer. Independence alone was not enough; neither was the war in itself. The only other thing we had was Islam, and to it we turned. Never underestimate the hold this religion has on us, nor how strong our Islamic sentiments and loyalties are, whether we show them or not." The present turmoil in that unhappy country has made me think back to this conversation.

We moved around Algiers and its immediate environs freely, but we could not travel outside the *Departement d'Alger* without written permission from the Foreign Ministry, which took a couple weeks or so to get. I was never turned down, but some in the Embassy often, if not usually, were. And the military attachés always were.

*Q: I didn't ask you what specifically was your job in Algiers?*

UNDELAND: I was the information officer, press attaché, dealing with the press, radio and television, where we sought dialogue and use of/interest in our materials. As I've already indicated, we didn't have much luck, much we could point to, although I got around in media circles quite a bit. I was in charge of our fairly sizable film loan program. I oversaw putting out the daily information bulletin using wireless file items and distribution of our magazines and pamphlets. However, I am the first to admit I was hardly overworked and therefore branched out into some normally cultural section affairs. I handled the visit by pianist Ann Schein, which went over quite well and some of the exchanges. Once the June War broke out, we all were sure we would not be remaining for long, and indeed did not. My assignment there lasted only a year.

The end came swiftly, with official and public outrage over what was believed to be our not only lining up with the Israelis in the 67 War, but actually joining them militarily. There was no question in Algerian minds once our friend King Hussein of Jordan made the accusation that American planes must be participating in bombing Egyptians sites, because it was impossible for the Israelis to turn around their planes so rapidly. This came on top of feelings already aroused. The Ambassador was called in by the Foreign Ministry and told Americans in the Embassy would have to leave immediately, because the Algerian Government could no longer guarantee their safety without using force against its own citizens, which it would not do. The handwriting

had been on the wall for some days, and dependents were already leaving on regular flights to Europe. My family went to Madrid. A few days later, those of us still there received a late night call from the Consul, telling us to be at the Embassy the next morning with our automobiles and one suitcase each. I went to Rome and then on to Madrid. We also got out on scheduled flights. When the family left, a security official at the airport gave my wife a hard time, after which another official came over to her and apologized for this lack of politeness, pointing out the other person did not work regularly at the airport.

To end the departure story on a lighter note, I did not turn in my house keys to the Embassy Admin Officer as directed, but rather to a can-do Algerian employee, whom I told could have all the liquor in my basement, a shipment from Denmark had just arrived, but I wanted my Siamese cat. Some ten days later I got a call from Madrid customs asking me to come out and pick up a cat. When I arrived and heard that unmistakable Siamese yowling ringing through the cavernous customs warehouse, I knew this family member indeed was there to rejoin us.

A few days before I left, an Algerian mob, organized by the youth section of the ruling FLN party, gathered in front of our center in downtown Algiers, with much shouting and sloganeering. We were not open, and had not been since the fighting began, so the shutters were down and all but a couple of FSNs were away. The mob pried up the shutter of the window of my office and entered. At that moment the FSNs wisely threw the main electricity switch and ducked out the back door, leaving those who broke in with no light. They stumbled around in some of the offices and library, overturning desks and throwing typewriters and books around, but doing little real damage. They never found the film library. They used no fire, except to burn outside in the street the contents of a file in my office -- I was months chasing down replacements of personal papers, but that's another story -- for the simple reason that the floor above USIS housed the headquarters of the *Union Nationale des Femmes Algeriennes*, whose members were leaning out of the windows yelling support and egging the demonstrators on. Their presence ruled out fire. Two days later, a similar mob did a far more complete job on the Egyptian cultural center to show their dismay over the Egyptian army for having stopped fighting and admitting defeat. Algiers was like no other place I served in before or after.

*Q: In Algiers, what were American interests, at the time you were there? What basically were we trying to do?*

UNDELAND: We recognized Algeria's importance in Middle Eastern and North African contexts -- her neighbors to the east and west were firm, close friends -- and her ties to independence movements and non-aligned countries. (How I dislike that phrase; they were almost constantly non-aligned against the U.S.) We sought stability in North Africa in a framework with which we could deal. It was a time when we were competing for every inch of territory in the world with the Soviets, and Algeria was more of a Cold War arena than many others. We were worried by the Algerian military build-up closely tied to the Soviets, who provided the arms and training, and we feared Soviet bases, whatever they might be called, would be established on Algerian soil. We knew that Soviet economic aid and planning model was wrong and bad for Algeria in the long run and we hoped we could wean them, at least partially, away from it, although we were under no illusions over our prospects, for the Soviet model was at heart more political than economic, as was the dominant Algerian Government

outlook. We felt we should do all we could on all fronts to keep up and strengthen contacts, looking to a brighter day in U.S.-Algerian relations. We saw the importance of Algerian oil and natural gas, and with the latter American companies were deeply involved. Despite the close official ties with the Soviets, the Algerians insisted, and with some justice, they were not under Soviet domination. Many of the Algerians we knew were strongly anti-Communist on both intellectual and practical grounds and were fearful of Soviet ways and grip on aspects of the country. There was reasonably widespread desire for contact with the West, however much we and Western Europe were criticized. These were attitudes on which we wanted to build.

A bright spot in the gloomy picture was John F. Kennedy's speech in the Senate supporting Algerian independence, although I'm not sure how much we gained by trying to draw out this card, as we did on a number of occasions. Still, the high point during my shortened tour was the visit by Senator Ted Kennedy to dedicate the John F. Kennedy Square in Algiers. The Algerians organized a good bit of hoopla over the inauguration and visit, but at the same time refused to provide a venue for the speech the Senator had planned and very much wanted to deliver. It was to be about human rights and responsibilities, if I remember correctly. So even with a Kennedy, they were not giving anything away.

I suppose that if it were not for the Cold War, we would have been less interested in Algeria, but I feel sure we would have been there with a presence probably not have been too different from the one we had, although perhaps smaller. It was a time we felt our position and standing in the world justified, indeed demanded, we try to be active everywhere, and I don't think we can attribute this entirely to the Cold War, dominant as that factor was.

*Q: Who was our Ambassador there at that time?*

UNDELAND: John Jernegan.

*Q: How did you find him?*

UNDELAND: He was, in my book, one of the best. Ever a gentleman, dedicated, bright and perceptive, under no illusions about our weaknesses in Algeria and our inability to have significant effect or impact on directions being taken by that country, he brought it all together cogently and accurately. I looked forward to meetings with him to share his trenchant observations and analyses. He had a wry sense of humor, much needed in an antagonistic climate of Algeria. Jernegan was unfortunate in that he was riding down a situation that was bad and getting worse, which was exactly what had previously happened to him when he was our ambassador in Iraq. I had a feeling, though with no hard evidence or proof, he was given shorter shrift in the Department than he deserved. I used the word unfortunate, for conventional wisdom said ambassadors cannot ride down these kind of situations twice and expect another ambassadorial posting.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the Algerian foreign service? Because I've heard people say that it is a very competent outfit. Was it true at that time or did it emerge later on?*

UNDELAND: We were in touch with so few Algerian diplomats -- I personally with none whom



I can recall -- that I don't think any of us could have made such judgments based on our experiences there. However, I later met Algerian diplomats in other posts and found them hard working, often on the dour side, but a rather impressive lot. And there is the experience of the Iran hostages, where Algerian diplomacy was central to their final release. They worked closely with Warren Christopher, and he and others have commented very favorably on the roles they played.

*Q: What about a little on, not the Cold War competition, but that for the hearts and minds of people between us and the French, the differences between our approaches, and how USIS fit in. The French and the Algerians had the major break, and here came the Americans with their own ways, the English language, perhaps differing perceptions and that sort of thing. Did this give us something of an advantage, or were the French so embedded that our inputs didn't amount to anything?*

UNDELAND: I don't look back on these considerations as looming at all large. Maybe it was that we had enough problems of our own that we didn't have time for paying much attention to the French connection. We in USIS had little contact with our French counterparts, I personally almost none, though I recall a cordial meeting with the French press attaché.

Virtually all of our dealings with Algerians were in French and the small English programs in schools at universities were not large enough to constitute a threat to them, although I cannot be sure they saw it that way. Anyway, the French were not raising a fuss about it. As to differences of ways and cultures, again it was not an issue. If you asked the question about Egypt or Syria or Lebanon or particular Tunisia, French noses were often out of joint and we were seen as the competition, sometimes the enemy. Also, I have known Arabs, particularly Syrians and Tunisians, who wanted to make English the second language -- it has happened in Syria, if Syria can be said to have a second language -- replacing French with what one Syrian termed "the world language"; in addition many Syrians favored American methods and systems, making it a cultural and not just a language matter. Maybe, that was true in a later day Algeria, but not in the mid-60s. Yet, and as I've said, Algerian technocrats with American experience were looked up to, which may have rankled the French, although I cannot cite any evidence.

One point of major controversy between the French and Algerians and among Algerians themselves were the moves to replace French with Arabic in the schools. Arabic teachers were brought in from Syria, Egypt, Lebanon and elsewhere to carry out this Arabization drive. It was a time of great educational confusion; many of the educated young ended up with no real competency in any language. Many years later, I heard an Algerian refer to them as the "lost generation." However, this did not concern us at all. The French did what they could to maintain French instruction in the schools, but clearly lost out, although to this day French remains the second language. Those roots run deep, although, as I've said, many Algerians got caught up in the middle and emerged with no real language competence.

*Q: Do you have more to say on how things played out for us with relations so strained? What was it like, say, in the summer of 1967?*

UNDELAND: A couple of comments on Algeria and a final vignette before moving on. I have

been very negative about so much, but we did have some rewarding experiences and relations with individual Algerians. And even officially, many Algerians regretted the sad state of the country, the inefficiencies, the corruption, the lack of concern for the individual and the fact that ties with the U.S. were not better. It was a joy to travel round and be warmly greeted everywhere by the little man and even by many officials. The villagers and local officials could not have been more friendly and helpful than when a group of us climbed Djurdjura, Algeria's highest mountain, or when I traveled to the Tassili-n-Ajjer in the south eastern most part of the country. Everywhere we went in and around Algiers and Oran, it was the same. It seemed at times almost as if they were saying: don't take us at face value, as we seem to be, for we're really much better and more friendly than that.

Now the story. I was at the central post office to buy stamps for my son's collection and was standing in line behind an obviously poor Algerian, who had an official paper and wanting an explanation. The clerk started yelling at him and cursing him out for his not knowing what to do and wasting his, the clerk's, time. I found myself getting angrier and angrier at this performance and finally barged in and told this functionary the man was only asking a civil question and deserved a civil answer. If he wanted to treat me or another foreigner that way, we could always pack up and leave, but the Algerian couldn't and should get better treatment. The clerk got beet red in the face, slammed down the window and stormed out. I, alas, left without my stamps, and once outside found myself surrounded by some 30 people, who individually shook my hand and thanked me for standing up to this boorish official. One explained that Algerians were afraid to do this themselves, much as they wanted to.

I next went on a temporary assignment to Rabat for four months, filling in for the absent IO. I got around a certain amount in that fascinating city and visited a few places outside, but we were there for such a short time, I couldn't get very deeply into much USIS was doing. It was an interlude, which gave me an introduction to Morocco, but little more. Unless there is a specific project with a clear beginning and end, I find such short assignments unrewarding; still, USIA had to find places for all those pulled out of Arab World posts due to the 67 war, and I fared better than most.

**MICHAEL E.C. ELY**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Algiers (1966-1968)**

*Michael E.C. Ely was born into a military family. After receiving a degree in international affairs from Princeton University, Mr. Ely entered the military as a second lieutenant of artillery during the Korean War. In addition to service in Algeria, his career in the Foreign Service took him to China, France, Somalia, Italy, Belgium, and Japan. Mr. Ely was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on March 9, 1992.*

*Q: How about in North Africa, because you were going to end up in Algeria soon, what were we doing in North Africa, the sort of things that you were looking at?*

ELY: We were covering Tunisia with AID projects -- we and everybody else. If you go to Tunisia, you'll see that the country is covered with clothes factories and agricultural institutes and teacher-training institutions that grateful aid donors have given to reward the Tunisians for their moderating, intermediary position in Arab affairs. I noticed that all these projects were marginal. None of them looked very good.

Algeria, however, was different. I'd been in Paris when the Algerian war was going on, and, indeed, when the generals had tried to mount a coup against de Gaulle, with paratroops flying up from Algiers. The Algerian government that emerged under Ben Bella was populist, radical, traumatized, and looking for friends. Ben Bella was very difficult to deal with; he was authoritarian and arbitrary, but he wanted to have good relations with the United States. And we started to put in an AID program.

During the war, we had actually picked up a number of young Algerians in Tunisia and sent them to the United States to study petroleum engineering. This was the smartest thing we ever did. We spent less than half-a-million dollars on that program, and it has changed the country. The present prime minister is one of those Texas boys, and a lot of them came back with Texan wives. They had a hard time, but it did inject a sensible American presence into the elite there, which was very much a French colony.

About the time, however, that my assignment got firmed up, Ben Bella was thrown out and the gloomy, gritty colonel, Houari Boumedienne, came in. And Boumedienne was very suspicious of the Americans. Vietnam was getting bigger and bigger. The Revolutionary Council looked at us and they came to the conclusion that the American action was not compatible with Algerian revolution, and that after we'd won in Vietnam, we'd knock off Algeria. They saw the Sixth Fleet in the Mediterranean as essentially aimed at Algeria. They were really self-centered paranoiacs.

*Q: Well, I think you could almost point to every country in the Mediterranean and...*

ELY: Right. "Those guys are out to get all of us."

And the budding relationship was suddenly turned around. The AID director left, I took over the AID section, and we decided we would cut back the PL 480, a little bit of technical assistance. We were hardening the terms of the PL 480, and the Algerians couldn't accept that. They didn't really believe that this was in response to congressional pressures and reduced availabilities.

Meanwhile, our telephones were tapped, our servants were suborned and interrogated, we were watched all the time. The East Germans were giving instructions to the Algerian secret police.

*Q: The East Germans apparently had one of the most effective training programs of anybody in the world. It still lasts today, of training local interior surveillance techniques.*

ELY: Tough, cold, ruthless, merciless. They were also trying to recruit our secretaries and communications people. They were luring people into black-market deals. It was a real mess.

Meanwhile, you felt distinctly unwelcome there. You were lied to in the Foreign Ministry. You had to get permission to go out of the capital. You couldn't get in to see people. It was not a pleasant tour.

*Q: I've heard that the Algerians, as a group, are a pretty dour group. They're not the volatile but interesting Arab, at least that's my impression.*

ELY: No, the Turks subdued them in a very economical and authoritarian colonial iron rule. And then the French came in and humiliated them further. The French colonial experience there, quite unlike the French colonial experience of Black Africa, which was fairly liberal, humane and decent, was quite incompatible with the French idealism of liberty, fraternity, and equality. The Algerians, already a gloomy people, learned to hate the French. Bloody civil war broke out. A million Algerians died, most of them of disease. The French used torture. The Algerians used terrorism. The moderate Algerians were all killed off by the extreme Algerians. The French moderates themselves were attacked and assassinated by the French military extremists. It was a very bad period.

Meanwhile, the French, and de Gaulle in particular, were hanging the mantle of imperialism on the shoulders of the Americans. "See, we want to help you, but these Americans, ha ha, they're out to get you! Look at what's going on in Vietnam."

*Q: Well, Vietnam could be related, but it's pretty dubious logic. But at the same time, there's this hatred of the French. You had de Gaulle, who was trying in every way possible to create a chasm between the United States and any other country. I would have thought that logic would have said...*

ELY: He took the weight of imperialism off his shoulders and stuck it on ours.

*Q: But I would have thought that the hatred of the French would have made us a much more attractive area to deal with.*

ELY: Well, it could have. Washington was of two views about the Algerians.

One was that, okay, these people are tough, they've had a hard time, we've got to be tolerant and work with them, "petite crisp de jeunesse," traumatized, we've got to get to know each other. We could put in an AID program there and keep it going and help feed the children and the hungry people -- food for work, and reforestation.

The other deal was that, you know, these people are tough, violent, Marxists, anti-American, anti-capitalist. They have their party ideologues who are professionally anti-American. And, you know, we're basically wasting our time there. We're never going to get anywhere. We shouldn't be trying; it's humiliating and counterproductive.

And the Embassy got caught between these two schools. And so you could never get clear instructions from Washington, because there was no clear policy.

I negotiated, at great difficulty, with my one Algerian friend, who ran the Economic Section in

the Foreign Ministry... He's now the secretary general of IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) in Rome, a multibillion dollar assistance agency. We finally negotiated a \$28 million PL 480 program.

*Q: PL 480 is wheat, isn't it?*

ELY: Mainly wheat and a few other things, some oil. And just as we were about to sign it, an American, married to a Frenchwoman (he had been a G.I. in North Africa and married a local girl and settled down), staggered into the embassy in Paris, saying that the Algerians had confiscated his farm without compensation, and if he didn't get it back, he was going to kill himself. Now we had, and still have, a prohibition against giving aid to countries that confiscate property of Americans.

*Q: The Hickenlooper Amendment, wasn't it?*

ELY: The Hickenlooper Amendment, exactly. So Algeria was in technical violation of the Hickenlooper Amendment. And I was told to go in and tell the Algerians that they had to give this guy his farm back.

*Q: Or compensation.*

ELY: Well, the Algerians had billions and billions of dollars' worth of French claims that they had not settled and were not going to settle for quite a while, and to settle with the Americans before they took on the French was something they were never going to do.

So the whole thing, as they say, fell into the water, and the loan was withdrawn. Relations, already bad, descended to the iciest, most distant level.

And then came the June war in '67.

*Q: This was between Israel and...*

ELY: Egypt. And the Arab world broke off relations with the United States. The Algerians called in our ambassador, and, in a rather friendly way, said, "Okay, you know, everybody's doing it, we're going to do it, too. Can you leave in two weeks? No hard feelings." So we arranged to leave in two weeks. Ten days later, after Americans were out of all the other Arab countries, they came in and said, "By the way, we made a mistake. We can't control the mobs. You've got to get out in 48 hours." This was essentially for their own political purposes. They orchestrated a couple of demonstrations in front of the embassy. And so we brought in a plane and evacuated everybody.

A few of us stayed on. I stayed on as the economic guy. Five of us as the American interest section of the Swiss Embassy, where I stayed for the next six months, and then was direct-transferred to Mogadishu to fill a vacancy there.

Now Mogadishu. The GNP of Mogadishu was considerably less than the oil production of

Algeria. It was a much smaller place and far behind.

*Q: Before we get there, just a couple of things. While you were in Algeria, did you find that the Soviets were really imbedded, or was this a marriage of convenience and it wasn't taking very well?*

ELY: The Soviets were trying very hard to become imbedded. They equipped the army and set up a training program of taking people back to the Soviet Union. They brought in industrial advisors and tried to get the Algerians (who were very statist people and wanted to run everything themselves from the top) to follow Russian quantitative methods in their economic planning.

The Algerians that I knew, the intellectuals, were contemptuous of the Russians. First of all, their agricultural equipment was no good, nowhere nearly as good as the French or the American. The amount of planning required was ridiculous and not feasible.

The French were influential. The French brought down advisors. This whole statist approach was more agreeable, more natural to them, than to us. We kept saying, why don't you do something about the private sector? They had no intention of doing anything about the private sector. And only now are they doing anything about the private sector. It's taken them a full generation to decide that they were going down the wrong road. And, indeed, they destroyed their agriculture. You could see it at the time.

But the Algerians were running in circles, and Algiers was a very depressing city. Unemployed everywhere. Revolutionary rhetoric, but nothing happened. The government was building steel mills that they didn't need, building heavy industry it didn't need of all kinds, wanted to have an automobile plant. Imprisoning foreigners for real or imagined tax evasion. They would hold them in jail for a couple of weeks, then let them go. There was no real violence or cruelty, on the one hand, but a continuing menace that was held over everybody. When we finally evacuated and had to leave the country, the Algerians searched all the luggage of the departing diplomats. They also were obsessed by the fact that some Americans had firearms; some Americans had brought in their 22s and shotguns and all. I had myself, and we used to go hunting for snipe. But for the Algerians, this was very, very menacing, an indication that the Americans were up to no good at all.

So it was a really unpleasant tour and I accomplished nothing there.

*Q: One last question. Most of the time you were there, John Jernegan was the ambassador. He's sort of an old Middle East hand and all. What was his method of operation, and how did you evaluate him?*

ELY: Well, Jernegan is a patient man and wise, tolerant and unexcitable. He didn't speak Arabic. He used quiet diplomacy, being friendly, not taking offense at things, letting the Algerians talk, and listening to them.

He made one mistake when he was talking to Bouteflika, the fiery, young, militant, very

ambitious, left-wing, foreign minister. When Bouteflika told Ambassador Jernegan that diplomatic relations were, indeed, being broken, and, oh, at this time, instead of having two weeks, he had to leave in 48 hours, Jernegan said, "Vous n'êtes pas sérieux?!" Which he meant as, "You're not serious?!" But in French it means something else; it means, "You're joking." And Bouteflika hit the ceiling. It was sort of like saying, "Oh, come on, get off it." And Ambassador Jernegan said, "Oops, that was the wrong thing to say."

I said, "You know, I don't think that he understood what you meant. That's not how you say, `You're not serious.'"

He said, "Oh, that's right."

I think the Algerians liked Jernegan as much as they could like any American at that particular time, when nobody would acknowledge liking anything about the American government. And yet you could feel yearning among the Algerians for a better society. And they could see that the United States, in some respects, was a better society, even though the French told them that the United States had a bad political system, capitalism was unfair, and there was a lot of racism in the United States, and inequality and corruption. This came regularly through French sources. The Algerians picked up on this so eagerly that you knew that they were looking for something to withstand the natural attraction they had for free society in the United States.

*Q: Did you find that the French had developed, despite the bloodletting of the Algerian war, the same sort of intellectual caste that is still in France, which is so powerful?*

ELY: Well, the French left and intellectuals had always disapproved of the war, and they claimed legitimacy in having understood and sympathized with the Algerians. And they continually played that card. Many of the young Socialists who are now in power in Paris were conscientious objectors. Either they were conscientious objectors before the war, or they went to Algeria and this turned them into pacifists. It was a dirty war. They saw the torture, the violence, the escalating hostility and hatred, and wanted to have nothing to do with it. So the French intellectuals have always had a soft spot for Algerian independence, and feel, in some unacknowledged way, responsible for what the Algerians do.

So when the FLN Party called off the elections six weeks ago, because the party, which is sort of like the Russian Communist Party, discredited and ineffective...

*Q: We're talking about 1992 now.*

ELY: Yes. They canceled the elections because they thought the Muslim fundamentalists were going to win. This caused heartburn among French intellectuals. Here's the democratic, liberal, educated Algerian elite refusing to apply democratic processes when it appears they're going to lose.

There's another argument, too, that the fundamentalists would then destroy the democratic framework of the elections if you let them win, so you're justified, in the name of democracy, in canceling the elections. I don't know how strong that argument is.

*Q: Well, then, you got your, what, comeuppance by being sent to Algeria?*

ELY: No, I'd asked for that. That was one of the few assignments I ever really set out to get.

*Q: You went there in '66 and served until '67.*

ELY: Right. They became independent in '62, and Ben Bella was the first president. Ben Bella was an autocrat, but he, in some respects, wanted to be friends with the United States, so we had an AID mission there. We were doing some reforestation and some food-for-work, had some PL 480 money going in. We had some agricultural projects. And it looked as if we were going to get into a long-term aid relationship with the Algerians, which would have been very healthy for them.

But we had some problems. The Vietnam War was really heating up by that time. A second was Boumedienne and the revolutionary coup against Ben Bella and his people. Boumedienne was a tough Berber colonel from the hills. He was a fighter and an ideologue. And he and the Revolutionary Council quickly came to the conclusion that Vietnam was number one and Algeria was number two; as soon as we polished off the forces of revolution in Vietnam, do the same thing in Algeria. And at about the time I got there, relations between the United States and Algeria began to deteriorate.

**FERNANDO E. RONDON**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Constantine (1966-1967)**

**Consular Officer**  
**Algiers (1967-1968)**

*Ambassador Fernando E. Rondon was born in California in 1936. He received his bachelor's degree from University of California (Berkeley) in 1960. His career has included positions in Tehran, Tangier, Lima, Algiers, Tegucigalpa, and ambassadorships in Antananarivo and Quito. Ambassador Rondon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on June 4, 1997.*

*Q: In 1964, you were transferred from Iran. You then went to Arabic language school. How did that come about?*

RONDON: An interesting story. I had studied Farsi while in Tehran and had gotten as far as learning the alphabet. I had discovered that Islam is fascinating and thought I would like to study Arabic--I thought I could do well studying that language in light of my experience with Farsi. So I repeatedly volunteered to go to Arab language school; I was totally ignored by the Department.

In fact, in early 1964, I was assigned to San Pedro Sula, Honduras as a vice-consul. I was ready



to go there, even though it was not my preference. On my way to the new post, I stopped in Washington and went to see Peter Chase, the officer in PER responsible for assigning personnel to Arab language training. I told him of my many messages volunteering for Arab language training and the lack of response I had received. He asked me whether I was still interested. I confirmed that I was. He asked me what kind of Arabic I wanted to study. I told him, "Western Arabic." He then asked me whether I spoke French. I said I didn't. Chase said that the Arabic class didn't start until January, but that he could and would get me assigned to the four month French language training class to cover the time before the Arab class started. I told him that sounded fine, but I asked what about my Honduras assignment. He said not to worry; he would take care of that.

So I went to study French for four months followed by an assignment to our language school in Tangier. I studied there until 1966. I was taught Maghrebian Arabic. I thought the program was excellent, although studying Arabic was exhausting. Farsi was easy in comparison; Arabic is difficult. I was mentally exhausted at the end of the instruction day, so I played tennis to vent my frustrations on that little ball. Our second son, Lawrence, was born in Tangier.

Herb Hoffman and I were the two students who entered at the same time. There were three others who were at a higher level of instruction. When I started, I had no onward assignment. But students in those days mixed lessons with local travel in order to apply their academic learning to real life experiences. I went by train from Morocco to Tunis. I had learned by this time that the relevant question was who I worked for, not where I worked. The management team--John Jernegan and Lewis Hoffacker-- in Algeria had the best reputation, so I wanted to serve in Algeria. By sheer chance, an opening became available in Constantine. It was a job classified two grades above my own, but no one else had the Arabic-French language combination that I had. I was assigned to Constantine as Principal Officer. I was there in 1966 and 1967. When the "Six Day War" started we were evacuated and finished our tour in Algiers as members of the American Interests Section of the Embassy of Switzerland.

Constantine was essentially a "listening" post. We were trying to establish good relationships with Algeria. Eastern Algeria probably had been the most militant and violent part of the country in its war of liberation from the French. A lot of the guerrilla warfare had taken place in that region. It was a one officer post. My wife, Marian, was my administrative assistant. I had an admin assistant for a while, but he was withdrawn. We lived over the offices. I would travel a lot in Eastern Algeria. Almost all of the provincial governors had fought in the Revolution; very few had finished high school. Many of them were my age and therefore, in general, we related to each other well.

I had available to me the opportunity to support financially--from AID--what was then called "self-help" projects. These were small development projects; we would provide financial resources up to \$5,000. But these projects required my oversight to ensure that the funds were expended in accordance with the grant agreement. That was a very good rationale for traveling. I well remember that everywhere I went, very high--if not on top-- on the people's "wish" list was a mosque. We couldn't finance the construction of such institutions, but at times we were able to support the construction of school rooms that might be attached to the mosque. Most often, we financed water projects, road improvements, etc.

What struck me was that the French had tried to capture Algeria's soul, while the Algerians were focusing on finding their God. That was very much part of their drive for independence. The tensions created by these two entirely different goals were very striking.

Algerians could be very difficult. As I said, normally they would speak to me but occasionally they would not. The FLN was a leftist party. It was upset with our Vietnam policies. It thought that we favored Israel to the detriment of the Muslim neighbors. I could establish personal contacts, but regardless of the relationship, our views of the world were very far apart. It has often been said that of all the Arabs, the Algerians are the most dour but the eastern Algerians were far more open than their brethren in Algiers. They didn't live in a capital or even a large city; they were essentially country people. They viewed Algiers as a police state--highly controlled. In my region I was pretty well known. I drove a big government car--big by Algerian standards--and was quite open about my movements and activities. People were fairly warm and, as I said, I felt generationally close to some of the provincial leaders. It was hard for me as an American not to have some sympathy for their struggle for independence.

President Kennedy was a hero to the Algerians; President Johnson was not. Of course, Kennedy had been assassinated by the time I arrived in Algeria, but his memory lingered very strongly. Johnson had to carry the burden of Vietnam. We were viewed by the Algerians as imperialists--the successors to the still hated French. They identified with the Viet Cong and were vigorous in their denunciation of our Vietnam policy.

Israel was a surprisingly easier subject to discuss. I had not been in Israel nor did I know the Palestinians. The discussions would often turn to the issue of self-determination, which of course was also close to Algerian hearts, but the topic of Israel was never a source of uncomfortable conversations.

There were still a lot of French in Eastern Algeria. We tended to socialize with the French and a few US missionaries. I'll never forget my initial courtesy call on the Soviet Consul General in Annaba. It was an early morning call and I had eaten a large breakfast, knowing we would toast with vodka. While I was with the Consul General, the Soviets invited my chauffeur in for a drink. He emerged dead drunk! I never allowed him near the Soviets again. We were not close to any Algerian; we were rarely invited to Algerian homes. They would entertain me when I traveled, but that was not usually in a home.

On the second day of the 1967 "Six Day War" there were huge riots in Constantine. The Algerians were demonstrating against the US, accusing us of bombing the Arabs. That accusation stemmed from complete ignorance; the Algerians could not believe that Israel could bomb the Arabs almost continually without American involvement. Much of this misinformation had been fed to the media by the Egyptians after their Air Force was essentially wiped out while sitting on the ground. A mob of Algerians broke into our garden and were swarming the window grills, determined to force their way into the Consulate. Marian, our two sons, and the two servants had hidden in the furnace room in the basement where Marian found a woodsman's axe with which she prepared herself to vigorously defend her children against all odds. I was upstairs. Finally, the police came to our rescue and routed the mob. The next day my family was

evacuated, thanks to the help of the French Consul General and the manager of Air France. That was particularly interesting because these were the days when General de Gaulle was trying to distance himself from the US. Nonetheless, our French friends had no intention of ignoring the safety of an American friend. The manager of Air France personally escorted my wife and two children through the crowd gathered outside our building and to the airport where he got them on an Air France flight to Paris. The French Consul General told me that he had not forgotten what Americans had done for his country during WW II and he offered me protection in his residence if needed.

For months afterwards whenever our older boy, Mark, saw a person in uniform he would pick up a stick (or whatever was at hand) to defend his mother.

Day three of the war was quiet in Constantine. Day four, at about 11 pm, all hell broke loose. A small mob broke into the garden again and then forced their way into a second floor guest bedroom. Between us was a heavy wooden door separating the living quarters on the first floor and the stairway to the upper floor. I called the DCM in Algiers, Lew Hoffacker, and told him what was happening. He wished me good luck; that is all. I feared that the door would be knocked down. I didn't think that I would be killed, because the rioters were FLN-led and I thought that I knew the local party well enough to be spared, although mistreatment was not out of the question. I remember drinking 3/4 of a bottle of cognac--probably in fifteen minutes. It didn't help; I was stone sober. After fifteen minutes or so, the police came and cleared the crowd out of the building. The door had held.

I called Lew Hoffacker again and told him that I was safe and that I was going to bed. I can still remember how dry my mouth felt at that moment from drinking the cognac. The next morning, the Governor of Constantine province called me in and told me that he could no longer guarantee my safety, even though the Consulate was just two buildings away from his offices. The police station--and the prison--was right across the street from us. That made it evident that no action against us could have taken place without the consent of the Algerian government. I am sure that the Algerian government just wanted our presence out of Constantine. That night I drove to Algiers--all night. I arrived early in the morning and went to the Chancery where I was met by Lew Hoffacker, who was shocked to see me. I learned later of a story that I had been carried out of the Consulate on a stretcher.

What I didn't know until I got to Algiers was that the night I reported to Lew Hoffacker and he wished me luck, all hell had broken out in the capital as well as in Constantine. Almost all of the official American community had been evacuated that night. The Embassy staff had burned all classified material in barrels that were on the roof top. The Embassy was situated on a hill. When the fires were started in the barrels, they looked like Roman candles. Algerians downtown thought that the Chancery was on fire. That stopped the mob from marching on the Embassy--since it was already on fire.

The next day the papers reported that the American Ambassador had departed, leaving the impression that the US had left Algeria. Ambassadors don't go "down with the ship;" their departures are political statements. In a strange way, the news of the Ambassador's departure somewhat shielded the Americans who were still in Algiers. In fact, the Swiss flag was hoisted

over the Chancery, where it remained for several years.

While in Constantine, we were getting a lot of information about Algerian party politics. Colonel Boumedienne was the President after his coup of 1965. I reported frequently on the political situation in the different regions in my area. At the time, we didn't know very much about these regions. As I mentioned, I would travel to the major towns and report on what I observed and heard, to give Washington a taste of what was happening in some of the "hinterlands" of Algeria. My reporting was mostly journalistic with generally little impact on US policy. I do not remember any riots or disorder in eastern Algeria during the time I was there, until the "Six Day War". Constantine thought that it was the center of the Algerian people--the "grass roots" and the heart of the revolution. In Constantine, they thought that the revolution had been captured by "outsiders" --e.g. Boumedienne--who did not represent the real Algerian people. Within the FLN there was a split between the so-called "insiders" and the "outsiders." The insiders spent the revolution as guerrillas in Algeria; the outsiders were located in neighboring Tunis and Morocco. I never guessed that Algeria would be torn apart by religion and politics as is the case today.

From 1967-1968, I served as a consular officer in Algiers, devoting much of my time to assisting the remaining American community. US oil companies had remained. I also did a little political reporting. I should note that only a few officers stayed in Algiers after our flag came down. I think the Algerians limited us to only five officers in the Interests Section in addition to one officer from each of the former constituent posts, Oran and Constantine.

The situation in Algiers was tense for a couple of months after Algeria broke diplomatic, although not consular relations. We tended to stay close to our homes, maintaining a low profile. After that initial period, things calmed down and we did wander away from our homes. As the Algerians learned more about the "Six Day War", they showed an increasing disillusionment with the Egyptians. They were quite angry at Egypt. We heard a lot of negative comments about Nasser, although that was not what was said officially or in the controlled press. We were limited in our ability to travel; in fact, controls had already been placed on us before the war. Algeria remained a police state.

Lew Hoffacker was left in charge of the Interest Section of the Swiss Embassy. He ran it with great skill and understanding. The Residence was open to the remaining small staff--the "hard" core. The staff became very close. One of us pulled duty every night; the Marine guards had been evacuated so one of the remaining staff had to stay in the Chancery each night. This duty officer had to make hourly rounds to make sure that everything was in order. We were all pretty well tired out by the time we left Algeria.

The Swiss served as hosts on a couple of social occasions. I remember the Swiss Ambassador playing the piano at one of these occasions--the "Stars and Stripes" at that. He was a very warm and nice gentleman. But essentially, the Swiss, despite being the protecting power, left us pretty much alone. Any representations to the Foreign Ministry had to be made by the Swiss on our behalf.

The American oil people, whom I mentioned earlier, were not subjected to any harassment. They were stationed in the desert and focused on oil. As I said, the situation stabilized soon after the

riots and normalcy returned. Algeria did not change very much after the "Six Day War." American investment was still welcomed and the projects that had been started were permitted to continue. Religious fundamentalism was not an issue at the time, beyond the importance of mosques for the Algerian psyche that I noted earlier. What is happening in Algeria today is a total surprise to me; there were absolutely no indications of the bloody instability that was to follow twenty years later. It is true that while I was in Algeria, there was still considerable instability. Ben Bella was overthrown only about a year before I arrived. Algerians were still trying to find their way.

The Algerians had confiscated a lot of French property. That was a major issue between the two countries. The Algerians began to market their own wine--from grapes grown on former French property. Some of it was pretty good. We could eat well in Algiers; the French influence was not totally eliminated. The last nine months in Algiers were greatly enhanced by the return of my family.

*Q: You left Algiers in 1968. Where did you want to go and what happened?*

**EDWARD L. PECK**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Oran (1966-1969)**

*Edward L. Peck was born in Los Angeles, California in 1929. As a Foreign Service officer, he was posted to Algeria, Sweden, Morocco, Tunisia, Washington, DC, Egypt, Iraq, and Mauritania. He was interviewed in 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: Well, then, from there you went to Oran as principal officer, Oran in Morocco.*

PECK: No, Algeria.

*Q: I mean Algeria. From 1966 to '69. Did we have a post in Oran --*

PECK: '68.

*Q: '68. What did we have at post in Oran?*

PECK: Well, if you look at the map, Oran is roughly halfway between the Moroccan border and Algiers. It was the capital of a region called the Oranie in French days, still called that today. That was the first assignment -- no, actually it was the second assignment I ever manufactured for myself. The first one was language training. The second one was Oran. Because when I was on home leave from Tunisia -- I had home leave and return orders -- I discovered that the fellow who had been evacuated from Oran had not been replaced, and within twenty-four hours I got myself paneled into that job. There were four Americans stationed there: two at the USIS post, two at the consulate. It was there as a listening post. It was a political reporting post.

*Q: What were you listening to?*

PECK: Internal and external affairs, mostly focusing on internal. Oran was far enough away and was different enough that a lot of the things that were going on in Algiers were viewed differently and were happening differently in Oran.

*Q: Could you describe the situation in Algiers in 1966?*

PECK: The country had been independent for three and a half years. The government was still trying to consolidate its hold. The guys who'd fought the war had only recently been disbanded. The army had come in from its bases in Morocco and Tunisia. They had not fought in the war, but they'd taken over the country: trying to set up institutions, trying to establish control, trying to punish wrongdoers, trying to reward the militants. All kinds of turmoil and chaos in this potentially very wealthy country. Still recovering from a very bloody war in which some say up to a million people perished, and in which their hundred and sixty years of French history had been destroyed. The French people had pulled out in the hundreds of thousands.

So the post was there in a lovely French townhouse on the cliff overlooking the Bay of Oran to listen and to report. You could not travel freely in the country in that day, maybe not even today. You had to have permission issued in advance. The local governors -- certainly the one in Oran -- sort of ruled independent fiefdoms, sheikdoms, if you will. The post was there and is still there to observe and report. It does far less reporting now. There was enough difference, Stu, so that on a couple of occasions the embassy chastised me for reporting things from Oran which were not in step with embassy reporting.

*Q: Well, what were American interests in Algeria at that time?*

PECK: What are American interests in any country? Algeria still had -- at that time -- a very prominent role in the third world. You will recall that President Kennedy, who of course was dead by then, had spoken out in support of Algerian independence when he was a Senator, which the Algerians never forgot. In fact the first president of Algeria, Ahmed Ben-Bella, had come to meet President Kennedy when independence came, and then he went right on to Cuba -- which was a serious mistake -- to meet Castro.

So we had interests in how are they doing, what are they doing. It was also a petroleum-producing country. There were major American interests there in petroleum exploration and in the natural gas liquefaction plants. That was at Arzew, very near Oran. We had the standard interests that we had with every country, plus the fact that Algeria was a fairly large, fairly populous, newly independent place in which we wanted to make sure that we were able to maintain good relations and know what was going on.

Oran was sometimes a thorn in the embassy's side because they would report something on the incredible power and control of the party, the FLN in Algiers, and then I would report from Oran that the party's activities were at best of secondary importance, because it was being run by the Prefet.

Q: *Prefet is P-R-E-F-E--*

PECK: T. He is the governor -- it's like the provincial governor. I was able to document my case on a couple of occasions, but I had a little trouble with the political counselor in particular, Fred Galanto, because my reporting didn't fit squarely with theirs. He didn't like that so much, I kept telling him, "Look, it's two different parts of the same country. You know, there are differences."

In 1967, June, there was a war between the Arabs and the Israelis. Almost all the Arabs, including the Algerians broke diplomatic relations with the U.S. The consulate building, which was two-thirds my house and one-third the office, was besieged thirteen times by mobs. I evacuated all the Americans, including my wife and two children, stayed on, put up the Swiss flag, closed the post, drove to Algiers through -- I don't know -- twenty-six road blocks, and stayed in Algiers for five months while my wife and children were first in Spain and then in England. Then I went back with my family and reopened the post, initially under the Swiss flag, for the remaining eight months of my assignment. By that time, Fred Galanto was the acting DCM, and Lou Hoffacker, who had been the DCM, was the Chargé.

Q: *Do you feel that there is an effort on the part -- using Algeria as a specific -- of a part of the embassy to try to rationalize unrational areas? In other words, in political appointees -- say this is all part of a piece, whereas they're really reporting from the capital, and constituent posts are reporting from a different perspective.*

PECK: Well, this is exactly the point which came to a head when -- there were two consulates in Algeria. One was at Constantine, the other was in Oran. When the war broke and relations were terminated, the two consuls evacuated everybody and themselves came to Algiers where they stayed. Embassy Algiers took the position that the two posts should be permanently closed, and recommended that step to the Department in a telegram.

Washington said, "No, we're going to keep them."

Embassy Algiers went in with a second message, with eight reasons why the two posts should be closed forever because they served no useful purpose and also were a bother.

Washington came back and said again, "No, we're going to keep them."

Embassy Algiers then did an airgram which went by mail, which the two consuls were forced to clear, listing in great detail the reasons why the posts should be closed.

Washington came back with a great long list and said, "No, we're going to keep them open."  
[Laughter]

Q: *Well, let me ask you, on the airgram, where you allowed to -- did you have to sign off?*

PECK: I signed. In those days we cleared "in substance" or "in draft." There should have been a third clearance called "in extremis." You know, "The boss wrote this, what do you think of it?"

"Oh, it's great. It's just great." I signed, what could I do?

The DCM/Chargé wanted to close the posts for a lot of reasons. (Constantine later closed forever; Oran has stayed open.)

The difficulties were that the Embassy felt embarrassed -- if that's the word -- when it would report something, the overwhelming control and power of the party, for example, and then I would come in from Oran and say not so. One of the things that the Chargé and the acting DCM said to me, after I was in Algiers with Oran temporarily closed, was "Look Ed, let's be honest. Anything that's happening in Oran can be reported from Algiers."

I made another one of those great mistakes, saying "Perfectly true. Let's go a step farther. Anything that happens in Algiers can be reported from Paris."

Which pissed them both off, I fear, instead of making the point. In fact, anything happening in Paris could be read out of the newspaper. From that perspective, who the hell needs a post anywhere? You know, I shouldn't have said that, but it's perfectly correct. The embassy was constantly hammering on the two consulates to travel more. Fred Galanto once said to me, very pointedly, "You cannot report what's happening in the Oranie just from Oran."

"Yeah, if that's true, Fred, it also applies to the capital city, doesn't it? Things happening in Algeria you report from Algiers, okay?" But he missed the point. I perhaps could have been less contentious, but I felt that what I had to do was report it the way I saw it, and let the people in Washington work out the realities.

The embassy reported, as an illustration, that a very, very senior person in the party was going to make a swing through the country, going to four places to put out the party line. Well, he came to Oran, and the meeting was held in the Opera, built by the French. I went to that meeting. I dressed myself inconspicuously and went and sat in the audience.

When the meeting started, that fellow from Algiers got up to the microphone, wearing a cape, for God's sake, and was haranguing the audience in half French, half Arabic.

About ten minutes into this speech, the Prefet arrived. He walked out and clomped very noisily across the stage to his chair and sat down, and then shifted his chair around a couple of times and then sat there, while the distracted speaker was speaking. Two minutes later the Prefet got up, went to the rostrum, and moved the microphone farther away from the speaker. Looked at the result, nodded and smiled, and went back and sat down. I thought, now that's a demonstration of what I'm trying to tell you from out here. The Prefet later got up and left, clomp, clomp, clomp, when the guy was halfway through his speech. Hey, there's the message. Down here, it's the Prefet. It ain't that party hack.

That is what I saw and what I reported. I thought it sort of put my other reporting into very clear, visible perspective. The embassy did not like it at all. [Laughter] So, see I made another mistake. I titled my report on that incident "The FLN in Oran: Dynamic Apathy in Action." Didn't need to do that. Didn't need to do that. That was a gratuitous kick in the shins, to say, hey, you guys, in



Algiers, read this.

**LAURENT E. MORIN**  
**Economic Officer**  
**Algiers (1967-1970)**

*Laurent E. Morin was born in Augusta, Maine in 1920. He was posted as a Foreign Service officer to Algeria, France, Japan, Washington, DC, and Iraq. Mr. Morin was interviewed in 1992 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

MORIN: I went back to Algiers instead. There I found a tremendous contrast to what it had been. Here it was a complete Algerian society where it had been completely French before.

Q: *You were there from 1967-70. What was your job?*

MORIN: I was economic officer, but also the number two there. We were small and limited by the Algerians. We were a section of the Swiss Embassy.

Q: *This was because of the 1967 war with Israel.*

MORIN: Yes, most of the Arab states broke relations with us then.

We were assigned to the Swiss Embassy. We had a limited number of people. I think it was 5 or 6 officers. So we all did everything. The Swiss flag flew over our Embassy. We had letters of protection from the Swiss Ambassador pasted on our houses. When we had any formal contacts with the Algerian government, diplomatic notes, etc., they all had to be done by or through the Swiss Ambassador. The Swiss charged us for everything. This kind of service was very expensive.

So we had to go down and brief the Swiss Ambassador about problems. Once in a while our position was in conflict with his. For example, we had a plane that came down in the middle of the Sahara. It was American-owned, Swiss chartered, running guns to Biafra. There were problems over who controlled the plane and who was responsible for the jailed crew. Anyway, he represented our side but had his own interests.

I hadn't been there very long when the three of us, the boss, Lew Hoffacker; Fred Galanto, the political officer, and myself met with the Foreign Office people for the first time after the 1967 break. It was at one of their homes, a private home. We slipped in and talked to them about where do we go from here. It grew from then on. We never went to top official functions, but we had many contacts lower down.

Q: *What was your impression of the Algerian government at the time?*

MORIN: At that time they had been flirting with the Soviets, but they didn't have much use for

them. They were looking to us more and more all the time for high technology. The Soviet programs were irrigation ditches and such. The Soviets and the Romanians had both given assistance with oil drilling equipment and wells. Interestingly enough, the Soviet well drillers would take so many hours to go down so many feet. The Romanians could better them by about 10% or so and we bettered them by about 100%. Some of our stuff was so much superior that the Algerian didn't mess around with the Soviet stuff if they could avoid it.

Then they had contracts during my time, with El Paso for natural gas development. We sold them Boeings which was quite an achievement. There was a chemical factory that was going to be built. This was all at the beginning of the period after 1967 when they were coming back to the Americans for technology. Eventually after a few years they did renew relations with us. But we had three governments that were without diplomatic relations...the Germans, British and ourselves all had Swiss flags. So everywhere you went around the city you saw these Swiss flags.

One day I got a call from the Foreign Office. The protocol chief said that their UN ambassador was on his honeymoon somewhere down on an island near Florida, and he was hit by a wave and knocked unconscious and was in a permanent coma. They wanted our help in getting him back. I said I would look into it. I got a hold of Washington and we engineered an arrangement where an American medical plane that was returning to Germany would come by Algeria and drop him off on the way. So it did. They brought his wife and all their belongings as well.

So the plane is coming into the Algiers airport and the whole upper crust of the Foreign Office, who are all his friends, including the Chief of Protocol, are there. I am there watching the plane come in. A big magnificent C-130 with the first American markings seen in Algiers since the 1967 war. A couple of crewmen jump out and scurry around. I called up and asked the captain if he would come down. Sure, he would come down. All these Algerians are watching. Down he comes, a big, black impressive guy who looked like General Powell.

I should have introduced this by saying that the Algerians are very racist. They were stunned to see a black man in a position of authority, this just didn't happen in Algeria.

I knew the diplomats at the African embassies. They used to tell me stories about being discriminated against all the time. Buses would pull away without them, they'd be turned away at night clubs, and that sort of thing. Algeria is actually 10% black because the black/white line crosses the middle of the Sahara, but the blacks are way down the totem pole.

A large crowd had gathered by this time. The crew was in effect given the keys to the city but they didn't have time to stay for anything except for lunch. But as they left there was a large crowd of people...from government and elsewhere. The plane started off, and as you know those planes are built for short fields and get airborne very quickly. I could hear the gasps around me as this fantastic machine took off.

At the same time Algeria was trying to make friends with the rest of Africa or show its strength, or something. They hosted one of those Pan-African Congresses in Algiers. We got very much involved in that. The city was full of reporters and all that. One interesting thing was that

American blacks were invited as Africans. There were two groups, the Eldridge Cleaver group and the Stokely Carmichael group which were opponents. They put one group in the St. George and the other in the Aletti downtown to keep them apart.

I was down in a store one day and heard American voices around the corner and went over to them. There were three black girls, young. I talked to them and told them who I was. I was Chargé at that time. They said, "Oh, maybe you can help us." I said, "Sure." They said that Eldridge and his group wanted to have a place where they could meet and could I help them. I said, "Sure, I'll give you a meeting room up at the Embassy. You can use the theater if you want." (This was an outlying structure across the road.) They said that would be wonderful. I said that I would send my vice-consul, Conrad Drescher, a young hippie type, down to talk with them.

He went down to see them and reported back, "Gee, the girls were all for it, but these guys turned their backs when I walked in." The girls said that they had talked it over and it wouldn't be appropriate for them to meet at the Embassy. I never thought they would come when I made the offer.

*Q: For the record, both these groups, Carmichael and Cleaver, at that time were considered militant blacks who were taking the line of the 1960s against the United States as an imperialist power.*

MORIN: Some of them were refugees from justice. A couple of them had hijacked a plane to get to Cuba. They disliked Cuba. They went around the world and found that there is more prejudice against blacks in most countries than in the US, and Algeria was one example.

Eldridge Cleaver and his group stayed around for a while, in fact a year or so. Then they went on to North Korea, I think. But we had a lot of contact with them. In the first place Cleaver had a baby and had the papers made out to register it American. One couple had...these people were pretty sad, they were actually refugees from justice. They were the ones who had hijacked the plane. They had a baby that was not doing well at all and could not get any treatment in Algeria. They wanted to take it back home where its grandparents could take it over. They couldn't go home, as they would be arrested. So what happened was that Conrad made arrangements to have a stewardess from Air France take the baby to Paris and then pass it along until the baby got back to grandma.

Mrs. Cleaver, Kathy, was a Foreign Service brat. Her father was an senior AID officer. One day he came up to Algiers looking for the "kids" and came to the Embassy. He wanted to know where they were hiding out. I said that they weren't hiding out, we knew where they were and I would gladly give him a car and driver to go see them. He said that Kathleen was very difficult. When she grew up he didn't know what to do with her.

We had a Thanksgiving dinner for local Americans about that time, open house for all Americans. Eldridge came with two or three of his people. He was personable. We had a lot of southerners in the oil fields, and their women were playing up to him...Mr. Cleaver this and Mr. Cleaver that. He was lapping it up. He stayed around for a while but the Algerians treated him

badly.

*Q: Tell me something about the Algerians. I have heard that they are sort of a special Arab people. How would you characterize them?*

MORIN: They are like Lebanese. The reason is because they had a heavy dose of French culture. French culture and Arab culture are a heady mix. They are very oriented towards France despite all the troubles they've had with the French. When Algerians said they were going abroad, they meant France. French television programs were carried in Algeria. The Algerian television service showed most of its programs in French, more than in Arabic. The main newspaper, the party paper, El Moujahid, despite its Arabic title, was actually printed in French. The University of Algiers was no longer in the French university system, but continued much as it did before with French teachers. France's largest aid program was in Algeria. They had 10,000 cooperants in Algeria. The countries were very close even despite this bad blood between them.

Of course you have thousands, maybe millions, of Algerians living in France right now. There seems to be a backlash against them in France at the moment. The French brought them up because they would do jobs that the French wouldn't do, and now they are unhappy with them. For a long while they wouldn't let women up, their wives. I don't know if that's changed or not. But when these poor slob came back to Algiers, they were shaken down for all their money at customs. They had to turn everything into Algerian dinars. They got mistreated at both ends.

**ARTHUR L. LOWRIE**  
**Algeria Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1968-1972)**

*Arthur L. Lowrie served in U.S. Air Force during the Korean War. He graduated from Allegheny College with a degree in international relations and studied at the Graduate Institute of International Studies in Geneva, Switzerland. In addition to serving on the Algeria Desk, Mr. Lowrie served in Syria, the Sudan, Tunis, Iraq, and Egypt. He was interviewed by Patricia Lessard and Theodore Lowrie on December 23, 1989.*

LOWRIE: After 18 months I got the Algerian Desk which was my first and only operational assignment in Washington. I spent an extremely interesting three years involved with different parts of the Government and corporate America regarding the huge contract between El Paso Natural Gas Company and Algeria for the importation over a 20-year period of liquefied natural gas into the United States. The Federal Power Commission had to be convinced not only of the economic feasibility of the project, but the political reliability of the Algerian government. Not an easy task given the fact that the Algerian government had not yet established much of a track record, having been independent only eight years. Again in this tour I had the opportunity to work with one of the finest Foreign Service Officers I've known, Jim Blake, who was the Director of the Office of North African Affairs. He had objectivity and intellectual integrity. What particularly endeared him to me was his frankness in personal dealings, not a characteristic

which all Foreign Service Officers possess. That office, by the way, was one of the best in the Department. We had Frank Wisner on the Tunisia Desk, Rocky Suddarth on the Libya Desk, Paul Hare on the Morocco Desk and Dick Jackson on the Sudan, all of whom went on to become Ambassadors. One other aspect of the Algerian Desk job was, as I mentioned, dealing with corporate America at a very high level; the head of El Paso, the top executives of Boeing, and people like Clark Clifford and Paul Warnke who the Algerians had hired.

**PHILIP C. BROWN**  
**Branch Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Algiers (1970-1972)**

*Mr. Brown was born in Massachusetts and raised primarily in Pennsylvania. He was educated at College of Wooster (Ohio) and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. After serving with the Voice of America, in 1965 he joined the United States Information Agency Foreign Service (USIS), where he served several assignments at its headquarters in Washington DC. His foreign posts include Dakar, Douala, Yaoundé, Paris, Vienna and Moscow, where he served twice. At these posts his assignments ranged from Assistant Branch Public Affairs Officer to Counselor for Information, Press and Cultural Affairs. Mr. Brown was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2012.*

*Q: Let's talk about Algeria. At the time you went there, this was 1970, wasn't it?*

BROWN: Yes.

*Q: What was the situation in Algeria?*

BROWN: The situation was tense. I went ahead to Paris, to consultations in Paris. Consultations were a wonderful way to spend a couple days in a place like Paris. My wife and daughters linked up with me there and we flew two hours to Algiers. No one met us at the airport. Apparently communications had failed and so we got a taxi, took it to the embassy and announced ourselves. I'm not sure how we managed with four people and luggage but our self-sufficiency impressed the people at the embassy.

We called it the embassy but we had a very unusual situation there. We were the Americans Interest Section of the Swiss Embassy. To back up a bit, in the early 1960s, the Algerians were struggling for independence in a bloody war against the French. No one had spoken out more on their behalf than President Kennedy. He was very moved by their struggle for independence and so there was a great feeling of gratitude towards the United States.

But by 1967 and the Six Day War, Algeria followed many Arab nations in breaking diplomatic relations with the United States. They broke diplomatic relations with the United States but they still wanted to have relations; they wanted to have it both ways. We accommodated them because it was in our interest to have a presence there.

If you go back to that earlier period, the '50s and '60s, the oil and gas industry had a thriving relationship with the Algerians and many young Algerian men went off to the United States, particularly to Oklahoma and Texas, to study oil and gas technology. Many of them, incidentally, returned with American brides.

And we had a presence in other ways. After Algeria became independent in 1962, we had a library or cultural center. But by the time I arrived, 1970, we were flying the Swiss flag. It is the only country where I served where I never met my ambassador. We never really had contact with the Swiss Embassy. We were the American Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy.

The Algerians had this schizophrenic relationship toward the United States. If you read the public newspapers, especially *El Moudjahid*, which was their daily newspaper, what was there for public consumption was that we were a capitalist exploiting nation, terrible race relations, Vietnam, anything that they could pin on us they did. Their president, Houari Boumedienne, had very close relations with the Soviet Union; close economic and other ties. When they were talking to us in that vein, the head of our mission there was the *Chef du Service*, chief of service, chief of the American Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy.

But they were equally interested in loans from the Export Import Bank. They wanted to sell natural gas. El Paso Natural Gas had a big presence in Algeria and the Algerians wanted good economic relations with us so when they addressed us in those terms, my boss, the head of the interest section became the Chargé. He was accorded that honor.

That reflected things overall. They wanted to have it both ways. For public consumption, they wanted to appear very much at odds with the United States politically and to be seen as cozying up to the Soviets. But behind the scenes, they wanted money, loans, technology and exports.

*Q: You say student relations were going on then?*

BROWN: I was the cultural affairs officer. There were two USIS positions in a very small mission and one of the things I was charged with doing was renewing a scholarship program. I must have worked for the better part of two years to send something like six or eight Algerians to the United States on full scholarships. I cannot recall the details now. That sounds so small but it was symbolically so important and bureaucratically so laborious that it took the better part of two years to get these guys recruited, all the processing completed to send them off to the United States. It had symbolic value; it was the direction we were trying to go.

*Q: You were located in the city of Algiers.*

BROWN: We lived right down the street from the building that I believe had always been the American Embassy. It was not an office building. It was a rather attractive, small villa and it was just down the hill from the ambassador's residence named 'Montfeld'. Montfeld was a beautiful villa overlooking the sea with a swimming pool, tennis courts. The embassy complex also included land across the street, a little compound that had a snack bar, school and that kind of thing. The house that we lived in was in easy walking distance.

The head of the Interest Section when I arrived was a man named William Eagleton, Bill Eagleton, quite well known at that time in Middle East. He had spent almost his entire career there and he went on to spend quite a bit of time, I believe, in Syria and other places in the Middle East. He had a wonderful collection of Middle Eastern artifacts, particularly rugs. I think he even wrote a book on rugs. Bill and his new wife Kay were very cordial, very friendly with my wife and me and our children.

At work, we had a daily meeting in Bill Eagleton's office. No more than eight people, virtually the entire staff, attended that meeting. More than once in our earlier sessions, I talked about what constitutes a good or a bad assignment for a relatively junior person. I had been overseas now for four years but was still relatively junior. This was a perfect example of a really good assignment being a small mission where the stakes are not that high but you see the whole operation from soup to nuts.

A bad assignment is one of those big Western European assignments, Paris, Bonn, Rome. Every day in Algiers, I went to the staff meeting with Bill Eagleton; the political officer, a fellow named Fred Galanto; the economic officer, Bill Keller; the commercial officer; a station chief; the head of the consular section, Richard Castrodale; the PAO, David Burns; the admin officer, Oscar Reynolds, and myself. The fact that I can remember many of their names now 42 years later says what an indelible impression it made on me.

We met every day. We talked about what was on the docket. Bill Eagleton would quip that each day, we were "one day closer to restoration of full diplomatic relations." The meeting didn't last more than 20 or 30 minutes but it exposed me to the entire gamut of embassy operations.

*Q: As the cultural officer, what did this mean for you?*

BROWN: Aside from the scholarship program I spoke about, we had did have the occasional opportunity to bring in performing artists. We relied on the office in Paris that could recruit American talent living in Europe and send them out. I developed a working relationship with an Algerian named Mr. Bel Hadj who ran a little theater, a performing arts venue downtown. We could bring programs there. We could bring folk singers and other kinds of performing artists there.

We also had the occasional speaker. Again, this was still that Apollo space period I mentioned in Cameroon.

There wasn't an information officer because there wasn't that much you could do with the press and media but if we did have a visitor, we would try to expose him to at least the cultural writers and whatever in the news media.

As an example of the type of program we were involved in, I accompanied a man named Donald Bullard, a retired American with many years of experience in international educational exchange. He called on the directors of training and a wide cross-section of Algerian companies and ministries to learn more about their foreign training programs and to answer questions about

opportunities for training and study in the U.S.

Over a week, we probably visited 10 or 12 different Algerian companies and institutions to talk about professional training in the United States. Again, it doesn't seem like much but it was one of those openings we had. It took me not to a university or newspapers, the traditional kind of USIA contacts, but to companies and ministries.

At this distance it is hard to recall some of the other specific projects that we had except that I knew that I was fully busy and I really enjoyed the assignment.

One of the things I did a great deal of was travel. When we traveled, Washington was always interested in reports that we could write.

*Q: I think of Algeria now as there was a long period where you didn't want to get outside the compound because you'd get your throat cut by Islamic fundamentalists. This would happen to Algerians too. It wasn't that we were being particularly picked upon but what was the situation then?*

BROWN: If I had thought that was the situation, believe me, I would not have been willing to do the travel we did. No, it was a period in which the Algerians were unsmiling, perhaps fearful. We always contrasted them with the Moroccans and the Tunisians who were much more hospitable to foreigners, who had received their independence through a normal transition process rather than through a war. The Algerians seemed to be an angry, inhospitable people but I never really felt that I was going to get my throat cut. My wife and two small children often traveled with me.

*Q: One of the attributes I have heard ascribed to Algerians as opposed to Moroccans or Tunisians is dour.*

BROWN: Yes, dour would be a good word. I think they were also scared of their own government. They were scared of the implications of having too close contact. In that respect, Algeria was good preparation for my later assignments in the Soviet Union.

*Q: How long were you in Algeria?*

BROWN: Exactly two years.

*Q: What about the tribal situation there?*

BROWN: We never referred to it as a tribal situation such as we experienced in Cameroon where there is a multiplicity of tribes. There were the Berbers. In fact, one of the most enjoyable day trips we would take would be east from Algiers to a town called Tizi-Ouzou, up in the Kabylie Mountains. There you would meet the Berbers who were much more gaily dressed, who produced beautiful jewelry. Sometimes we called them, and I am not sure it is accurate, the Jews of North Africa. They were separate from the Arabs. They were very enterprising people. So it was just the opposite of having your throat cut. Look, you say to a visitor, do you want to go out and really have an interesting day trip? Let's go out to the Kabylie Mountains, have lunch in



some restaurant there, meet some of the people. They were extremely hospitable.

Another group of tribal people whom we really had to go a long way to see and meet were the Tuareg in southern Algeria and that gives me the opportunity to talk about one of the most interesting experiences that I had in my lifetime. It took place in Algeria.

The political officer was a fellow named Fred Galanto and at one of these morning staff meetings soon after we arrived, he said that he was going to be taking a trip in the near future way down to the south of Algeria, a tourist trip. I don't recall the circumstances, whether somebody had dropped out or what, but there was room for another person and would anyone be interested in going? I checked with my wife and got the okay.

Fred and I went off with no more than 12 or 14 people. We flew from Algiers to an oasis town called Djanet, way in the southern part of Algeria. Mind you, Algeria is one of the largest countries in Africa. At its easternmost point, it is farther east than all of Tunisia and at its westernmost point, it is west of much of Morocco. So we were way down in the very south of Algeria in the oasis town of Djanet, not too far from the border with Libya.

After a night there, we hiked up to what is called the Tassili Plateau. For a week, we hiked around this plateau. We had Tuareg guides and donkeys which carried all our supplies. We went out in search of paintings done some 5,000 to 10,000 years earlier. These were not cave paintings; they were on walls, recessed walls, not deep in caves. They were done when this area was tropical. You knew that because some of the paintings were of long-necked animals, giraffe, elephants and the like.

These beautiful paintings had been discovered only a few years earlier and had been written about in Horizon magazine of May, 1959. I have the article called "Surprise in the Sahara." A Frenchman named Henri Lhote had gone there and discovered the paintings. An artist named Georges Le Poitevin, who was part of the team, had reproduced the paintings. There was some controversy about whether reproducing them had done any damage to them. I later met Monsieur Le Poitevin. He lived west of Algiers and we bought reproductions which we still have of some of these paintings.

I say paintings. They were done by mixing crushed stone and water and they were overlaid, maybe different periods, different time periods one on top of another. Our guides wore blue so we called them our "*guides bleus*." They knew where the paintings were and could help us interpret them.

We slept out under the stars, under little overhangs in one of the most remarkable weeks I can recall. By the way, I know exactly the timing of that trip. Most of our fellow travelers were French or West Europeans and somehow we got the news, maybe someone had a shortwave radio, of the death of Charles de Gaulle. De Gaulle died November 9, 1970, so I know that I celebrated my 29<sup>th</sup> birthday (November 7) on the Tassili Plateau in southern Algeria.

*Q: How was de Gaulle viewed by Algerian colleagues?*

BROWN: For the French, this was like the death of Churchill or Roosevelt. Even if people did not admire everything about him, there was acknowledgement that he was one of the major figures of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I am not sure how the Algerian people viewed de Gaulle. We didn't talk too much about that. It was only a few years earlier that they had won a very bloody revolutionary independence from de Gaulle's France.

Back to your theme about being afraid, I never felt fear but sometimes I look back and think gee, was I naive to go off to this country with my family, small children and no security. You walked into the embassy right off the street, nobody asked any questions.

There is that very famous movie, "The Battle of Algiers," that they would show regularly. The scenes of the Casbah suggested the use of terror as we know it today. It was during this time that four airplanes were diverted to the Jordanian desert which leads me to another facet of life in Algeria.

We had a very small American community, a few business people, oil workers and a number of American women married to Algerians. We had a neighbor up the street, Eldridge Cleaver, the famous Black Panther. He represented the other side of how the Algerians dealt with the United States. They wanted to provide hospitality to Eldridge Cleaver, the Black Panthers, anything to poke their finger in our eye.

*Q: He was a fugitive of the United States.*

BROWN: Yes, he was a fugitive. He jumped bail in California and fled to Algeria via Cuba. His presence was well known. One time he came into the embassy, ostensibly for some consular business. When the consul, the poor fellow, had his back turned, Eldridge Cleaver stole or walked off with the seal. Whatever he did was terribly embarrassing. Otherwise, we weren't very conscious of Eldridge Cleaver but he was there and we were barred from contact with him..

Another incident came late in my two years in Algeria but since we are on that subject, in June of 1972, there was an American airline called Western Airlines. They were flying somewhere on the US West Coast and the plane was hijacked and can you believe it, American authorities gave in to the hijackers and they took that plane all the way across the United States, released the passengers and forced the crew to fly all the way to Algiers with \$500,000 ransom money.

One of the pilots told our political officer that this was the first time he had ever been out of the United States and here he was in Algiers. I think it was the same pilot who was flying between Seattle and Los Angeles who ended up flying this plane all the way across the United States and all the way to Algiers. That was June, 1972.

Two months later it happened again. A plane was hijacked out of Detroit en route to Miami. The hijackers demanded ransom money. The FBI provided it. There was some insistence on the part of the hijackers that the FBI people come to the plane wearing nothing but their underwear so they couldn't be hiding any weapons. The money was delivered, the plane flew on to Boston and then to Algiers.

On this occasion, I was the duty officer so I got the call. I went to my boss, Bill Eagleton, and informed him there was a plane en route. It was a Saturday, so Bill Eagleton and I decided to play tennis on the lovely clay courts at Montfeld. After each set, Bill would check, call the authorities to see where the plane was, come back out and say, “No, we’ve got time for another set.” Eventually he had to go to the airport.

In both cases, if you had read the Algerian press, you would have imagined they provided red carpet treatment to these hijackers who were fighting the American system. In fact, what they did was put them in the back of a police van and turn most of the money back over to the Americans. They didn’t provide any real encouragement to the hijackers though they did let them go.

The person who got the red carpet treatment on arrival in Algiers was the President of the Export Import Bank. He had what they were really looking for but symbolically, the plane hijackers, and there were two hijackings to Algiers, June and August of 1972, received publicity.

In the case of the second plane hijacking, I was listening to the news last year (2011) and heard that a black American had been detained in Portugal; he had been fingered by the FBI as one of the hijackers in that 1972 plane hijacking. Sure enough, this individual has since settled down in Portugal, married, has a family there but the FBI tracked him down. They are trying to get him extradited to the United States.

When I read that, I said, “That rings a bell. I remember that particular plane hijacking.”

*Q: What about the Soviet and maybe the Chinese communist presence in Algeria?*

BROWN: I have no recollection whatsoever of the Chinese presence. They probably had an embassy but I don’t recall. The Soviets yes were there and we would occasionally meet some of their officials.

*Q: Did you feel in competition?*

BROWN: Yes, I did, but that was the mentality of that period. Again, I go back to my four years in French Africa. The French were dominant. The French were not our enemies or adversaries but they were the dominant foreign power in those countries. And as a good, young, patriotic American, I looked forward to the day when the United States would be the leading influence in those countries.

Of course, today, you look at French Africa and something goes badly you think “thank goodness” the French are there to send in troops to the Ivory Coast or somewhere to try to restore stability.

Certainly in the 1970s, this was my introduction to the Cold War. We would hope that the United States would be able to replace the Soviets and their influence there. The Soviets were after a foothold in North Africa. There was a big port down at Oran where we had a consulate. We had two consulates, Constantine in the east and Oran in the west. The one in Oran had as its primary mission observing activities in the port. The Soviets would bring military vessels in there. I

wasn't directly involved but I do recall that we were very conscious of growing Soviet presence and influence.

Boumedienne would make frequent trips to the Soviet Union. Eventually, I think Boumedienne died in the Soviet Union while getting medical treatment there; if not, he died in Algeria soon after seeking medical treatment in the Soviet Union so we kind of thought he got his comeuppance.

We had to heat our in the winter. It got pretty cold and believe it or not, in this country with its great supplies of oil and natural gas, we had a coal furnace. I used to go down in the basement, throw coal into the furnace; I think some of it came from the Soviet Union, if I am not mistaken.

That's pretty much it for their presence there.

*Q: Did you have the chance to socialize with the Algerians?*

BROWN: With selected people, yes. I mentioned this man, Mr. Bel Hadj who ran the performing arts center. That's too fancy a name for it. Let's call it a cultural center. For some reason or other, he was quite comfortable working with us when we could bring in performers. Before I completed my two years there, I was able to send him to the United States on an international visitor grant. I was in the United States when he came to Princeton.

There were a number of American women married to Algerians. Remember, I said a lot of Algerians went to Oklahoma and Texas in the '50s and '60s to study oil and gas technology. These were handsome guys, good looking men who came back with American wives. Quite often these American women found that life in Algeria was not very comfortable. The man they had known in Oklahoma was not exactly the same man when they got back home; especially if they had children, it was going to be very difficult to take those children out without the husband's permission.

One couple whom we got to know very well and with whom we are still in contact were Dr. Zachary Brahmi and his wife, Fran. They now live in the US. He was not in the oil and gas field. He was a physician but we got to know them, socialized with them, went out east of Algiers to his hometown of Bejaia or Bougie. He had to be very careful and there were times when we sensed that we ought not to have contact. They and a few couples like that were windows on Algerian society.

*Q: How about the papers, the newspapers? They took pretty much an anti-American stance?*

BROWN: I am not sure we can even say papers, plural. The only one I can recall of any significance was this *El Moudjahid* which was in French.

Which leads to another subject. The Algerians thought of themselves as Arabs but French was the language. The French that I had learned in my four years in Senegal and Cameroon was all I needed really to do business in Algeria. The Algerians were importing Arab language teachers from Egypt. They just didn't have them themselves. The French language and French culture

were so strong that French was the *lingua franca*. Algerians, many of them, struggled themselves with Arabic.

*Q: The interview I did a long time ago with Dick Parker who was our ambassador there said he was at a meeting with Boumedienne, the president and his cabinet and they were talking and he very pointedly said, "You know, it is ironic that the American ambassador speaks better Arabic than you all do."*

BROWN: They were painfully aware of that. I can imagine that they might have joked about but in other circumstances they probably found it pretty awkward.

I mentioned in the past that well before I thought of doing these interviews, I prepared for my own satisfaction written summaries of my years in Africa. I am going to read three sentences from one because it goes back to that question that you asked;

"We traveled frequently. In retrospect given Algeria's recent bloody war of independence, its overt hostility toward the United States, the dawning of the era of hijacking, the lack of even basic services on many desert routes, the ages of our children and Algeria's later civil war, we made some remarkable trips. We certainly did not live behind high walls."

That was the case. We took many day trips in and around Algiers. One of the things we really loved were the Roman ruins. There were sites within an hour or two drive of Algiers where you could see wonderful Roman ruins. One of them was west of Algiers, a place called Tipaza. For others you might have to take a longer trip, to go east to the area near Constantine; Djemila and Tingad had remarkable Roman ruins.

In the fall of probably 1971, my parents-in-law came for a visit. My wife was fortunate. Her parents came to visit us when we were in Dakar, again in Yaoundé, Cameroon and a third time in Algiers. Each time it was an opportunity to take a trip so we went with them out to the east beyond Constantine, stopping to see the Roman ruins. I know it was an eye-opener for them and of course, our children loved seeing their grandparents. It was very special when my wife's parents came.

*Q: Were you dealing with the press at all?*

BROWN: No. As I say, there was really only one daily newspaper. I was a cultural affairs officer. If there had been an opportunity to deal with the press, I wouldn't have been hung up on titles but only when we had a performer, you'd try to get a little article in the newspaper about guitarist Steve Waring performing. Or he might give an interview to radio or television.

There was a black jazz player named Hal Singer who came from Paris. I remember my children called him the "singer man." Hal Singer came out on a couple of occasions. Even at that time, he must have been in his 60s, a black American who had gone to Paris because he had found the cultural scene there more hospitable. He was recruited to go out to perform in Africa.

But no, as far as dealing with the press, certainly nothing compared with what I would later do in

Paris.

*Q: Was then the equivalent of sort of the intellectuals a mirror of the French intellectual class and all?*

BROWN: There were and I can think of another couple and exactly how we got to know them I am not sure. But I can see these people, I can see their apartment, I can recall them inviting us on many occasions for dinner. They would serve elaborate Algerian meals; when we reciprocated, they would come and she would hardly eat any food. She was so slender, so conscious of her size.

There was an Algerian educated class; most of them had pretty close ties to France. If they hadn't been educated in France, they traveled there. That was their fallback position.

Were there a lot of occasions like that? No, but there were enough to give us a window on Algerian society.

On the subject of travel, I did take a lot of observation trips. The consul in Oran was a fellow named Glen Cella. Glen and I got along well. We both liked sports. We hit it off well, although we had very different backgrounds.

Glen and I decided to take a lengthy trip. These were reporting trips, go out, observe and write your report when you got back. So he came to Algiers and we headed east to make a big loop. We decided we were going to share the driving so I drove much of the first day, then Glen took over. Right away, I realized I was not particularly comfortable. I talked a little bit to Glen. He had grown up in New York City where he didn't have a car, didn't learn to drive until he was probably in his 20s.

I said, "How about I do all the driving?" He said, "Fine" and it was a wonderful accommodation. I was much more comfortable doing the driving and he was much more comfortable being a passenger.

We went east, probably stopped in Constantinople and then down into the desert into the oasis towns of Ghardaia and Laghouat. I left Glen there. He was going to take a plane to a place way down in the south called Tamanrasset and I drove back alone.

I remember very clearly that it was May first. I remember because May 1, International Labor Day, was another way in which the Algerians let their socialist or their leftist credentials be known.

So Glen Cella was a good colleague. He was replaced in Oran by a fellow named Bob Maxim. I mention that name because when we were in Dakar, Bob Maxim and his wife were in Nouakchott, Mauritania. That was the time of the Six Day War. The Mauritians broke relations with the U.S. and Bob and his wife had to pack up all their stuff, using paper towels and other things and evacuate to Dakar.

So here, four or five years later, we were going to run into them again in Algeria.

*Q: Let's pick this up again. This is Phil Brown on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February.*

BROWN: Despite the restrictions and no diplomatic relations, I felt productively busy in Algiers. I never went to work feeling bored or feeling "gee, I don't have a job here." I really thrived and it wasn't just the travel and it wasn't just sending these six or eight fellows to the United States on a scholarship program.

We lived in a marvelous house that had three different levels plus a basement and it was situated above a garden. To just get from the street up to the main living level, you must have come up 30 steps. The house was shaped like a boat. Whoever built it was probably a well-to-do Frenchman who built his house of dreams because from the top level on a clear day, you could see the mountains in the distance, you could see snow capped mountains, you could see the harbor of Algiers. This house also had a huge and dank basement where that furnace was. It also had the contents of the now-closed American Library. We had an American library in Algiers before the break of diplomatic relations.

I don't recall that I ever visited the former library but all the books were in the basement and one of the things I was able to do anytime I went out to a school or made any kind of official visit was to give away some of these books. They were in good condition. They weren't getting in any better condition but we knew if we ever reopened the library, we wouldn't be using these books so we gave away as many as possible.

*Q: What about contact with universities, colleges, academic places? Were we able to get anywhere?*

We had a Fulbright professor, a very interesting man; Elton Smith from Florida. He was, I believe, an ordained minister but he was teaching American literature. He must have been in his 60s which meant he was 30 years older than I was and a mean tennis player. I don't think I ever beat Elton Smith on the tennis court. Just when I thought I was about to finally win a set, he would grit his teeth and win. Elton Smith was replaced by a man named David Stryker. I believe they had the position of Fulbright professors of American literature.

We also had an English teaching program. On the other hand, I cannot recall any intense interaction with people at universities. It would have been more with the minister of higher education.

Not to sound defensive but it wasn't because I was not outgoing or initiative taking. We were not given that opportunity. We were not encouraged to do that. Everything had to go through the ministry. If I had gone to the faculty of American studies, if there was such a thing, directly to a dean at the university, it would have been frowned upon and he probably would have not received me. We just didn't have that kind of contact.

*Q: Were the Soviets able to do anything?*

BROWN: They probably tried but I can't imagine they were terribly successful. My guess is despite everything else, a lot of teachers, professors would have been French or French educated.

USIA had a program under which they would send out sports figures. On one memorable occasion in June of 1971, they sent out a group of basketball players headed by none other than Lew Alcindor, as he had been known up to that point. He had just changed his name to Kareem Abdul Jabbar. Seven feet two inches tall and his coach, Larry Costello of the Milwaukee Bucks. The group was also supposed to include Oscar Robinson but at the last minute, he cancelled. There was a fourth person who played pretty good basketball, I think at UCLA, a white American who in addition to being a pretty good basketball player spoke French. So they came out as a sports presentation.

Well, it was stressful. Lew Alcindor/Kareem Abdul Jabbar, was not going to take any chances at that point and start playing basketball with Algerians. He was a highly paid NBA talent and what he did was run a couple fast break drills up and down the court and he would dunk; a dunk at that time was something pretty special. Everyone oohed and aahed and that was it.

He had recently married a woman named Janice Brown. She called herself Habiba. He had become a very devout Muslim. We had a greasy spoon snack bar but Kareem Jabbar would not go near that snack bar because something might have been cooked in the same frying pan as his food was going to be cooked in.

We decided to have a reception at the ambassador's residence in his honor. He didn't want that. I can perfectly well understand why because all you were going to do was go and gawk at this man who was so tall. He finally did come, came reluctantly and didn't stay for very long.

Then the sports presentation went on to some other country. It was memorable but I am not quite sure what it did to enhance U.S.-Algerian relations.

I guess I should say a little bit more about our personal life in Algeria. Our children were small but they started school there. This was the first time they went to any sort of formal school, nursery school.

My boss was a man named David Burns. David was an avid jazz player. He went off one time on a trip and came back with a string bass instrument. He bought two seats on the airplane, one for himself and one for Mr. Bass because he didn't want to put this big stringed instrument in the hold of the airplane. I think Dave's mind was on jazz as much as anything else. His wife, Sandy, taught at the school, a dear friend with whom we are still in contact. My children looked at Mrs. Burns like an aunt. In addition to their little formal schooling, they just loved Sandy Burns. They lived not too far from us in a very nice house and they did quite a bit of representational work. We did minimal representation just because there weren't that many opportunities. We used the ambassador's residence and the PAO would host the occasional representational event.

In the summer of 1971, my sister who is 13 years younger than I am, which means at the time she was about 16 years old, was entrusted by my parents to come visit us. She had never been outside the United States. My parents took her to New York, put her on the plane. She was going



to fly from New York to Paris, Paris to Algiers. I went to the airport around mid-day to meet her. There were four flights a day from Paris.

You could stand on a deck and see people coming off the plane and I looked and I looked and I looked. My sister was not there. My parents had dropped her at the airport in New York and gone on vacation. There was a telephone strike in the United States at the time, not that telephone calls were very easy anyway. I couldn't reach them and I was distressed.

I went out to meet the second flight and the third flight of the day and still no sister. Only by chance, 24 hours later, did I decide to make one more try. I went to the airport and there was my sister. Just an example of the way things can sometimes go awry. When my parents spoke of the date, they spoke of the date she would be leaving the United States. Somehow I put that date in my head as the date she would be arriving in Algiers. If she was leaving New York on August 16<sup>th</sup>, let's say, she would arrive in Algiers August 17<sup>th</sup>. It is just a small anecdote but I mention it because today with e-mail, there would be no confusion. At that time, with our limited means of communication and a telephone strike in the United States, there was total confusion and a great deal of fear for 24 hours.

My sister came. I can remember walking with her through the Casbah of Algiers.

*Q: What was the Casbah like when you were there? I remember I have seen the movie Pepe Lomoco and*

BROWN: It fits the stereotype; narrow, twisting streets, laundry hanging out everywhere, Algerian women wearing the traditional face covering and long white attire.

*Q: Were their faces covered?*

BROWN: Yes, not everyone but these were not people influenced by the French, very traditional. There was an open market. You would see animal parts and I mean every part of the animal hanging out there. Music playing, trash in the streets, it wasn't clean. It wasn't fancy and it probably wasn't that large an area of Algiers either. It was very much that image.

I can remember going to Tunis with my wife. I am not sure what took us there. There is a little part of Tunis, Carthage perhaps, that visitors go to, known for birdcages and that kind of thing. My goodness, it was clean, well painted, everything maintained in an attractive style to please foreign visitors. The Casbah was 180 degrees different. There was no pretense, no dressing it up for visitors. It was narrow twisting streets, paint peeling but lively.

Back to the summer of 1971, when my sister came, we took another one of these memorable family trips. We drove west from Algiers, spent the night in Oran, crossed the border beyond a town called Tlemcen and into Oujda in Morocco, went to Fez for several nights. We visited the famous ruins at Volubilis where I saw mosaics for the first time. We visited Tangier, recalling that I had once been assigned there, and then we went all the way across Spain, through Seville and Cordoba, to Madrid, where I took my sister to a bull fight before we put her on a flight back to the U.S., and then on to San Sebastian to visit friends of my wife's. We came back through

Granada.

We spoke very little Spanish and I joke that we survived on three words – gazpacho, paella and sangria.

We cut costs by traveling to Europe from Spanish enclaves in North Africa. En route, we went from Ceuta past Gibraltar to Algeciras; returning, we crossed the Mediterranean from Malaga to Melilla. These were internal Spanish sailings and so our travel costs were much reduced. After a month long trip, we came back to Algiers with a lot of recreation and not too much rest but it was part of our total educational experience.

Early on in Algiers, we got a dog. We met a Frenchman who had a kennel. He was very reluctant to allow us to take the dog we immediately focused on but finally, when he realized we were going to be a good family, he let us have her.

*Q: It is dangerous to take a dog to an Arab country.*

BROWN: You would think and not a lot of people had dogs but we hadn't been there a month when we got this wonderful little black cocker spaniel whom we named 'Tar'. This was 1970 and Tar was with us for the next 15 years -- Algeria, back to the United States, the Soviet Union and eventually we buried her in the back yard in France. A much traveled member of the family.

I'm reminded that in 1972, I had a chance to go to Rome on a pouch run. For some reason, they were looking for someone to carry the diplomatic pouch to Rome. Of course, I used my free time there for a day or so to look around Rome. One of the people I was in touch with was Henry Boguslawski. I mentioned him as an American businessman when we were in Yaoundé. He came out there with ITT, International Telephone and Telegraph, installed satellite ground stations. Henry Boguslawski was Polish-American.

I learned through meeting him on this trip to Rome and then in New York that he was a fabulously wealthy man through his art collection, had an amazing life story of being arrested by the Russians during the Second World War, was freed, spent some time in Iran. I don't believe he had any children. I wish I could find out more information about him because I think his story must be a very interesting one. He has passed away. The last time we saw him was in New York in 1972, '73 period.

When I came back from that brief trip to Rome, we took another family trip within Algeria. Again I ask, was I foolhardy? Was I naïve? We drove almost 2,000 miles over eight days, just my wife and me and our two children down into the desert from one oasis to another. I have extensive notes on that trip and I would describe going from oasis X to oasis Y not really knowing whether we would see anybody along the way, hoping the road would be open, that sand wouldn't be blowing across it.

Much of the desert, by the way, was not sand. Much of it was just barren, flat, and rocky.

*Q: Was there any residue of the Foreign Legion that you ran across?*

BROWN: Not that I recall, no. What we would see would be the camel caravans. On this trip, I recall at one point stopping and there, several hundred yards off the road, was a tent and a man gesturing to us. We got out of the car and went over. He was a nomad, I guess, took us into his tent, and gave us milk to drink. I let it collect on my upper lip so it would look as though I was drinking a lot of it. He had small children running around. And then we went on our way.

The unfortunate part of that trip was that after all these years in Africa, we got careless at one point and I asked for bottled water by asking for water in a bottle. I think all they did was run some tap water into a bottle and very quickly my wife and both children were seriously ill, almost life threateningly in the case of the children, ill with diarrhea and infections.

We got back to Algiers and I thought we would get medical attention and rest there. We did go see the doctor but the kids kept getting worse and we had to evacuate them to the American Hospital in Paris. I was really at that time torn between my job and my family. I reluctantly went along to the American Hospital, got them all installed there and then turned around and came back.

This is all in the form a confession. This was not an easy point in my professional life or my personal life. I really should have spent more time with my wife and children at that hospital. But I felt that I had to get back to the office. My job was important. I was always very, very dedicated to my work. I would go in on Saturdays and this kind of stuff and I couldn't let my job not be done.

My wife and two children were in Paris for about three weeks. Her mother came out from the United States to help and they came back, my wife and two children at the end of those three weeks. We had some hard talks about priorities and that kind of thing. It was a very difficult period and it was sad that it came at the end of our six years in Africa where we had the normal ups and downs but nothing this serious. So it taught me a lesson. Happily I am still married to the same woman and my two daughters have grown up and are very happy mothers themselves. We survived it but it was a tough period.

*Q: You left there in '72?*

BROWN: 1972. One of the last things we did was sell the trusty Volkswagen straight back that we had purchased in 1966 just before we went to Africa. That car had taken us through six years, really a reliable vehicle.

Again, just another couple footnotes.

One of the most interesting American families we met during our stay in Algiers was the Malcolm Kerr family. He and his wife I think were on a Fulbright scholarship traveling through North Africa when they stayed with us. Malcolm Kerr eventually became President of the American University of Beirut; he was a very astute student of the Arab world and one of the best friends the Arab world could ever had had. He was assassinated in Beirut somewhere in 1984.

Among their children was a son named Steve, who went on to become a National Basketball Association star with the San Antonio Spurs and is still today involved in the executive part of the NBA. We knew him when he was just a little kid, running around that big house we had in Algiers.

Malcolm Kerr's father was a professor at Princeton and we saw them for the last time at Princeton which is the next stage of my life.

I was in Algeria from August 1970 to August 1972; on March 10, 1972, we had a visit from a man named Nicholas Katzenbach. He had been Attorney General under President Johnson.

*Q: He was number two in the State Department.*

BROWN: Yes, after serving as Attorney General. I don't know exactly why he came out, what brought him to Algiers, except that by that time, he was a high-level lawyer for IBM. So after meeting him at a reception, I said to myself, "Gosh, I am meeting these interesting people. I should make a note about this" and beginning March 10, 1972, I began keeping a journal. I have kept a diary virtually every day since, sometimes writing down simple memories, nothing more than that I listened to a baseball game but in other cases, making rather interesting notes about my experiences. It was all inspired by the visit of Nicholas Katzenbach.

**WALTER COLESHILL**  
**Second Secretary; Management and Consular Officer, British High Commission**  
**Algiers (1970-1973)**

*Mr. Coleshill was born and raised in the United Kingdom and worked with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Department of the British Government in London and abroad. In 1986 he married United States Foreign Service Officer Renate Zimmerman and accompanied her on several assignments in Washington and abroad. As Consular Officer in the British Government, Mr. Coleshill served in London, Accra, Alexandria, Algiers, Pretoria, Bangkok and Nairobi. He subsequently accompanied his wife on her assignments in Washington, DC, Kinshasa, Brasilia, and New Delhi. In each of these posts Mr. Coleshill held positions in the Embassy. Mr. Coleshill was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2012.*

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

COLESHILL: From June of 1970 to September of 1973.

*Q: '73. What was the situation there at that time?*

COLESHILL: Well, life was very difficult. The Algerian guerilla forces, having beaten the

French Army in 1960/62, suffered immensely as a result of the War. They achieved independence for Algeria on 5 July 1962. As a result, almost all the French, Italian, Spanish and Maltese population left Algeria. Very few Britons were left. However, in 1970 there were an enormous number of French-language-speaking Canadians in the oil and gas fields in southern Algiers. In total there were 300 Britons employed on projects such as building paper factories and over a thousand Canadians in the oil/gas industries. The problem was that Canada had no Embassy in Algeria and expected the British Embassy to provide Embassy and Consular coverage for their nationals. As the Management and Consular Officer, this produced problems for me, as I was given no staff to deal with the additional responsibilities. The absence of trained artisans in the local work force (they disappeared at Independence) made it difficult to manage the Embassy building and maintain the fabric of our staff houses.

*Q: What were relations between Great Britain and Algeria at that time?*

COLESHILL: We had diplomatic relations. We were trying to improve our commercial relations. It was difficult working alongside the Algerians as they had a brittle strain in their character and were not terribly welcoming. Virtually all aspects of Algerian commercial work had been nationalized. Even the hotel industry was under the control of a government department. As a result, negligible amount of tourism took place. Two or three cruise liners arrived but did not return because of the lack of facilities and the absence of a welcome by the authorities. I found this situation to be bizarre as Algeria is a beautiful country. The responsible government department built a series of marinas along the coast and wanted to encourage tourism. But then they took the attitude if foreigners came to Algeria to enjoy Algerian sand, sun, and sea, foreigners shall be charged high prices for the pleasure. As a result tourism never expanded.

*Q: Yes.*

COLESHILL: That was lots of money around in those days. I found the Algerians to be, unlike the Egyptians, who would smile as they stole from you. Whether stealing from you or not, the Algerians never smiled.

*Q: I've heard somebody describe the Algerians as dour.*

COLESHILL: Yes, that's correct--

*Q: Which is what you'd call the Scots?*

COLESHILL: Perhaps. I have no wish to forget the many happy moments I have spent in the company of Scotsmen and women in places around the world. However, I do recall the many occasions I have been served superb French-style food in hotels on the Mediterranean littoral from Oran to Annaba by unsmiling Algerian waiters. When traveling, I would take my coffee in a town square and enjoy the cooler evening air; I would be surrounded by, perhaps, a hundred Algerian men in drab garb drinking their coffee. There was little talk, no jokes, no smiles and no women. After a while the men would get bored and go home. It was no surprise to me that many wanted to leave their lack luster country.

*Q: Well, what were British interests in Algeria at the time?*

COLESHILL: We were interested in the liquid gas and the oil, which Algeria wanted to sell. And we were interested in building factories and infrastructure that would further develop those and other industries. .

*Q: What function were you performing there?*

COLESHILL: I was the Management and Consular Officer.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

COLESHILL: The ambassador was Sir Martin Le Queens. He was a fluent linguist. A Jersey man from the Channel Islands. He was filled with self-confidence and did not suffer fools gladly. He knew the country well from his time with the British Army and the pursuit of the German Army in 1942. Ronnie Burrows followed him. He was quiet man. I believe in his earlier life he had trained in a seminary. If memory serves, he had flown torpedo-carrying, outdated bi-planes in the gallant British Fleet Air Arm action against the German battle cruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau which, with the cruiser Prinz Eugen forced their way through the British-controlled English Channel. Mr. Burrows' aircraft was shot down in the attack on the ships. The crew of a German E-boat pulled him from the water of the Channel. He spent the remainder of the war in a German P.O.W. Camp.

*Q: Oh yes, I remember those two battle cruisers.*

*Q: Was there much residue or feeling towards Britain there from World War II by the time you got there, or had that been well gone?*

COLESHILL: Not that I noticed. The only time that would be mentioned was in Oran. If you remember, in 1940, Churchill ordered Admiral Cunningham, the Commander of the Western Mediterranean Fleet, to seek the surrender of the French Fleet at Mers-el-Kébir rather than allow the Germans to take them over. When the French Admiral refused, the British fleet opened fire against their former allies causing many deaths and casualties among the crews. It will be many years for the French collective memory of the action to be forgotten and forgiven. With one exception, the ships of the French fleet were destroyed or badly damaged.

*Q: Well no, this is a very difficult time, during the war. I remember that.*

COLESHILL: Yes.

*Q: Could you travel around? You know, later when you get up in the hills and all it became very, very dangerous.*

COLESHILL: The Algerians continued with the arrangement the French had put upon the international community when they were the colonial power. I was allowed to travel, unhindered,

only within metropolitan Algiers and perhaps 25 miles outside the city. Thereafter I had to ask permission if I wanted to travel elsewhere in the country.

*Q: Yeah, so there was --*

COLESHILL: I traveled to the west as far as the Moroccan border, or east as far as the Tunisian border. Having submitted the necessary applications, I knew if something went wrong in the community, or if I wanted to travel to Annaba, to Arzew or Oran, I could proceed without delay.

*Q: Did the Algerian equivalent to the Secret Police, follow; harass you, or anything like that?*

COLESHILL: I was never overtly aware although I suspected the Algerian watchers were present. Very occasionally a black colored vehicle would fall in behind me. They were such amateurs at the tailing procedure. So much so, I would often stop and indicate by signs the way I was going. I did not want my tail to get lost. As Kipling wrote: "It was a Great Game."

*Q: Ah.*

COLESHILL: I knew my home was bugged, as a small, white-paneled van with an antenna would be outside my residence for two or three days a week. My family accepted it. The only time I was furious was when my home in Algiers was burgled. I was away on a consular trip and my wife and my adult daughter came home from working in the Embassy to find the house in disarray. It was not a professional job as nothing of value was taken. We accepted it was the political police entering the house and looking for something they wanted. The burglary was never reported to the Algerian police or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

*Q: Did you have people in jail, you know, for traffic or various things?*

COLESHILL: I don't remember any prison or jail visits in Algeria. The probable reason was because we were off the beaten track for the popular backpackers routes. There was nearly a tragic incident where a Briton arrived with a young wife and two infants in a beat-up, bald-tired, London taxicab. He came to the Embassy and asked if we would provide him with a road map showing the route south through Algeria and on to South Africa. He was refused any help for such a perilous journey. After driving some 200 miles to the south, he eventually returned and left Algiers by road to the Moroccan border.

*Q: (laughs)*

COLESHILL: Algiers could be a fun place to be. It was here I worked closely with my opposite number, the American Consulate General. The American and British Embassies combined their operations on the staff medical field. The Americans provided the accommodation and the drugs; the British provided the staff. So, if the staff of either Embassy were sick, they went to the clinic in the American Embassy and found British staff working there. It was a splendid combined operation. We worked very closely together.

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

COLESHILL: I was there from June of 1970 to September of 1973.

*Q: Well now, the Yom Kippur War was what, '71?*

COLESHILL: Yes.

*Q: Were there repercussions back in Algiers?*

COLESHILL: Not that I can remember. We knew about the terrorist training camps that had been set up in the desert and so it is more than likely the Algerians were helping and training their Arab brothers in their struggles. Given the declared policies of the Algerian Government it would be folly to believe otherwise.

*Q: Well now, during that period was Gaddafi messing around? Was he a presence?*

COLESHILL: Other than the fact that British Forces leaving Libya, I have no recollection about the repercussions that followed the arrival of Gaddafi.

*Q: I'm not even sure when he came into power, so.*

COLESHILL: He came to power in 1969.

*Q: Well, how about with Morocco. First place, was the Polisario, had that started or was that later?*

COLESHILL: The Polisario front began, I recall, in 1969 when students began supporting the independence arrangement for the Western Sahara. The movement was supported by both the Algerian and Libyan Governments.

*Q: Well, was Tangiers where the Brits were supposed to send their remittance men?*

COLESHILL: They may have. I suppose it was the hedonistic life style in the International Zone that attracted them.

*Q: In the old days, anyway.*

*Q: Well, you left in '73?*

COLESHILL: I left Algiers in 1973 with few regrets. At FCO I was told I was going to be trained in British nationality and citizenship law, a somewhat specialized subject.

**ALLEN C. DAVIS**  
**Political Officer**



### Algiers (1970-1973)

*Ambassador Allen C. Davis was born in Tennessee in 1927. After receiving his BSFS from Georgetown University in 1956 he served in the US Navy from 1945-1953. His career has included positions in Monrovia, Moscow, Algiers, Ouagadougou, Dakar, Kinshasa, and ambassadorships in Guinea and Uganda. Ambassador Davis was interviewed by Peter Moffat on June 26, 1998.*

DAVIS: Initially, I was asked to go to South Africa as Public Affairs officer, but I asked whether that was the only opening. The Department said, "Well, there is the possibility to go to Algiers, our interest section in the Swiss Embassy since we don't have full relations with Algeria. That post needs a political officer, number two." So I went there and worked with Bill Eagleton. We flew the Swiss flag. While we were in practice, part of the Swiss Embassy, we were considerably bigger than the Swiss Embassy. We were quite remote from it, and we circulated very little of what we did through the embassy. The mission was run largely like an embassy and relationships with Algerians were surprisingly good behind the scenes. We had pretty good contacts with the foreign ministry but these were not all that direct. We went through an Algerian businessman who was a personal friend of Boumediene, the president of the country at the time. A man named Rasheed de Gazaar, who was the next door neighbor to the chief of the interest section, Bill Eagleton. It was a strange, anomalous arrangement which...

*Q: At the same time, I was the political officer in Berne, Switzerland. We would occasionally try to have some connection with what was going on down in Algiers, but we quickly learned that Bill Eagleton ran a very independent operation and didn't want us to know anything about what was going on.*

DAVIS: Bill, up until then and maybe afterward, made a very interesting career of being assigned to difficult, difficult places. I guess at various times he was our chief of interest sections in Tripoli, and Baghdad, and maybe even another one. His philosophy was that once you take the initiative and if people don't complain, press on with it. He also had very, very good relationship with the Bureau of North African and Middle Eastern Affairs. Very effectively, I thought.

*Q: What were the big issues at the time?*

DAVIS: If there was one overriding one, Peter, it was how do we go about normalizing our relationship. Flying the American flag from our mission. In other words, how do we get away from this situation in which before the rest of the world we don't have diplomatic relations.

*Q: The relations had been broken because of the '67 war?*

DAVIS: Yes. And the continuing tension over the American relationship with Israel. We had particularly interesting things happening on the economic side. If there were initiatives that eclipsed others in that field, they were attempts to work with the Algerians to complete private commercial relationships between the Algerian government and American companies for the liquefaction and transport of natural gas.

*Q: It was Boston, wasn't it?*

DAVIS: Boston was one of the main centers through which it would have been transported, but there were some others - some secondary ones. Boston, I think, was the primary one yes.

*Q: And that foundered at that time.*

DAVIS: It never happened. There was an enormous amount of effort and enthusiasm and time spent on the project and a great deal of visiting by prominent people. The head of Standard Oil came to visit us in his private plane, accompanied I think by now-Senator John Glenn, and quite possibly others who were quite prominent - working to make the thing happen. It did not happen while I was there and quite frankly after I left I kind of lost touch with what had happened. But my impression was that it never really came anywhere near the scope and importance that we envisioned in those years.

*Q: How did you find the personal relations with the prominent Algerians?*

DAVIS: Algerians were a kind of a phenomenon in that if you knew them personally and if you had something in common. They couldn't have been more cooperative and easier to get along with. For example, there was one foreign ministry official who had studied in this country and had been very, very active in student politics in America, particularly student politics of foreigners - especially Africans and Arabs. Officially, it was a tough, tough place to work. While this didn't happen while I was there, I think it throws a pretty good light on the attitudes and behavior, particularly, of Algerians.

The person who was foreign minister while I was there was Bouteflika. Bouteflika had a well-deserved reputation for being extremely prickly and difficult and quick-witted and tricky. Certainly, in his relationships with us. I believe the ambassador's name was Jernegan, who was there before Eagleton and maybe once removed before Eagleton ... I can't be sure because Bouteflika was foreign minister for a very long time.

Jernegan went to the foreign ministry and during the course of the meeting with Bouteflika, Jernegan was told something that was so patently absurd that Jernegan, whose French I can't judge because I never heard him speak it or know anybody who could evaluate it. I think he spoke pretty good French. He said in French what I guess literally translated in English would be "Mr. Foreign Minister, you can't be serious." I guess would be literally how we would say it. But anyway, he said to Bouteflika "*Vous n'êtes pas sérieux [French: You can't be serious.]*." And Bouteflika, who spoke very, very good English, must have known - could not have been misled - must have known that what he meant was "You're probably kidding me a little bit, Mr. Foreign Minister?" But Bouteflika took that to mean "You're a clown, or you're not a serious person." And so he asked our ambassador to leave his office, and when he got back to his office at the chancery, Ambassador Jernegan was requested to come back to the foreign ministry and to apologize to Bouteflika for saying "But Mr. Foreign Minister, *Vous n'êtes pas sérieux*." So I think that sort of puts in a nutshell what was going on between us both during Jernegan's time and Eagleton's time.

We had to be extremely, extremely careful. We were always walking on eggs officially. But behind the scenes we were spending long evenings in Rasheed Zegar's house being fed and wined and entertained with dancers, musicians, and the most elaborate kind of, I guess, Arab hospitality - Maghrebian hospitality. We'd get a chance to travel to neighboring countries. It was so dramatic a comparison to see the gentle nature of Moroccans and the wonderful hospitality of the Tunisians and then you'd come back across the border after having been... I'm back home again in Algeria with all these prickly, difficult people, which in some ways was understandable because of their traumatic experience with the French. Their attitudes toward foreigners and Europeans were negative, partially because of their non-aligned movement membership in which Algeria was so active. Attitudes toward the West, colonialism, and the United States were poor.

*Q: Have you been surprised by the horrors of the present situation in Algeria?*

DAVIS: Surprised in that, when I was there, Islamic extremism was not that much of an issue. In other words, it was beginning and we could see what the ramifications of it might eventually be, but the intensity and the horror of it hadn't really developed. Now, having said that, it was obvious at the time I was there that when the Algerians disagreed with each other - the degree with which they would mistreat and hurt and kill each other was limitless. One of the people we knew fairly well was a freedom fighter who was trying to carry a bomb up the steps of the post office during the time of the French. The bomb went off and blew off both of her legs. So in daily life you were in touch with people who had done the most incredible acts of cruelty and horror during the struggle with the French. So the fact that this can be happening now has its roots at least that far back - and probably further - in the struggles between the Berbers and the Islamic people who came from the East.

Near the end of my stay in Algeria, after so much effort had gone into both the economic relationship and the political relationships, Bill Eagleton was convinced that not only was it time for us to re-establish relationships but he was convinced also from what the Algerians were telling him behind the scenes and through his confidant of Boumedienne - that we could finally reestablish full diplomatic relations. Ambassador Newsom was rumored to be the American choice for the new ambassador. The Algerians had given us indications that he was acceptable. He left Washington on an official trip, and included Algeria. I'm a little bit wobbly on the exact timing here, but between the time he left Washington and arrived in Algiers, a very prominent anti-Israeli activist - I think we would have called him a terrorist and I think the Algerians and the Arab world would have simply called him a patriot - was assassinated and the finger of accusation aimed at the Israelis.

As I recall it, we didn't weigh in quite heavily enough in condemning the assassination to please the Algerians. Newsom arrived and there was a session at the foreign ministry. Eagleton and Newsom went to this meeting, and when they arrived back at the residence, they both just shook their heads. They didn't say anything. But the effort to re-establish relations had just been thwarted by the assassination.

*Q: So when did you leave Algiers?*

DAVIS: It must have been in the summer of '73 that the Department first of all asked me if I

would go to New York to work with Bill Schaufele at the mission to the United Nations as African person in the political section. I was appalled at the idea of living in New York and trying to educate three little kids. Let's face it, I didn't have the independent income or the kind of savings that made me comfortable going into such a high-octane surrounding. So I begged off and the Department gave me as a second choice an assignment to the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

I started in the fall of '73 and stayed there until late the next spring in early '74. Easily the most comfortable, pleasant year that anyone could imagine. I think there were something like 225 colonels and lieutenant colonels or people of the same rank from some other services. There were 10 civilians. I represented the Department of State as our only person there, and was treated with enormous hospitality, kindness, and with a great deal of professional and personal friendship. It was a delightful year.

**HOWARD R. SIMPSON**  
**Public Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Algiers (1972-1974)**

*Howard R. Simpson was born in 1925 and raised in Alameda, California. In 1943, he was drafted into the U.S. Army and served in the European Theater. He returned to the United States in 1945 and continued his education in California and Paris, France. Mr. Simpson joined the Foreign Service in 1951, where he served in Vietnam, Nigeria, France, and Algeria. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 10, 1994.*

SIMPSON: Well I was assigned to Algiers as a Public Affairs Officer and at that time it was an American Interests Section under the Swiss flag. It was the American Embassy building, the only difference was that we flew a Swiss flag. And we had the normal set-up as you do with any diplomatic post. And the program was very different because there was very limited access to Algerians. And the Algerians watched us very carefully. Relations, there were no diplomatic relations as such. So we had to tread a very soft line. And it was when Beumediene was President, trying to build a great socialist industrialist complex there that didn't work. But we still managed to send a certain number of Algerians to the States and I had my contacts with certain Algerian media people but mostly government media people. They were all government media people.

*Q: You know for some reason or not the Algerians have a reputation of having the most professional and skillful diplomatic services. Did you find this?*

SIMPSON: Yes, I can say, yes that's true. We went to a number of meetings with them on different subjects usually having to do with radio programs or film. Once again the Motion Picture Export Association was having problems with the Algerians, the Algerian government in relation to American film imports there and I'd sat in on a number of these meetings. And you're right, the professionalism was much different than a lot of African countries. They had the

French polish on top of their own abilities. And they did very well. It was a time of growing terrorism, coming up as a real threat all over.

*Q: We're talking about all over the world, PLO, Red Army, Badar Mein Hauf gang in Germany, the Japanese Red Army, etc., etc.*

SIMPSON: And the Algerians, as far as security for our establishment for the Embassy there, were very good and seemed to have a very good line on everything and kept us informed. I didn't travel, we were allowed to travel, but I didn't travel much because everything was centered more or less in Algiers. And a lot of people, a lot of Foreign Service Officers didn't realize that in a way Algiers, despite no diplomatic relations, was a little gem of its own. I had officers come from Tunis, come over for the weekend or come on business. And I'd take them to lunch at the Algiers Yacht Club which is down in the harbor, a beautiful old 1930's building, that the French had built of course, and that the Algerians had taken over. And where the menu, Rougé Brillet, and Rosé Wine and all that and it was just like in the old days. And it was being used by, there were yachts there, Algerian yachts, but there were mainly Algerian businessmen who used it as a lunch time spot. You had to drive through the Naval base to get there and when I think back it was amusing, because you could drive by, of course we had CD cars. But the Navy security was not the greatest.

*Q: Who was running the Interests Section at that time?*

SIMPSON: Bill Eagleton was the Chief of the Interests Section and Bob Pelletreau was the political officer. And at one point when Bill had to go off for quite some time I, being the senior officer after him, was acting Chargé d'Affaires but Pelletreau ran the political section and the contacts there. And it was ah, the embassy was well located, it's still the same place, I'm sure in the old building, but it's above the hills overlooking the city, with a pool and a view of the bay.

*Q: What was our impression of Boumedienne and his drive towards having a socialized economy?*

SIMPSON: Well I think, our operation was mainly a sort of a holding operation till diplomatic relations returned. At the same time it was a reporting operation where we tried to keep track of everything that was going on in the country. Particularly of Algerian contact with other nations, particularly, you know, the communist bloc nations, even the Black Panthers were there, Cleaver's crowd. And I'm just trying to think. There were many Eastern Europeans that we used to run into in all the hotels all the time. But we also spent a lot of time, as much time as possible, with Algerians who were in business or in government business who had a lot of foreign contacts. Whose job it was to go out of Algeria, make contacts, and make deals and they were more open to talking to Americans than the average. Because most of the government was still old ex-FLN guerrilla fighters against the French. They were still living on the old glories and the memories of the war against the French. They weren't really looking ahead and Boumedienne's great plans for building an industrial complex of course, turned out to be a disaster. But at that time he was pouring a lot of money into that and letting the great wine production centers fall apart. That could have meant a lot to the Algerian economy. Because Algerian wine has always been not bad, some of the wines from there. But unfortunately that was all jettisoned when these

farms were taken over and the emphasis was put on factories and plants to build.

*Q: Was the feeling that Algeria was in the pocket of the Soviet Union on the block, that they were using it or what?*

SIMPSON: It wasn't so much that it was in the pocket but there was a lot of influence there, there was a feeling that there was a lot of Soviet influence. That there was a lot of training of the army and what not, the Soviets were helping them, Soviet equipment. And yet the Algerians were feisty enough, and let's face it, difficult enough to maintain their own thing. So you didn't get the feeling that anybody was really telling them what to do.

*Q: People I've talked to who served in Algeria say that they're basically a rather dour people. I mean, not the livelier people of some of the other Arab states. Did you find that?*

SIMPSON: Not so much. I think it was mainly just the regime that brought that on. I mean, when you drove down near the University of Algiers, and the students outside, there'd always be police watching the students and all this sort of thing. And that put a damper on what would normally be a relaxed situation. But I've been to Algerian weddings and various feasts of different kinds. And they were quite wild affairs you know. And one of my sons-in-law is Algerian born, he's a French citizen but he's a Kabylie. And I got to know his side of the family. In a way his family is sort of typical of the torn fabric of Algerian society. His father was a doctor and became a doctor in the Foreign Legion during World War II, Algerian but still a doctor in the Foreign Legion. And then he became a doctor in the FLN, fighting the French and unfortunately for him he was captured by the same Foreign Legion regiment that he had served with in World War II. So he underwent a lot of very rough treatment and he survived that but he still talks with a certain nostalgia about the Legion. Yet they're the people who beat him up and tortured him.

*Q: What was the view of Libya at that time? I don't think Qadhafi had come in yet.*

SIMPSON: No, it's sort of, well I can't recall. Let me think about it.

*Q: What about Morocco?*

SIMPSON: Well there were little clashes on the border and the Algerian army was always moving tanks around and there would be rumors of this and rumors of that. The government-controlled press would have all these stories, you know, anti-Moroccan stories.

*Q: But the post-Syria movement hadn't really gotten on the way.*

SIMPSON: No.

*Q: What about fundamentalism?*

SIMPSON: That also, maybe it was seething under the surface but you didn't notice that at all. Once again one of the big problems there, when we were there, large numbers of youths, unemployed youths. Hanging out on the street corners of Algiers, getting into all sorts of trouble,

with nothing to do. And the idea of the regime from time-to-time was to get as many into the army as possible to control them. But there were always clashes on the campus and some confusion about which way they were going. In fact, my oldest daughter was in the French Lycee there and she and her husband-to-be got involved in a strike. And they were striking about some silly thing. The school had insisted on keeping a fence up that the students wanted down so that they could go in and have lunch in this place, in this forest nearby. And it got so bad that I had a call from somebody in the Algerian security that I had to get my daughter out of there because if they didn't shape up in the next 4 or 5 hours then they were going to send in the riot police and crack a lot of heads. And so the strike petered out. But also it meant that the last French Lycee in Algiers would be closed down. And so that was straightened out but it was sort of indicative of the atmosphere because these students were reading about things that were happening all over the world. The student protests and all that.

*Q: How about your dealings with the papers there?*

SIMPSON: Very few. The only time we dealt directly with them was when they needed something specific, a text or something like that. They didn't like to see you around their office. There wasn't a question of dropping by to see your friend and chatting over his desk. They preferred it if you have a messenger deliver the stuff. And the same applied to radio and TV. They were just starting their TV operation there. And it was a typical state TV thing. Talking heads and long speeches and different official political parties. But no, our contacts, sometimes we had more contacts with the Chinese and the Russians than we did with the Algerians. I remember I had met this Chinese general, a military attaché at some party. And I had invited him to cocktails at our house to meet Bill Payeff, Deputy Director of USIA, who was coming through. I thought it'd be quite a surprise for Bill to walk in and see a Chinese General waiting to greet him. And the general came along with his 2 or 3 aides and the Russian cultural affairs officer came in and was quite shocked to find a Chinese there. He couldn't quite figure this out.

And I tell you there was something funny that happened while I was there. The Russian cultural attaché, or whoever ran their cultural center, was a big bear of a man with a huge beard, and he always made a great point of coming over and shaking hands and all this sort of thing. And he invited me to drop by his center one day and I did, and it was the usual ordeal by vodka routine. And we sat down and we had these thick, greasy paté sandwiches and vodka. And we were drinking and eating. We got involved in conversation and before you knew it, it was noon, time for lunch. Have a last couple of drinks! And we got up to leave and his assistant had left and locked us in. So he was put in the untenable position of having to call his own security people at the Russian Embassy, to have them come over and let him and an American officer out of his office. I thought that was a unique situation.

*Q: Well, was our policy favorable towards Israel, sort of a burr under your saddle while you were there?*

SIMPSON: Yes. You didn't notice it that much. I think the Algerians took it all with a grain of salt. They understood pretty well what was going on. It wasn't something that you would find yourself in an argument about. The Algerians were very diplomatic. Not like, for instance, if you were in a French diplomatic thing and there was a certain contention between the two parties it

would come to the surface. There'd be a give and take. Whereas if the Algerians were at a social affair or something, they would very seldom get into a discussion of what the problem is, they'd rather save that for the office. Or exchange notes or something like that.

*Q: What were American interests in Algeria at that time?*

SIMPSON: Well there was a certain amount of oil interest. There were other business interests. It wasn't great but there were certain companies, mechanical, tractors, equipment, mining equipment, drilling equipment. And different contracts with the oil exploration, natural gas, things like that.

*Q: Part of it was just maintaining the contact.*

SIMPSON: That's right. And there were certain things going on between Algeria and the United States, both in Washington and on the international scene. That either took place in Geneva or Paris or wherever. We weren't part of it really. But the people who were directly involved would come whipping into Algiers and they had a base. We provided the base that they could operate from. And support for whatever they were doing, which Ministry they were dealing with.

*Q: Well then you left there in 1974. was that right?*

**CHARLES HIGGINSON**  
**Economic Counselor (US Interests Section)**  
**Algiers (1973-1975)**

*Born in Massachusetts, Mr. Higginson graduated from Harvard University and entered law practice before joining the Foreign Service in 1961. During his career he served in Brussels, Algiers, Rome and Luxembourg, dealing primarily with international organizations such as the European Community (EC), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the OECD. In Washington Mr. Higginson again dealt primarily with international organizations and issues. Mr. Higginson was interviewed by Raymond Ewing in 1998.*

*Q: Anything else on the OECD? Maybe we ought to go on to your assignment in 1973 as economic counselor in the embassy in Algiers.*

HIGGINSON: This was an assignment I wanted and liked. It was just after Henry Kissinger had raised SALT, which was the disarmament negotiations in Europe, with some members of our embassy in Mexico at a dinner table and received the salt and pepper. Then he decided that there should be more intermingling of the Foreign Service officers so that we would have expertise in all worldwide issues. Therefore, from my record of four years in Brussels, there was no way I was going back to Europe. So, I looked around. It seemed to me that Algeria, which was then in the African Bureau, and we did not have diplomatic relations, so I was actually assigned to the Swiss embassy in Algiers, would be a place where I could still follow European issues with some



care. So, that was where I was assigned.

*Q: This was actually the U.S. Interests Section of the Swiss embassy. Who headed it?*

HIGGINSON: Bill Eagleton was the head of the U.S. Interests Section.

*Q: You went there under Henry Kissinger's Global Outlook Policy (GLOP).*

HIGGINSON: Yes. The Department sent me to the University of Chicago's Petroleum Institute in order to learn more about liquefied natural gas. The Export-Import Bank was about to make a major \$500 million loan to the Algerians to make LNG (liquefied natural gas) at Arzu in Algeria. They kidded me that that would be my prime responsibility to follow that area.

*Q: How long was that course?*

HIGGINSON: It was a two-week sabbatical. Mr. Kahn was the head of the program and did a really superb job on me. Since the University of Chicago was also working with the Algerians on a training program, I saw him quite a lot in Algeria and he was a very useful contact in continuing education on liquefied natural gas processes and issues.

Before I got there, I was going to leave on July 15 to the U.S. Interests Section in Algiers. Abe Katz called me on July 4 and said that he had just succeeded in having me assigned to the U.S. Mission to the OECD and which did I want to do? Actually, it was closer than that. I was leaving the next day for Algeria. Much to my wife's consternation, I felt that I had been educated for the Algerian job and that's what I should do. That's what I did do.

*Q: You were there at the time of the September war.*

HIGGINSON: I was there at the time of the September war. Remember, Algeria at that point, Boumediene was the President; Bouteflika was the Foreign Minister; I think he was also either then or immediately thereafter president of the United Nations General Assembly. Before the September war, Algeria had the meeting of the non-aligned countries in Algiers. Algeria was a major player in international economics and the "new international economic order." So, it was a fascinating post to be assigned to. For my Foreign Service career, it was clearly what one could hope for as a Foreign Service officer.

*Q: Diplomatic relations had been broken in 1967 at the time of the previous Arab-Israeli War. Did you have much to do with the Swiss embassy?*

HIGGINSON: No. An Algerian taxi cab driver explained it all to me. They broke diplomatic relations. The American flag was pulled down at the U.S. embassy. The brass embassy plaque on the wall was removed. But otherwise, there was no change. He didn't realize that there were two changes. One, officially, our ambassador was Ambassador Raletton of Switzerland, who was one of the nicer and more gentlemanly and sort of perfect international ambassadors that I ever had. He gave us no problems. Socially, we saw a lot of him. But from a foreign policy point of view, there was practically no contact. It was good for him because we had trucks, cars, and supplies

that he didn't have because our U.S. Interests Section was some 10 times the size (That means there were 20 people in it.) of the Swiss embassy to Algeria. But the important difference is, since we had broken diplomatic relations, we could not speak to the Algerian Foreign Ministry. They couldn't speak to us. Therefore, what to do? The United States was too big a country to ignore, not to do anything. So, the Algerians figured out that the best solution was for us to talk directly to their president, Boumedienne. Therefore, we had better contacts to him than any other embassy in Algeria. I was there when we recreated diplomatic relations and had to go through the Algerian Foreign Ministry. So, really, there was a setback as far as the effectiveness of our embassy in Algeria with the re-recognition.

*Q: At the time you went there, the building where the U.S. Interests Section was located was the former U.S. embassy.*

HIGGINSON: Yes, without the flag. Before 1967, there was another residence which was a larger, more impressive building, but separate from the chancery. The new and now present ambassador's residence is more convenient and is still a very fine building overlooking Algiers Bay.

*Q: Bill Eagleton was the head of mission, but didn't have the protocol or prestige of being ambassador. He didn't have to line up with the rest of the diplomatic corps.*

HIGGINSON: Yes.

*Q: You say you were there when relations were reestablished and the embassy was reconstituted. Do you remember when that occurred?*

HIGGINSON: It was late 1974. Ambassador Dick Parker replaced Bill Eagleton as our Chargé d'Affaires ad interim to Algeria.

*Q: It's interesting that it happened that soon. If you think about the 1973 war and then the OPEC decision, there were a lot of things that were burdening the relationship, I would think.*

HIGGINSON: No. Remember, at that time in the Middle East process, Boumedienne had a major catalytic role. Henry Kissinger came four or five times and the first couple of times it was just an interests section. Then he believed, given the important of the Algerians in the whole process, that he and Boumedienne agreed to forget this charade and return to full diplomatic relations. I make light of being a U.S. Interests Section. In actual fact, I, my wife, and many of the other staff there still remember when U.S. One with that big American flag on its tail and Henry Kissinger in it came and landed at the airport. It was very good to be real again.

*Q: And to have the flag go back up.*

HIGGINSON: Later on, have the flag go back up. Actually, I have that flag up in my attic at home in Boston.

*Q: When it was the Interests Section, you talked about the good relationship with the presidency*

*and the need to not go to the Foreign Minister for protocol purposes. What about other ministries around the government? Were you able to go directly to them as you needed to?*

HIGGINSON: Yes, especially the Oil Minister.

*Q: Tell me more about your day to day, month to month relationship with the Petroleum Ministry, particularly after the OPEC decision, or maybe the period leading up to it. Did you feel that you were pretty well informed?*

HIGGINSON: I was desperately trying to keep informed. Luckily, there was a very well named Frenchman by the name of Mr. Well in their embassy, and he was well informed. He and I were very good friends. So, we used to compare notes pretty continuously. Basically, the only way you could find out what was happening was to know people who were handling the bowels of the oil pipeline. That was the only way you could find out how much oil was going in which direction and where. The Algerians were trying to indicate that they were cooperating, but were not leaders in the oil embargo and there had been no interruption of their liquefied natural gas shipments. At that time, there was a contact with District Gas, the (Inaudible) Corporate to import LNG. One ship a month was meant to go to Boston. During the "embargo," that ship left Algeria, but had engine troubles in the middle of the Atlantic and didn't get to Boston until after the embargo was lifted. The Algerians always insisted that they had never embargoed and were a completely secure supplier of liquefied natural gas. To the best of my information, the "engine troubles" were decreed from Algeria.

*Q: How long did this embargo actually last? There was an embargo and then a significant price increases.*

HIGGINSON: That was the gas lines in the United States. It didn't last that awfully long. I think it was about six weeks. Algeria was exporting oil during that period, but not officially. The war, we listened to BBC and followed it quite closely. At one point, there were rumors that the U.S. Interests Section might be a target of public resentment. You could hear the crowds down in the lower city. We carefully destroyed most of our records and were ready to abandon the mission. But nothing ever transpired except that we no longer had any historical records in the embassy.

*Q: Did you draw down the staff or evacuate?*

HIGGINSON: No. We maybe could have, but we hadn't gotten to that point when it was quite obvious it wasn't necessary. Boumedienne and Bouteflika, primarily Boumedienne, given the chaos in Algeria now, had an absolute control over that country. Nothing happened there unless they wanted it. I remember, every morning you'd read El Moudjahid, their big French newspaper, and it sort of counted the number of women and children we had killed in Vietnam. The U.S. was just trashed every day. But it didn't stick with the Algerians. Again and again, individual Algerians showed us a sense of kindness. One little incident was just after we arrived, we were at the beach. Since it's a hot direct sun, we were worried about our kids getting sunburned, so we put shirts on them when they were swimming, which got them arrested because the Algerians were in the full mode of becoming westernized and one thing a westerner did was that he swam in a bathing suit rather than fully dressed. These kids had violated this law.

So, the police were trying to take the children away. We just finally figured out what was happening. But the Algerians knew what was happening and they just came down. They all started yelling at the police. The police let them go. Then the Algerians took our kids over to an ice cream vendor and gave them ice cream much to our consternation because we didn't want them to have ice cream because we were quite sure it wasn't sanitized. But that is just one example. Again and again, the Algerians were individually extremely nice to us, though we had a young student staying with us who was going to the University of Algiers. He had met a young Algerian girl and she came to visit us several times. Then her parents came and said, "Look, will you please end this relationship. Each time our daughter comes to your house, it goes into the police log and we're being investigated. This is about to be a blot on my career." That showed you a little bit of what a police state it was.

Two other incidents which are sort of amusing. I had some sea boots which I had kept in a friend's boat in the harbor and they were stolen. I mentioned this at a cocktail party to the Chief of Police of Algiers. The next morning, the boots were on my doorstep. This was in a city of two million people. It gives you an idea of how thoroughly they kept control of what was going on.

*Q: The government was a police state in many ways, had very tight control of the country, anti-American things being said in the newspapers. What was the government attitude toward you, the U.S. Interests Section on a day to day basis?*

HIGGINSON: The individual Algerians really liked the United States and liked Americans. But the official line was anti-United States. The way this worked out was that the lower levels were very cautious in dealing with us, but the upper levels had no qualms. Many of them had been to the United States, been trained in the United States. One of my contacts was Rosalie, who was the head of SONATRAC, the Algerian oil company; and Upsalaam, who was the Minister of Energy. Both of them were extraordinarily busy, but they had both committed themselves to trying to move Algeria from being totally oriented towards the French to feet in both camps, in the United States and in Algeria. That was the whole point of the LNG contracts so that they would diversify; they wouldn't be just exporting the LNG to France, but also the United States so that France wouldn't have sort of a hammerlock on them. I think this was very much in the minds of all of the ministers. When I was there, General Motors came to talk about a world or Arab automobile assembly plant. This was the Department of Industry in Algeria. They couldn't have been more cooperative and interested in General Motors. Nothing came of it. The big contract that interested me was with General Telephone Electronics. This was a bid put out by the Algerians to build a whole electronics industry, a \$500 million complex. They were going to make telephones, radios, and T.V. sets. GTE was meant to train all of the workers, build all of the buildings, and design factories to produce these radios and television sets, of which only less than 10% would be important parts from the rest of the world. The Algerians wanted to have total independence, sovereignty over the production. This contract was signed just as I was leaving Algeria. I remember the final negotiations. There was a red telephone on the table and that was directly to Boumedienne. The final sticking point had to be, that telephone was used to get approval of it. GTE built the complex. My chief interest in it was that I thought this would be the lead-in for GTE and American companies to supply a lot of the electronics industry in Algeria. It wasn't a big enough market. They never followed up. I blame GTE and I've told GTE this, that they had a potential market and they never took advantage of it. I think this was

repeated again and again as one reason why the U.S. has such a trade imbalance and almost tied markets of the developing world. It's coming now, but this was a perfect example of where we, GTE, didn't take advantage of it.

*Q: Missed an opportunity.*

HIGGINSON: Yes. I must say the Algerians gave them an unbelievable amount of grief. Later on I was in the Senior Seminar and wrote a paper on this contract. I went up to Connecticut to talk to GTE top level officials. They indicated this was a contract that they had never heard of, not that they didn't make money on it, but things they hadn't figured on like the training school north of Boston. They bought a bankrupt girls school and put a bunch of young Algerian men there and almost immediately had all sorts of paternity lawsuits on their hands, all suing GTE. GTE had not figured on this sort of issue.

*Q: You mentioned off and on the French embassy, the Algerian interest in diversifying away from total reliance on the French in the economic area. What would you say generally about the role of the French as you saw it in the couple of years that you were there?*

HIGGINSON: I guess from my earlier comments in Brussels, I am a great admirer of the French, but also highly critical of them. They knew what was going on in Algeria. They were by far the largest embassy in Algiers. They were well qualified. I always looked at them as an adversarial position, except for this petroleum attache. But he was not a French foreign officer and was treated by their embassy as an outcast and that's one reason why I got along so well with him. The French were so totally involved in Algeria that most of their issues were not, except at the most high level, like whether Algeria should just sell gas to France or some to the United States... On the everyday level, they had so many French in Algiers, they had to take care of them.

That reminds me of one thing. The Belgians were very well-informed on Algeria. You could join their aid program instead of joining the military in Belgium. Therefore, there were a great many young Belgian doctors, engineers, businessmen, who took jobs with Algerian firms or American firms in Algiers. This all counted as their military service. They were sharp people. They were given jobs with a great deal more responsibility than they would have gotten in Belgium for their age. I felt it was an extremely effective program both for the individual's sake, for Algeria's sake, and for the Belgian's sake.

*Q: Was there any other European country that played a significant role in Algeria at that time other than France and, in a special way, Belgium?*

HIGGINSON: The English were there, very much so. Again, we have a rivalry with them. The other country getting liquefied natural gas, but it almost ceased by the time I was there, was England. They were interested in the oil supplies of Algeria.

Going back to another point, how did we get on with the Algerians? The Algerians with the choice would choose a Texan to be their oil crew and hired a fair number of them. The two, even though they didn't speak the common language, got along. They had no problems. It was really

quite a thing to see. You'd go out in the desert and here were these Texans and they could run an Algerian oil well crew while the French, the whole colonialism; the English didn't have it either. With the Texans, there was a camaraderie among the oil workers that transcended nationality.

*Q: You mentioned at one point what's happened in Algeria in recent years: the chaos, the Islamic fundamentalism, political and social changes. Did you see any of that coming? You were primarily on the petroleum economics side in the period that you were there in the mid-1970s.*

HIGGINSON: Yes and no. You could see it coming. We had a maid who wasn't live-in, a nice lady. She tried to come to us in her western clothing. She had a lot of trouble in the buses and the trolley cars to get to us. People bothered her, harassed her. So, she switched back to the veil and had no troubles commuting. The student that we had living with us, who was at the University of Algiers, would take trips out in the desert. In his college, young girls would be in Levis and just would have looked just right in an American university. When they got near their hometown, on would come the veil and the burqa. When they left the town, they'd go back into Levis. To that degree, you could see it. I remember this poignant issue coming back from a trade fair where the U.S. had a pavilion. The transportation system had failed and I was coming back in a station wagon by myself. There were a bunch of people hitchhiking, so I stopped and three young girls got in. We were talking. They were three sisters. The older two spoke French and were secretaries with French companies. The youngest was an Arabic secretary. The older ones were in the process of being let go because they were no longer meant to speak French in Algeria, while the younger sister was a very valuable commodity. They realized it and they knew that, basically, they had no function thereafter. They joined the unemployed, which even at that time we guessed was in excess of 30%.

*Q: You speak French from your time in Brussels and so on, but not Arabic. Did you use French almost exclusively in Algiers? Did not knowing Arabic make it difficult for you?*

HIGGINSON: No. Basically, the oil community could all speak English. The other people like the General Motors group had carefully selected Arabists to come to Algiers to talk to the Algerian government. But the officials in the Algerian government could speak Arabic. I was dragged in to translate French-English so that the communications... I think now it's mostly all Arabic. But at that time, until you got out into the desert, French would get you by without any problems. My wife learned some Arabic and it was useful sometimes in directions out in the desert.

*Q: Did you travel throughout North Africa, or were you pretty much just in Algeria?*

HIGGINSON: Algeria is big. It's the second largest country in Africa from a square mile point of view. I only got out once to Morocco and that was after about six months. I still remember driving in from the airport in Rabat and seeing by the side of the road a boy and a girl holding hands, looking at each other, and smiling. I suddenly realized that I hadn't seen that in Algeria for six months. The population pressure, the industrialization pressure, the police state, it was a driven populous and was not that happy a populous. They didn't know who they were yet. I remember one of the revolutionaries against France had been tortured by the French. His back was just all laced with scars and everything. But when asked what his hope for Algeria was, it

was "To be a big country like France." There was a real mix of a love-hate relationship at that time.

*Q: One of the things they were really trying very hard to do was to rapidly take advantage of their natural resources, the petroleum and natural gas, but also industrialize, try to move very quickly ahead. Did you get any observations about that? It was probably hard to see the results.*

HIGGINSON: You could see the results: the cement, the oil production. That was going up very rapidly. But with the advantage of hindsight, it was a disastrous policy. I mentioned the 30% unemployment. They should have been putting money into whatever would create more jobs. Again, in home electronics, if they would have just imported some of the tubes, the more complex parts, they could have gotten more modern machines, cheaper machines. But, no, they wanted to have it all Algerian. That was a waste of money on their part. No, again, I completely say with the advantage of hindsight, Boumedienne's industrialization policy was a total disaster and has led to a lot of what is now going on in Algeria. But I really respect Boumedienne. It was done with the thinking at that time. There was corruption in Algeria, but not that bad. It really was a mistaken, honest attempt, and a tremendous attempt.

Another huge problem is the population. It is just exploding. This I will fault Boumedienne on. I remember coming on the radio with an old Algerian gentleman, with his arms around him saying, "This is a true Algerian. He has just had his 13th child. This is what I want you people to be like." That led to this huge population. It's a very young population. They've done a wonderful job in educating it, but they don't have the jobs. The cement factory and the oil industry just doesn't hire lots of people. It doesn't build houses. They missed the boat there.

*Q: So, all of this is not uncharacteristic of a number of other developing countries. The other thing that I've noticed in many countries is the tremendous influx to the cities. Was that beginning to happen? You said Algiers was a city of two million. It probably is a lot more than that now.*

HIGGINSON: When the French left, Algiers was somewhere around 700,000. They've gone to two million and probably no houses have been built during that period, or there has been no net increase in housing. So, you just are cramming everybody together -again, clearly in my mind leading to some of the problems of today. Also, they were coming in from the desert and the farmland. Algeria, given its weather and its location to Europe, should be supplying fresh vegetables and fruit to the European market. They started on that route before I got there and it just all fell apart. They never followed up on it. They never got a steady supply of reasonably sorted out fruits and vegetables. When we were there, there really were food problems and shortages.

*Q: Do you want to say anything about Algeria's connections at that time with southern Europe across the Mediterranean? Was there a pipeline to Italy or did that come later?*

HIGGINSON: That came later, but the contract was signed while I was there. They were talking about a pipeline that they're now building to go by Spain, which again gives these diversified routes of supplying gas to Europe.

*Q: What about tourism? Where there tourists there at that time?*

HIGGINSON: Yes, there were tourists. They had built a number of resorts, but it was a one shot deal. They were very inexpensive tour groups, but nobody ever went again. The food was terrible; the service was terrible. The resorts were rather attractive externally, but then the plumbing didn't work. The major industrialization, you go to Morocco and they've done the same thing with German companies. The German companies insisted that they have a continuing contract to maintain the hotels. So, there, the toilets worked; there was water. In Algeria, forcing their independence, paid for it by none of these things working and they were pretty miserable places to stay.

*Q: Do you want to say anything about the organization of the U.S. Interests Section? You were the economic counselor and petroleum attaché. Was there a DCM?*

HIGGINSON: No, there wasn't a DCM. Actually, three of us arrived at the same time. Bob Pelletreau, who was a very successful career Foreign Service officer, was the political counselor. Then there was a Consular Section. Bill Eagleton had been there the longest time. He ran the whole place and very effectively. It really was a one man show. From a systematic organizational point of view, it was not a good arrangement. But in actual practice, since Bill was so capable and knew the country and everything so well, it worked very well indeed as long as what you were doing was within Bill's periscope.

*Q: His interest.*

HIGGINSON: Yes.

*Q: Then when the relations were reestablished, Dick Parker came as ambassador and it became a more traditional organization.*

HIGGINSON: Yes. Then there was the usual issue of who comes first. I believe Bob Pelletreau was made the DCM. I can't now remember whether he was officially made DCM or just in practice was DCM. Anyway, he was the alter ego of the ambassador and had become the alter ego of Bill Eagleton. If you don't know Bob Pelletreau, he is very capable, an Arabist. His real strongpoint is dealing with people. I don't know anybody who was unhappy in their dealings with Bob Pelletreau. He knew how to handle people and work with them at the same time. I never had any problems, issues, or anything but the utmost respect for Bob, except for the tennis court (He always won.).

*Q: Well, that's important, too. Just as a reminder, this was the period from 1973-1975 when you were in Algiers. Is there anything else that we haven't discussed?*

HIGGINSON: Two years was enough, especially for my wife. We had a wonderful residence right across from the embassy. It was the DCM's residence, but without a DCM, I lucked into it. It was a 15th century Turkish summer palace. We sort of rattled around it very comfortably, which was very rare. Most people had lousy housing in Algiers. We were very lucky.



The American school in Algiers was also on that property. I had two sons there. One of my auxiliary functions was to be chairman of the board. I think I spent more time working on school problems, parent-teacher relations, headmaster-teacher relations, and board of director relations... There really were more direct negotiations involved in that job than most any other Foreign Service job I've had.

*Q: At the time, the school went up through high school?*

HIGGINSON: No, it just went through the ninth grade. Teachers were a problem. It turns out that we needed a third grade teacher, so I drafted my wife to do that. She had 16 students, only one of whom was a native American speaker. All the rest spoke various other languages. The school was in the ex-slaves quarters of this Turkish palace. It had nothing. However, it educated Stevie Higginson, my third son, unbelievably well. It just proved to me the importance of teachers over bricks and mortar. A number of teachers were young American women from the Midwest who were schoolteachers who had married sort of startling, dramatic Algerian young men, and come to Algeria. They had been shut in the house, told to wear a veil, and thought maybe they would leave. They were informed they could leave but their children would stay behind. So, they decided to go back to teaching at the American school. They put their lives into it. Some of them were really dedicated and effective teachers.

*Q: Was the student body from the diplomatic corps?*

HIGGINSON: From American oil companies, English oil companies, anybody who wanted to speak English, and a very few highly, very well-to-do Algerians who didn't want to have their children in the Algerian public school system and wanted them to learn English. But the Algerians really tried to discourage that.

*Q: How about these teachers who were married to Algerians? Were they able to have their children in the school?*

HIGGINSON: Yes, some of them were in the school.

*Q: You were appointed to be the head of the school board?*

HIGGINSON: Yes. The United States supplied at that time over half the budget. Therefore, the chairman of the school board was to be an American official. It usually was the political counselor, but Bob's Pelletreau's children were so young that they didn't get to that school. Mine were and it was also the place where I was living, so it made sense. I opted for it. I remember it with great interest. It did take up a great deal of time. At times, I wished I had never heard of the school.

*Q: Those schools certainly do take a lot of time on the part of the president of the board, the chairman of the board, or the school board itself. But, as you say, they also are, certainly for our children, the best experiences they have in terms of their early education.*

HIGGINSON: My son is still in touch with a lot of his classmates. One of them was a Bulgarian girl who he was rather fond of. She has since married and then left Bulgaria, immigrated to the United States, and she and her husband are now very involved in the air conditioning business. My son was their sponsor. This to me was the first sign that the communist regime was about over. These two kids' parents were absolutely at the top of the Bulgarian Communist Party leadership. If they couldn't make it or wanted to get out, it was clear that something was wrong.

**LARRY COLBERT**  
**Consul, Officer in Charge**  
**Oran, Algeria (1973-1976)**

*Mr. Colbert was born in Ohio in 1940. He attended the Universities of Ohio and Missouri. After a tour in Turkey with the Peace Corps and a year as an assistant on Capital Hill, he entered the Foreign Service and was sent to Viet Nam as Regional Advisor. His subsequent postings, where he served as Consular Officer include: Ankara, Turkey, Oran, Algeria, Dublin, Ireland and Manila, Philippines. At Tijuana, Mexico, Madrid, Spain, Ciudad Juarez, Mexico and Paris, France Mr. Colbert served as Consul General. Mr. Colbert was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in November, 2006.*

COLBERT: We did it, and we went to Oran where I was in charge of a one-officer post. The staff consisted of my wife who had to agree to be my admin assistant/code clerk, which I would like to come back to, one piednoir, that is to say a French lady who had been born in Algeria, who was a French citizen but had stayed behind when the French left who was my secretary/receptionist, a driver and then a gardener/handyman and a janitress who doubled as the downstairs housekeeper because the office consisted of what had been the drawing room of a downtown villa and the ladies drawing room was the admin officer's office and the side foray entrance was where the secretary sat. You went through another set of doors and there was a big entry way and a formal dining room, a small sitting area in the kitchen. There was a formal garden in the back that badly needed repair which probably was lovely when labor was cheap and the French planter lived there. Then we lived upstairs. It was a two-year assignment.

*Q: This would be '70...?*

COLBERT: This would have been '73-'76. When I got there I knew nothing about consular work at all. I'd never taken the consular course, because I went directly to Vietnam. The job was consul. I was the American consul, and I flew the American flag. However, I reported to the American interest section of the Swiss embassy, which essentially was the American compound flying a Swiss flag. But the Charge de Affaires of the interest section was under the Swiss. I reported to him but I was the American consul.

The anomaly of that was when in '67 when the Algerians and the Americans broke relations because of the 6-Day War we broke political and economic relations but we didn't break consular relations. We had a consulate in Constantine, and we had a consulate in Oran. At some

point maybe in '60, at some point between when we broke relations and when I arrived in '73 the consulate in Constantine was closed because of security concerns. When I arrived in Oran it was just me and my wife and my family living in this compound. My job was to report on what was going on in the western part of Algeria, to keep an eye on the possible conflict between the between Morocco and Algeria because of the so-called Green March.

*Q: That was down in the...*

COLBERT: Sahara.

*Q: The Spanish Sahara.*

COLBERT: Yeah. When the Spanish left the Sahara the Moroccans grabbed it and the Algerians thought it should be belonging to the Saharans. So there were a lot of tension.

At that time there was major American investment in natural gas and particularly the liquidization of natural gas. So there were a number of large American companies in western Algeria, with a large American business/worker bee present so I would take care of these people. Then I had the normal visas and all that sort of stuff.

I found I really liked doing the consular work, which I hadn't been trained to do. In fact, I think my first big consular error was a wonderful one. This Vietnamese-American wife of a construction worker who was working on the natural gas liquidification plant came in with a passport, which had been limited to three months. She wanted to leave the country because her mother, father, brother somebody was ill...she had to leave. She couldn't get out because her passport was expired and she...I said, "Why was it limited?" She said, "Well I didn't have my naturalization certificate when I had to leave and so they gave me this passport. Here is my naturalization certificate." So I just extended the passport and filled out the form and sent it back to Washington. Since I didn't have cable then my only means of communication was one telephone line and an unclassified bag that came via the railroad. The classified bag I collected myself whenever I went to Algiers. So time passed and I got this nasty, nasty message from the Bureau of Consular Affairs how dare I renew this passport without getting their specific approval in advance. In fact I was right, they were wrong and the rules subsequently changed that you could exercise this modest degree of good judgment.

I found that I really, really like the consular work. So I wrote my career "mangement" officer, my career management officer more accurately and said that I wanted to change from political cone, which I didn't even know I was in, when I arrived in Ankara for my first tour, I didn't know I was a political officer. I didn't know there were cones because I had gone to Vietnam, and we were more concerned with hand grenades than you were demarches. So I wrote this person and said that I wanted to change and he wrote me back and said, "Well you are up for profession from FSO-5 to FSO-4, you are in the zone. If you change you won't be promoted because you will be competing against people who have been doing this work already." So I said, "Don't change me." Then I got promoted indeed to the august level of FSO-4 and then I wrote back and said change me and changed.

So I became a consular officer who had never taken the consular course who had nobody supervising me and in fact there was only one other consul in the country and he was a first tour officer in Algeria, so it was really a case of the blind leading the blind. We did a very good job I thought and used common sense and when we absolutely had to we looked in the FAM (foreign affairs manual). I'm a great believer in the sayings of Lou Goelz, one of the great consular officers.

*Q: I knew Lou. Lou took my place in Seoul.*

COLBERT: Well Lou was one of the all time great consular officers in my view and his rule was "Don't ask, don't ask."

*Q: Well my rule is "Ask if you don't want to..."*

COLBERT: If you know the answer.

*Q: If you want to stall or something but other than that don't ask.*

COLBERT: Only ask if it is in your interest, that's right. If a person is asking you to do something that you don't want to do, use the State Department for cover but for God's sake don't ask them to exercise good judgment because they won't.

*Q: I'm trying to pick up sort of the spirit of the time when you were going to switch from political to consular, what time is it?*

COLBERT: Well I waited until I got promoted and then I wrote back and switched and then continued on. The things that gave me the most satisfaction in Algeria were solving the human problems. I wasn't trained so it was basically my doing what I thought made sense and going on from there.

I think probably one of my biggest failures occurred in Algeria and when I think about it even now occasionally. Early on I heard that an American lady was in a hospital in Oran, a military hospital, which was very strange. So I managed to go see her and it turned out that she had married a German who was involved in a German company project in a provincial town half way between Oran and Algiers. She had gotten ill, had a very serious illness, and in talking with her I found out that she was pregnant. Moreover, she had all these intolerances; she was sort of like a walking list of don't do this, can't do that, sort of thing. This was a very high-risk pregnancy. I said, "You should really go back to Germany. You have in-laws there, good medical treatment and all these intolerances or special needs that you have would be treated there." I visited her a couple times and kept talking to her, and she said no she wouldn't leave her husband. Her response to me was to be with her husband and Algeria was pretty basic in the 1970s, and I kept urging her to go back. I even spoke with her husband who was not sympathetic to my point of view. Then time passed and I found out that she had died in childbirth, because they couldn't treat her; there was nothing that they could treat her with. In fact, there was a Chinese medical contingent from the PRC (People's Republic of China), in her provincial town and they were good doctors. But the medical problems were quite complex and beyond the facilities available.

I always felt that I should have been more able to persuade this woman to go back. So I did have failures.

I had some successes. I think the most dramatic thing that happened when I was there was there was a company called Chemico which was building liquefied natural gas plants, two of them, two giant plants in a place called Arzew which was to the east of Oran in an area where the allies had actually landed in 1942. There was already an existing liquefaction plant there run by Shell, a small one. They were building these two giant plants, and there was a falling out between the company and a SONATRAC, the Algerian state oil and gas monopoly company. The company forfeited their contract. It then became really, really dicey as to whether they'd be able to leave – it was a police state and the company was the state and the state was the company. There were very bad feelings on both side. In the end the American company employees were escorted to their airplanes with people with guns. Luckily everybody left and nobody was held hostage and all worked out well but it was sort of dicey.

Another vivid memory was when often the Algerian provincial authorities would call me up and say there is going to be a spontaneous anti-American demonstration at 2:30 PM on Wednesday of next week, it will last twenty minutes, or some other day and time. I underline the word spontaneous. That was a given, the government then was under Boumedienne and it was anti-American, it was pro-Soviet Union and the papers were controlled and had vicious cartoons - that was the way it was. Nobody would actually harm us and everywhere we went we were followed by the secret police but apart from that I was perfectly safe, I thought. So there was this humongous demonstration...my neighbor, I lived in a villa with a wall around it, and my neighbor was a Moroccan consul who lived in a similar villa with a wall around it.

As I said earlier, Morocco had absconded with the Spanish Sahara and there was this humongous anti-American, anti-Moroccan demonstration, several thousand people and my office had wooden shutters of the type that you see in the tropics and a couple on bars. Well you could just reach through and shake hands, there was certainly no bulletproof glass, and we were flush with the street. So here were four or five thousand screaming Algerians and I call up on my single telephone line which that was my only means of communication to the mission in "Algiers" and say, "I am now witnessing a demonstration of X thousands of people which had not been announced to me in advance. This was truly spontaneous or they hadn't bothered to tell me and this is a lot of people. So the DCM says to me, "Let me know if anything happens." I said, "If anything happens I won't be letting you about it." I mean I would have been dead but in fact nothing happened. It was quite an interesting experience.

Shortly after I arrived there I received a classified pouch and opened it up. Let me go back to how I got my classified pouch, as it's relevant. But I got this classified pouch and I opened it up and there was a pistol wrapped in metal foil and ammunition. So I wrapped it back up, put it back in the foil and sent it back to the people who had sent it to me. Of course they couldn't reach me except by phone, and they couldn't discuss it anyway. It had come from the RSO (regional security officer) in Rabat; there really were RSOs then, not one or more in each mission.

*Q: The Regional Security Officer.*

COLBERT: Exactly. The regional security officer was actually in Rabat in Morocco because in those days they were really regional and when he got this package back from me he was mightily unhappy and when I got up to Algiers there was a nasty cable waiting for me from the person saying, "How dare me send this back to them." My thinking was I was living in this house with my wife, two small daughters, there was an Algerian policeman guarding the official entrance where the public came in, I was under 24-hour surveillance. If the Algerians wanted us dead we were dead, if the Algerians wanted us alive we were alive. But my shooting somebody with a six-shooter wouldn't save anybody's life and more likely I would shoot myself or my kids would shoot themselves. So I wasn't having any part of this and I was sending it back. It gave them real heartburn.

The safe area in the house for storing classified was what had been a small kitchen which was maybe four foot deep and two feet wide and it had one bar lock safe in it. There was a combination, not a bar lock, a combination Mosler safe and then outside door had a combination safe door on it too. Once we were having trouble with the outside door, the door to the strong room and it was being impossible to open so it was stuck shut, essentially we couldn't make the combination work. So, we asked for the regional security officer to send one of their technicians. The technician came and within minutes of approaching the safe it popped open, one spin of the dial and he gave me this disdainful look like he brought me all the way from Morocco for no particular good reason. So my wife said, "Well, why don't you try it one more time?" and he was there for three days. So he agreed it was indeed broken.

It basically was for the most part a job of helping people with their problem, traveling around and seeing people in isolated areas. There were Americans in isolated circumstances such me in small posts. In my case, every two or three weeks I would be a non-pro courier and fly to Algiers. It was a gruesome trip because you had to get up very, very early in the morning and go to the airport and hope that despite your reservations, even with a reservation you could get on the airplane which was sort of like a cattle run and then hope that the embassy met you as they were supposed to with a driver. Nowadays, of course, you are met by a driver and an American. I was just met by a driver. So I arrived maybe carrying material, which was moderately sensitive or bringing back information which is sometimes very sensitive which I then had to shred and waiting for a driver. There were occasions when I actually took a taxicab to the American embassy carrying a classified bag, because nobody came to pick me up and you couldn't call; there were no cell phones, of course. And sometimes I actually drove myself in either the official car or my own; I had a Volvo station wagon which I mentioned earlier. Sometimes I drove myself with the classified making a non-pro courier run with classified in both directions. I mean mindless; now they would never permit it, never any had problem.

Once making such a trip, I don't know whether I think I was going at the time so I couldn't have had very much, I saw an automobile accident, a car had gone off a road down a gorge. I had to park, left the bag in the car temporarily, went down, picked up the person who had been in the automobile accident, carried him up, put him in the flattened out back of my station wagon,; I had folded in the seats and drove him into the provincial hospital all the time, clutching my little classified bag in my hand the entire time! I never found out what happened to him.

People in the embassy were very good, the station chief...

*Q: Who was the acting ambassador then?*

COLBERT: Eagleton.

*Q: Bill Eagleton?*

COLBERT: Bill Eagleton for the most part. Then there was another person who was a real Arabist who came at the end or came after. Eagleton was charge under the Swiss and then Parker, Dick Parker, was also my boss. They were both good guys. They were good people to work for but I was really, really, really on my own. I mean one telephone line and that's it. I had to do what I thought best on my own.

*Q: Well let's talk a little about the area you worked. As I recall, Algeria you were in the western part of Algeria?*

COLBERT: I was about two hours from the Moroccan border.

*Q: That also is sort of the center of I can't remember the name but it's a particular area in Morocco isn't it? I mean in Algeria, who are not too happy with the ruling government?*

COLBERT: I think you are thinking about the Berbers and they're actually farther, they are in the Constantine area. Oran was probably the most Levantine, the most Peonwar, the most European city in Algeria. It was the center of the OSA

*Q: OSA?*

COLBERT: OSA, OAS. It's also where...

*Q: Which was the French...*

COLBERT: Resistance.

*Q: Secret army, which was basically, the French army post opposed to the...*

COLBERT: No, no well I mean that's true, some people...it was the resistance group organized to prevent the French Government giving up Algeria and the headquarters was actually in a high-rise building that faced the villa that I lived in. I lived in a villa, as I described it that was on a Cornish on a road overlooking the main commercial harbor.

*Q: So you weren't, the area you were in I mean was there anything sort of political going on?*

COLBERT: It was a very closed society run by the military and there wasn't much to report on because basically everything was totally controlled. There was no Muslim fundamentalist resistance at that time. The army ran things and the army in turn was run by the people who had

been the leaders in overthrowing the French. They were a group of older colonels who had been in the Algerian Liberation army and they ran everything. They were called “Le Pouvoir”, (the power).

*Q: Also, and correct me if I am wrong but people who have served there tell me that the Algerians just by their nature are rather dour people?*

COLBERT: Dour is a compliment. The saying is ‘How do you tell a Moroccan from an Algerian? The one that’s smiling is a Moroccan.’ Algerians were not happy people although the people who looked after my family who were very nice and we had Algerian friends who were doctors and business people, but they were exceptions. For the most part Algerians were not really, at least when I was there, not really warm. I’ve met Algerians since outside of Algeria who have been very nice. I met a couple the other day that are here observing our election so I don’t really understand that. I do know that it was very, very difficult to be friendly with Algerians.

Case in point, one Algerian customs official came to our house for dinner and then got very badly beaten up by the secret police. When people get beaten up for coming to your house for dinner it really discourages other people from coming to dinner. So on a social level there was very little interface except for people who were very well placed. Our closest Algerian friend was very close to the original colonels who overthrew the French. When he was warned off he told me that he made a phone call to Algiers, and in turn the people who warned him off were warned off. You had to have that kind of “enchoufe”, that kind of “piston” to be OK.

*Q: Looking at sort of the Mediterranean there are some of the people, sort of the Levantine, people who have entrepreneurial genes, I mean the Lebanese obviously the Jews there, certain Egyptians. Did you see any sort of economic sparks in Algeria at the time?*

COLBERT: I think the government, which was authoritarian, and socialist in name discouraged that sort of thing. There were people who had small shops but there was not a great entrepreneurial spirit about.

I remember a Algerian doctor friend who was explaining to me that at one point the only part of the food economy which hadn’t been naturalized, say only the production of meat had been naturalized, say only the production of vegetables everything but fish...the fishing industry was free, people could buy the fish, come and catch the fish and buy the fish in the market. At one point it became part of the socialist system as well. He said, “Well you see, the reason that they took over the fish was the government explained that the people who had money like doctors, me for example, would pay more money than the people who didn’t have as much money so we’d get the best fish because we would pay the most money.” He said, “That’s true, I would pay top money for the best fish to feed my family, I was a doctor.” He said, “So now it’s much improved you see, the best fish is taken by the government officials for themselves and they don’t pay at all and we all pay now controlled prices for the worst cut, so it works out very well.”

Another friend of mine was a doctor and she, all doctors had to work half day for the society as a whole for a nominal government fee and then they could work so many hours on their own dime.



She was furious because she had to work; her job was to work in the provincial headquarters seeing all the sick people who work for the provincial government. She had seen her requisite number of 100 patients or whatever it was and this person insisted on seeing her and she said, "You know I've been here X number of hours, I've seen X number of people, I've done my bit I am leaving." He said, "No you have to see me I've paid." She said, "What do you mean I've paid? It's free." He said, "No, I've paid the guard there." It turned out that she was seeing 100 patients everyday for free, and the guard was charging I don't know how much money for each patient to get in line so the guard was making more money than the doctor was. That's what you get in the socialist system I think.

*Q: Was there any mobilization or did you have any feeling that things might get rough between Morocco and the Algerians?*

COLBERT: Oh yeah, the Algerians did mobilize and I tried to observe that. I don't know how much I want to talk about that because this is going to be an unclassified document but certainly we were very interested in what was going on. There was a time when it looked like Algeria would invade Morocco and there was mobilization all around, yeah.

*Q: Was there anything else we should discuss do you think?*

COLBERT: About Algeria? I think it was a fascinating job because I was on my own. There was a lot of responsibility because I had to look after all these people. Did I do any insightful political reporting? I doubt it. Did I do some? Yes.

*Q: I mean how much insightful political reporting can one do under a socialistic dictatorship?*

COLBERT: Well there's that. I think that we projected a positive image of the United States because we lived a good decent life. Apart the couple immediately before us who were absolutely first class several previous consuls who had had the job before there had problems. One person lost his mind there, one person abandoned his wife for another woman with a big scandal, there had been a series of problems, and so I think we left the post in good order and well thought of by the people who observed us. That was something I can take pride in.

*Q: What did you think of the hinterland?*

COLBERT: Hinterland?

*Q: Of Algeria. You get out of the city because...*

COLBERT: Think of it as three different countries, the very fertile lovely green coastal plain, then an area which is high plateau where you can grow wheat and crops and is very flat and maybe a hundred miles deep, and then the real Sahara desert which is either desert like we think of the southwest rocks and occasional rough branch or then suddenly it is like you have in the movies, the sand dunes and the oasis, so it was all of that. It's a very pretty country. I can understand why the French didn't want to leave; I can understand why the Algerians wanted them to leave.

*Q: Was much being done wheat wise? Because it was a breadbasket for a long time and what was happening while you were there?*

COLBERT: It was going to hell in a handbag. I think that the oil permitted the government to do foolish things. Socialism probably wrecked agriculture, and they had a good wine grape industry that got wrecked for religious regions, ideological reasons. No, the country was good at producing kids and not much else. That's pretty harsh isn't it?

*Q: Yeah, but when you left there in '76 if I would to ask you wither Algeria what would you have said?*

COLBERT: I think that I would have said that when the oil runs out they're in deep do-do. Subsequent to my departure, of course, they had an election and the Islamist's won but the army, essentially the people who were running the country, the "Le Pouvoir" decided that the people who won the election couldn't take power because they were going to displace the people who had power, so they had a very long and very bloody civil war. I think the army or the "Le Pouvoir" succeeded in essentially bringing it to an acceptable level and then with the Bouteflika coming back,- the former foreign minister coming back as president- you had some sort of amnesty and the country has calmed down a bit and maybe it will go somewhere. Certainly it's not as strictly leftist as it was. We have good relations with them now. I think they probably like our attachment because we help essentially prop the people who run their country can lean. I haven't been back for a long time.

*Q: But at the time there wasn't, how did we see it is this the place where we were keeping the flag flying for the Americans or did you see any strategic interest or...?*

COLBERT: I think we were very interested in being able to have access to their oil, particularly to their gas. We hoped to wean them away from being favorably inclined to the Soviet Union; we hoped they will be more like Morocco and Tunisia and certainly not more like Libya. Our relations were correct but not really cordial. They were very, very helpful in the Iran hostage situation, and I think that our relations began to improve markedly after they helped...

*Q: That was after '79.*

COLBERT: Yeah.

*Q: But during the time you were there did the Soviet presence play out at all where you were?*

COLBERT: The Soviets supplied them military equipment on a systematic basis. They had good relations. They didn't allow any Soviet troops there but they certainly had good relations with them and they got all their military equipment from there.

*Q: Did you get any impression of how the military equipment was being used?*

COLBERT: No, I didn't get into that.

**RONALD D. FLACK**  
**Commercial Attaché**  
**Algiers (1974-1976)**

*Ronald D. Flack was born in Minnesota in 1934. After receiving his bachelor's degree from the University of Minnesota he served in the US Army from 1957-1960. His career has included positions in Athens, Manila, Abidjan, Paris, Algiers, Geneva, and Copenhagen. Mr. Flack was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on January 7, 1998.*

*Q: Kennedy was a sort of unknown lightweight at the time.*

FLACK: There was also the Algerian thing when Kennedy supported the Algerian resistance against the French. Kennedy was not well liked in France for meddling in French domestic affairs.

*Q: Yes, as senator he made a mistake there.*

FLACK: I think it was interesting to high ranking U.S. officials that according to a close confidant of General de Gaulle, he favored Nixon in the election.

Anyway, the most interesting thing in all this was in the fall of 1960 I was having Sunday dinner with this family. The phone rang and my friend went into the next room to answer it. I could understand from her side of the conversation that it was her brother, the general. She came back, didn't say anything, and sat down. We continued conversation and she suddenly turned to me and said, "How would we immigrate to the United States?" This is a very well established aristocratic French family. I said, "What in the world would you want to immigrate to the United States for?" She didn't answer. She said, "Well, I am just thinking how would we go about doing this?" When I started reflecting on this it was clear that her brother had given her some information that put that family in danger politically. This was at the time of all the rumblings in Algeria and I later learned that the general had given his sister warning to get out of the country in case things went badly. So the general, through his sister and me, gave the U.S. government and intelligence authorities confirmation of a coup attempt by the generals in Algeria, which he was involved in.

*Q: This was the generals revolt.*

FLACK: That's right. This was the first clear indication that I was able to get and pass on that confirmed this. It was kind of the last piece of the puzzle that fit in and said, "Yes, this is really going to happen," which indeed it did and it failed. The general was arrested but the family did not suffer but were under a lot of pressure at that point. They had a younger son who was a radical, sort of loose canon type, who I had to at one point dissuade from joining in an attempt to assassinate de Gaulle.

*Q: You left there in 1974.*

FLACK: We left in 1974 and I was assigned to Algiers. They figured that I had had three years in Paris and they were looking for a commercial attaché in Algiers. I went with some reluctance there. First of all I was a little bit uneasy about my wife's health. It is not a malaria post but she was also to have excellent medical treatment close by and, of course, we didn't there. The answer was that we would be only two hours away from the American hospital in Paris, which was true. Anyway, we went to Algiers in 1974 after home leave arriving in late summer.

*Q: You were in Algiers from?*

FLACK: From 1974 to 1976, two years. It was a really fascinating time. First of all we didn't have an embassy when I first arrived. It was the American Interest Section of the Swiss embassy. So, even though we were physically located in what at one time had been the American embassy, we flew the Swiss flag, had Swiss ID cards, stationery, etc. We were all officially Swiss, even though on operational levels we operated as Americans under Swiss protection. There was an enormous amount of American investment and business in Algeria in natural gas and oil. The economy was doing well, and still is, strangely enough, its booming. The Algerian economy now is growing fast in spite of the slaughter that is taking place there.

We had Bechtel doing a major project in building a natural gas plant at Arzew. There was Morrison Knunson doing a major irrigation project. Major U.S. firms doing major projects in the country. So there was a lot of work to be done and it was very gratifying because you would work with U.S. businesses and the government and a huge project would flower out of it.

We, also, of course, during that period in 1975 reestablished diplomatic relations which had been broken in 1967 with the first war in the Middle East. Kissinger came on a visit just before I had arrived and came back a year later, after I had been there for a year, and met with Boumedienne and I actually went with him for the meeting. That was a story worth telling because Boumedienne was a dictator and not very well liked. He hadn't been seen for months and there had been rumors that someone had tried to kill him, but nobody knew anything. On the other hand, Kissinger was coming and they said Boumedienne would meet with Kissinger.

It was a dark and stormy night when Kissinger's plane came into the Algiers airport. To step back a moment, on his first trip, one of his secret service agents and one of the Algerian agents had gotten into a fist fight at the airport over who would stand next to him. When Kissinger was coming down the ramp to get off the plane there was the secret service and the Algerian agent both vying for who would be at the bottom of the stairs and they got into a physical fight. Kissinger is walking down the ramp and here are these two guys battling at the bottom of the ramp. So, this time we had an arrangement where the same two guys would shake hands and stand at the bottom of the ramp when Kissinger came down. That worked.

Kissinger often traveled with his own armored Cadillac on a separate plane. They wouldn't let the Cadillac off the plane. This was going to be an overnight stay with the meeting that evening. They had a bunch of old Citroens lined up there. At this point we didn't have diplomatic

relations and couldn't force anything, so we left the Cadillac in the plane and got in a Citroen and took off in the middle of the night. We were going to go directly to the meeting. Algiers' nights can be really, really dark. I don't know why that is. I remember sitting in the back seat of this Citroen, Kissinger was in the car behind me, with some Algerian agents who had all the windows down and were leaning out looking backward at the car with Kissinger.

So, we raced through the city. No one ever knew where Boumedienne was. We ended up in front of some rather modest little villa in the far reaches of upper Algiers. Boumedienne was a very striking looking individual. First of all he had very large, intense eyes. There was almost a hypnotic look to him. We walked in and he was wearing a black burnous (cape), so he looked like a monk. Previously we had seen him with normal length hair. His hair was almost all gone. There was just a little black hair growing and his head looked like it had been shaved. So, he really did look like a monk. We realized something must have happened. He must have had an operation because they wouldn't have shaved his head like that. We later learned that he had suffered a head wound in an assassination attempt.

We sat down and began negotiations about a number of things but most importantly, the reestablishment of diplomatic relations. I remember one of the things that we were discussing as a side issue was the establishment of a bilateral economic commission similar to what we had with Egypt. The Algerians didn't like the idea very much. We had been talking to them about some of these things for quite some time. Kissinger was suppose to establish this commission. We started off talking about the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and then a little about establishing this bilateral commission that would follow, Kissinger thinking that would be a carrot for them. Although it must have been in his briefing papers he seems to be rather surprised that they weren't interested. Without a second thought, without consulting anybody, Kissinger simply said, "Forget about the commission, let's get down to business about reestablishing relations." So he gave up on an important U.S. initiative as a negotiation ploy, which was a very smart move. We almost agreed to reestablishment of relations, but there was the question of timing and it was put off for two or three months. Anyway, he left with more or less the agreement of reestablishing relations. The head of the Interest Section was Dick Parker, who was later ambassador to Morocco and Lebanon. He became ambassador after we reestablished relations.

*Q: On the commercial side, basically we are talking about major bits of oil and gas equipment. I thought one just went to Houston to buy equipment for that.*

FLACK: That is true to a certain degree. Obviously these big companies didn't need the Interest Section's help in making contacts. When Bechtel came to town they pretty much took care of themselves. But, there were many times when they needed help and would call and say, "You know this has gone wrong and do you know somebody in the ministry of whatever that can help us with this?" So, we did work with them. I went out to Arzew on many occasions to visit the project and see the work. They built a small American town out there. A small subdivision of very nice little houses that were by the coast and the project they were building. Later, Ambassador Parker paid a couple of visits to these projects where they would really put on a good show for him.

*Q: How did you find working with the Algerian ministries? Algerians are sort of a dower group, I'm told.*

FLACK: They are. They are what we used to call a "serious people." We had excellent relations with the Algerians; at least I did. They were difficult because they were very defensive about their relationship with the U.S. They were afraid of being seen with Americans. They were afraid of being identified as having too much contact with Americans. But, on an official level when I had to go my meetings... for example, one of the things I did there aside from commercial work, I did civil aviation work and FAA had a lot to do with the local FAA equivalent, the acronym was ENEMA [sic]. So, I had a lot to do with ENEMA in arranging visits with FAA, and these people were just wonderful, all the time. At the time the professional and working level relationships with the government and the ministries, at least for me, were excellent, and I am sure with the others as well. I know with the economic officer they were good. I know Parker had excellent relationships.

However, on a social level, if you wanted to invite them to a party, especially if it was someone from the foreign ministry, there was one couple that was kind of the designated American embassy social contact that always came. None of the others did. We would invite three or four Algerian couples and it was always the same couple that could come. The others would regret. So, we knew there was a policy of just having a certain person being the contact for the Americans and the others weren't allowed to go.

On a personal level we had made friends with a number of Algerians who were afraid to come to our house for fear of being identified as being friends of the Americans. When we left Algeria, one couple we knew quite well didn't come to our farewell party and we were hurt. We were very surprised that they didn't come. When we were at the airport getting ready to leave, a fellow came with a package for us from this couple. It was a beautiful Algerian miniature with a little note saying, "We could not be seen at your party, but we are going to miss you very much." And, this happened very often, not only with me but with others. They were reluctant for political reasons to become too much seen with Americans.

*Q: What were the politics of the country that brought forth this?*

FLACK: At the time I was there Boumediene was the head of a socialist Islamic dictatorship and it wasn't working. You had basically a socialist, almost communist, regime, everything was run by the state and nothing worked. The French had left a city of about 400,000 people in 1962 and the economy was basically agricultural. The upper coast of Algeria is like the coast of California, wonderful agricultural land. That was totally abandoned. So, by the time we were there which was a good ten, twelve years after independence, the economy had broken down completely. There were food shortages at all times. Not only food shortages, but shortages of whatever you were looking for at the moment. If you needed a battery for your flashlight you wouldn't find one. You would find flashlights but no batteries. This was basically because the decisions on buying and selling were being made by bureaucrats behind desks who had no idea about business or the law of supply and demand.

I remember a businessman coming to me in my office one day. I had seen him the day before. He

was selling these very large lighting elements for street lights, the part the light bulb goes in. He had figured out what they needed and was going to the ministry. He came back the next day and said, "I am absolutely amazed." I said, "What is the matter?" He said, "I made an incredible sale but they bought four times as many as they need. They are going to go bad before they can use them all. I don't know if I should tell them or make the sale." I think he probably made the sale. People were doing this all the time, they just didn't know what they needed and how many they needed. If somebody was going to be buying the state's supply of transistor radios they would just pull a figure out of the air. Most of them would then be put into storage. Nobody needed them. Dumb things like this. They didn't let the market work.

*Q: What about influences from the Soviet Union?*

FLACK: It was very high. The Soviet Union, China and North Korea. Their embassies were very active there. Kim Il Sung came to visit while I was there. He stayed for two months. We thought he would never leave and couldn't understand why he stayed so long. Practically everybody in town got a set of complete works of Kim. They must have come with a plane load of them. At the airport you constantly saw the Soviet air force planes. The military was basically supplied by the Soviets. So, there were very close relationships with the Soviet Bloc. Lots of East Bloc countries had aid programs in Algeria. The Bulgarians, for example, sent a lot of doctors.

*Q: Was there any feeling that this relationship was beginning to break down?*

FLACK: Only in the sense that the economy was going so badly that you would have thought some intelligent people there would start thinking about what is really going on here, socialism is not working in this country. But, I didn't really see much of that. The Soviets for example were building a huge steel mill. One of the things that I did when I was there – Times Magazine used to do what they called a "Times News Tour." They would gather 20 or 30 top executives and send them off on a tour by chartered plane. They came to Algeria. I was making arrangements with the Algerian government to show them various things. They were very anxious to show them all these wonderful things that the Soviets had done for them. One of the things was a steel mill outside of Algiers. We arranged a visit to the steel mill which we knew was not working. I was surprised when the Algerians wanted to show the mill to them.

Well, we went over with this group and I remember we were walking through it and I was surprised that there was activity. There were people running around. It looked like it was probably staged, but nevertheless there was activity. I was walking with Lee Iacocca and he was looking and chuckling to himself. He said, "Who do these people think they are trying to fool?" I said, "Is this as I suspect all put on?" He said, "I don't know who they think we are, we are industrialists, businessmen. We know how a steel mill operates. See that machine over there? (It was a big machine with a huge roll of steel, like a stamping machine.) If they press the start button on that it is going to snap because they have it threaded backwards. If you look through the plant you can see that this is just not a plant, it is a movie set. The Algerians must think we are real fools." Well, you wonder about things like that. How could they make such stupid mistakes and think they were getting away with it? I don't know.

*Q: Did you find the hand of the French there at all?*

FLACK: There was much French influence, of course, because there is a strong tie with France even though it is a love/hate relationship. There were three countries with major problems with Algeria -- France, Morocco and the United States. Morocco because of the border war over the Western Sahara, which was starting when we were there. So, we used to say the United States was number three on the Algerian hate list, the Moroccans first, the French second and the American third. The French had a terrible time there because their cars were spit upon, their houses were broken into regularly. For an Algerian it is hard to tell an American from a Frenchman so we were often thought to be French and were given a bad time. It was hard, especially for the French. On the other hand, they are still the biggest trading partner and there is a terrific connection there. There are so many Algerians in France who are sending money back. Even back then there was an enormous amount of money coming in from France. So, there was a lot going on in that relationship, but it was also a very bitter one because of the war.

*Q: Were you able to have political discussions with the Algerians about Israel, etc.?*

FLACK: Yes, but it was very, very difficult because it was clear that they were very uncomfortable talking about it. They were afraid of it somehow getting back to the people above them or on their own political level that they had been talking to the Americans and they really weren't supposed to. So, anytime you got into a political discussion it was usually with a non official. Our best friends there, he was an art professor at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. He was a painter and his wife was French and they had two kids. We got to know them fairly well. He would discuss with me these things but it was because he was an academic. He was very Algerian and very pro- Algerian, but he was perhaps a little bit more objective on these things and I could have good discussions with him.

*Q: Was the rise of fundamentalism apparent at that point?*

FLACK: It was coming. There was certainly a lot of things going on in the society which indicated that the Islamists were gaining ground. In terms of fundamentalist, I would say no, it wasn't too clear at that point. It was all on the basis of what the Algerian government was doing to Arabize the society. For example, the language. They were taking French out of the schools and making Arabic the official language, which is normal but it was really dumb to stop teaching French to young people. When I was there, if you were talking to anybody that was under 15, they didn't speak French at all because it was no longer taught in the schools. If they were over 15 they spoke French and the older the person you talked to the more fluent their French was. It seems to me to be only logical to interface with the rest of the world; they should have kept teaching French. Instead their nationalism was trying to repress it.

*Q: Were there any other developments you would like to mention?*

FLACK: Let's see. I still remember the moment when official announcement of the reestablishment of relations came over the news archives. Parker called us all into the center part of the embassy and was reading the announcement, we knew it was coming but the locals didn't, and there was a great deal of cheering by the national employees. I will never forget this. This guy who worked for me and had been there before when we had had relations, ran off. I asked



him where he was going and he said that he would be back in a minute. He went back into the GSO's back closet and was rummaging around. He came back out with the metal U.S. embassy seal and said, "Come with me." We all went out to the front gate and took down the Swiss seal and put back the American seal. That was fun because it gave you an idea of the feelings that these people had at that point. I was really amazed at that.

*Q: Then you left in 1976 and whither?*

**RICHARD B. PARKER**  
**Ambassador**  
**Algeria (1974-1977)**

*In addition to his service in Algeria, Ambassador Richard B. Parker was posted as a Foreign Service officer to Australia, Israel, Jordan, Washington, DC, Libya, Lebanon, and Egypt. Charles Stuart Kennedy interviewed him in 1989.*

PARKER: I sort of despaired at getting an ambassadorial post in 1974. Henry Tasca, our ambassador in Athens, asked for me as Deputy Chief of Mission. I always wanted to go to Athens. I said, "All right." This was a senior DCM post. I was all set to go when, well to make a very long and complicated story short, my orders were changed, and I was sent to Algiers instead to be chief of the interest section there.

The Algerians had also broken relations with us in 1967. I was sent with the understanding that I would be the first ambassador when relations were renewed, which came to pass about four months after I got there. I went out just at the time of Nixon's resignation. So I was appointed by President Ford.

*Q: What was the situation in Algeria when you went out there?*

PARKER: Well, a very difficult situation in the sense that although American companies were very active there, the political environment was hostile. They had enormous contracts. Two-billion dollars worth of contracts, which was quite a bit of money in 1974. They were building installations for the oil industry.

We had good economic relations, but our political relations were at best cool. It was a very difficult climate. The Algerians are very suspicious of us, and nobody would tell us anything. A very tough environment in which to work. Terrible housing problems and shortages. We were dependent on food orders from Denmark, and people flying in cheese from Paris and so forth. There was nothing to eat in Algeria. I mean, aside from bread. They were even importing potatoes and eggs. Algeria was the largest egg importer in the world in the 1970s. And this is in a country which could be the market garden of Europe.

My principal problem was trying to do something about the morale of my staff. They all felt under siege. They all felt the Algerians were the enemy. I had great work persuading people to

be more patient and understanding and to try to see the Algerian side of it and accentuate the positive and so forth.

I also had to sort of start from scratch in terms of relations with Algeria. I really had no opposite number here in Washington. They didn't send anybody senior here to represent them. I worked very hard at this.

I had a good relationship with President Boumedienne, B-O-U-M-E-D-I-E-N-N-E, largely because I spoke Arabic to him. This became a point of honor between us. We never needed an interpreter, and he and I would sit and talk Arabic. When I left to go to Lebanon in '77, he expressed appreciation for this. One time he reportedly told his cabinet, "If the American Ambassador can speak Arabic, so can you." Realize that the Algerians had been brought up by the French to be illiterate in all languages. Very few of them could speak correct Arabic.

*Q: Could you give your evaluation of Boumedienne?*

PARKER: Well, he was not nearly as dour a figure as everybody thought. He certainly took his ideological commitments very serious, but he had a sense of humor. He would occasionally joke with me about something. Had a twinkle in his eye. I liked him.

He was direct. He would give you a straight answer as opposed to Morocco where you never get a straight answer. The Algerians would come right out and tell you, "No, I'm not going to do it." The Moroccans would normally say, "Well, yes, we will think about that," or "We'll try to do it," or "Yes, of course," when they have no intentions of doing it. With the Algerians, the answer is usually no, but at least you know where you stand.

I had a lot of sympathy for what Boumedienne was trying to do. I thought he made a lot of mistakes in terms of economic planning. I didn't have any luck trying to tell this to the Algerians. But he was overly ambitious, I think, in what he was hoping to do for Algeria.

*Q: Did you have anything outside of private American investment, any tools at hand?*

PARKER: No, no.

*Q: No aid.*

PARKER: No aid program or nothing. Nothing but personal contacts.

*Q: Were they particularly interested in the United States?*

PARKER: Yes, they are very interested in U.S. policy. But you see, in most international fora, we and the Algerians would be on opposite sides of the line. But no, they were not interested in U.S. aid. We couldn't give them anything.

I worked very hard to try to get a medical exchange started. I had personal interest in doing something to improve the quality of medical services in Algeria since I was dependent on them. I

worked very hard, both on the American end and on the Algerian end, to get an exchange of physicians started. It got started just as I left and then, I don't know why, it stopped after several years.

*Q: Well, why -- again looking at it at that time -- what was the analysis of the embassy and your staff and yourself of why things didn't work in Algeria? I mean, here it was an immensely rich country.*

PARKER: Because of socialism. The idea of socialized agriculture is, you know, a non-starter. Peasants are paid whether they work or not. And their pay consists largely of chips which they can only use at the company store which doesn't have anything in it except fly spray and laundry starch. The motivation for working harder and producing more is not there. People simply didn't work. Agriculture was the principal disaster area, but throughout industry, the same thing was true. When you have a group of bureaucrats who are making decisions as to where money is to be invested in what without really much regard to what their economic realities are.

**LAMBERT HEYNIGER**  
**Principal Officer**  
**Oran, Algeria (1976-1978)**

*Lambert Heyniger was born in New York in 1930. He graduated from Princeton University in 1953 and served overseas in the U.S. Army from 1953-1955. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956 and served in numerous posts abroad, including Jordan, Netherlands, Congo, Tanzania, and Algeria. He was interviewed on May 19, 1996 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.*

*Q: So you are up to '76.*

HEYNIGER: Yes and in '76 I was just about to be remarried, and I was looking for a post abroad. The assignment officer for the Arab world came around and said "are you going to marry that tall dark girl that you've been chasing around the halls?" I said "yes." He said "does she speak French?" I said "yes, she is a native of Quebec." He said "Oh have I got an assignment for you." His problem had been for a number of months that Dick Parker, our Ambassador in Algeria, wanted the constituent post in Oran staffed by two officers, two FSO's, but there was only one house. The two officers assigned to the post were going to have to live and work in the same building, and this is pretty tough. So, when Charles Matheson, the assignments officer, learned that we were going to get married, he was just delighted. The assignment went up. It had to be approved. This is interesting just as a vignette. It had to be approved by Ambassador Laise herself. This was the very first tandem assignment in the Foreign Service where one half of the couple was in a direct supervisory position over the other half of the couple.

The way that we solved the problem, and I think it was a very good one, was that both of our efficiency reports would be written by the DCM in Algiers so there would be nothing in either of our files about the other one.

So off we went to Oran from 1976 to 1978. It was fun for me because it was an opportunity to have my own post as a Principal Officer. I remember Roland Welch when I first came into the Service saying the most fun is to have your own post. The main reason why we had a consulate in Oran was there were some very large American businesses like Bechtel and Foster Wheeler who were building gas liquefaction plants for the Algerians right near Oran. ITT was building a huge factory to produce electronic appliances in the old headquarters of the French Foreign Legion in Sidi-bel Abbes. It was more economic than political work. My new wife was my deputy principal officer. We had one clerk, so we were a small, happy family.

Oran and Algiers are tough places to serve. Oran is quite isolated; the people are not particularly friendly. We had a small circle of friends and not many opportunities for recreation and culture. I don't think we did too badly. One time I went up to call on the mayor of Oran. He said Mr. Consul how are you doing? How are you enjoying life? I said, well not bad at all, beautiful weather, beautiful scenery, a chance to be in the Mediterranean, but jogging up and down the streets the little boys run along with me. They find this interesting. Oh, he said, I'll make arrangements for the National Stadium to be opened for you and your wife. A week later I drove the Consulate vehicle up to the main part of town, and the gates of the National Stadium were opened, and we were ushered in. My wife and I had two full hours to run around this gorgeous thing which had been built possibly as an Olympic facility with a track that was like cork, totally by ourselves.

We got around a lot. It is a very interesting place to serve with these little, small towns like Mascara which is where the make up comes from. A couple of times we got to go down fairly deep in the Sahara Desert. We were always a little fearful because here we are in our little Consulate Plymouth. Algeria is a beautiful country, but it has experienced an enormous amount of trauma particularly getting liberated from the French and the tremendous insurgent effort that required. I think the Algerians, who are very intelligent and very capable particularly in business, they are a very capable people. They just need to be left alone for awhile so that a lot of this stress can subside.

*Q: What was the political situation in '76-'78 in the department where you were in Oran?*

HEYNIGER: At that time there was none of what is going on now where there is this drive for Islamic fundamentalism and killing of people and atrocities which are just making Algeria a tragic place. Things were relatively peaceful. The government was by and large a quasi-military government. The Governor of Oran district was an Algerian general. The focus was on trying to build up the area economically and commercially. Some rather sad things were going on. I think for cultural and religious reasons, Algerians were tearing up a number of the vineyards in this western part of Algeria. I don't know if you know this, but there was a very significant amount of wine that was produced in Algeria and shipped to France where it was mixed with other wine for table wine. This was a considerable produce and trade, but for religious and cultural reasons the Algerians didn't want to be producing alcoholic beverages, so they were pulling up and burning the vineyards which was really sad.

They were doing other things too. One of the reasons why my wife and I decided to try to learn

written Arabic was that they decided to go around and take down all the road signs in French. This was a bit tricky because you could get 50 or 75 miles out in the country, and you wouldn't really know how to get back home. We learned at least to read Arabic, enough to say Ah, we better go west.

There were only two of us. I was really concerned in terms of the operation of the post. I thought the post was not equipped the way a Foreign Service post should be equipped. We had no secure communications whatever. We had no real communications; we just had a telephone. The post had been trying to get a telex machine for about eight or nine years and not succeeding. I talked long and hard with the Ambassador and the DCM. We finally got a used Algerian telex machine which enabled us to at least send routine unclassified Consular and administrative messages to the department. Otherwise everything had to be reported by telephone to the Embassy in vague terms and then sent on by Algiers.

Another thing was that we had an emergency E and E radio which we were supposed to test every week so in case the balloon went up, we would be able to let the Embassy in Algiers and the military forces in the Med know to come and get us. In all the two years I was there, we never really had any clear successful radio contact. I felt that if the United States government was going to open and maintain a Foreign Service post anywhere, it should have a basic level of equipment and ability to operate. These are tales from the Foreign Service.

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

HEYNIGER: The first year it was Dick Parker for whom I have enormous admiration. During my time he was one of the foremost Arabists in the Foreign Service and served all over the Arab world, had and has a marvelous sense of humor, a wonderful guy. He was reassigned, and we got a political appointee, believe it or not.

*Q: Sort of an odd place for a political appointee.*

HEYNIGER: Very. He had been an executive for a number of years of Cummings Engine, had worked for about five years in Tehran. I guess he wanted to be an Ambassador and was offered Algiers and took it. He was there for the rest of my tour in Oran and I think a year or two after. I don't think he really enjoyed it too much. He was a black Ambassador. Of course while the Arabs claim to be totally raceless, I think that he felt that they were not being as welcoming to him as he might have otherwise expected.

One of the main things, to come back to the question that you asked me earlier, one of the main things that was going on was there was an insurgency in Morocco, particularly southern Morocco. We wanted to find out the extent to which these insurgents were being supported and supplied by the Algerians. They were certainly giving King Hassan a headache. It would have been valuable to learn the extent to which the Algerians were aiding, I think it was called the Saraoui Independence Front. One time my wife and I did go down about 400 miles along the border between Morocco and Algeria to a significant route that led west. But you can only hang around so long because you are so conspicuous. We never were able to find out too much about it.

At that point the Algerian central government really had the domestic situation pretty much in hand. There was no insurgency. People were trying to get their lives back together and to improve. Algeria was going through a period of very serious cultural change. It was the country that France had thought it could keep while it granted independence to Morocco on one side and Tunisia on the other. There were many native born Europeans, born in Algeria, called Pied Noir who had been there and had been a great portion of the middle class. Now the Algerians were having to fill all that in.

*Q: What was the attitude from your perspective of the Algerians toward the Americans and the United States Government?*

HEYNIGER: I think somewhat the same as in Tanzania. I consider the Algerians to be politically very sophisticated people. This was a time, you may recall, when Algeria was trying to play an intermediary role between East and West. Algeria was a very socialistic country, very centrally organized, but particularly with things like airplane hijackings and other terrorist acts, it was frequently the Algerians who stepped in between the terrorists and either the Germans or the Israelis or whoever and tried to settle the thing. They were strongly interested in being an active, vocal participant in the third world socialistic approach.

Now I think they are focused more on their domestic situation, but at that time, I never served in the Embassy, but I don't think it was easy for our people to have access to senior Algerian officials. I certainly had rare access to senior officials in my Consular District, but it was possible to do business. The fact that the Algerians had chosen these large American firms for these major projects -- each one of these gas liquefaction plants cost about a billion dollars -- and they had three of them going up at the same time, showed that they were not afraid to bring in large scale American assistance. Morrison-Knudsen was there building electric plants.

*Q: Did you see any parallels between what you observed in Tanzania, indeed a more non petroleum enriched society, and Algeria in the socialist path they were going down?*

HEYNIGER: I think certainly you could draw some parallels between what the Tanzanians and the Algerians were trying to do in forums like the United Nations or the OAU or the Arab League or things like that. They were both, as opposed to let's say Morocco or Tunisia, the Algerians were trying to be much more activist, much more outspoken, much more energetic on an international level.

They had a great deal of difficulty in their relations with France. On the one hand, they were very involved with France economically, with the currency flows going back and forth across the Mediterranean from Algerians who were in France and sending money back to Algeria or Algerians who wanted to buy stuff in France and they couldn't get it in, so they were smuggling it in. Quite a difference.

I did not see, during my period there, any real Algerian interest or activity in rural development as compared with Tanzania. It was more stimulating business, trade, and building up the economic infrastructure.

*Q: What about dealing with the local officials? Did you find them fairly open, or were they... You mentioned when you were in Tanzania, you were treated with a certain amount of caution.*

HEYNIGER: I found it much more difficult in Algeria. Again it was a situation where most Algerians did not want to be seen with American government officials. They basically wanted to have as little as possible to do with Americans. It wasn't just us. They didn't want to have to do with the French. At that time there was still an enormous French presence in Algeria, enormous French aid programs. All the young French men and women who didn't want to do military service went into the French Peace Corps. Many of them were assigned to Algeria as educators or helping to train people in skills, so the French still had great interest in what was going on in that part of the world and yet great difficulty. The French consul General had a very difficult time communicating with host officials. We had a somewhat easier time on the level of commercial relations and business. Although you have to remember that in a country like Algeria at that time, many of the host business officials that you were dealing with were in effect government employees.

This is why I said that opportunities for recreation and culture were fairly limited. We had a very small circle. We tried to do what economic and commercial reporting we could, but oftentimes it would come in the form of frequent visits to American businesses and then just picking up from them how things were going from their contacts with the Algerian people.

Canadians were functioning quite effectively working for the American businesses. The Canadians are Western people and democratic free enterprise types, but the ones who were in Algeria all spoke fluent French, and therefore were employed a lot by American businesses to sandwich between themselves and the Algerians. My wife being a former Canadian, the Canadian Embassy people would come down and stay in our house, and we had very good contacts with them, and they were very helpful.

*Q: Were you seeing any glimmers of the fundamentalist uprising that has certainly occupied the Algerians in the last 10 years?*

HEYNIGER: On the surface, no because the situation was so controlled by the military and the sort of quasi-military government of the Oran and other consular districts. So, on the surface, things were calm; however, there were a number of indications. In the first place there was tremendous unemployment, particularly among young men. Thousands of young men on the streets of Oran with nothing to do and no opportunity to earn a living. Digging up the vineyards, taking French off the road signs, all these are signs that the country was trying to assert its Arab and Islamic character and become less of a French colony.

I remember a not very attractive story. My wife after awhile, decided whenever she went out, to wear a raincoat. I said "beautiful climate, beautiful day, why have you got your raincoat on?" You know, when she went out to do shopping or to do errands or things like that. She said "because people spit at me because I'm not wearing the [overall head to toe cloak of Arab women]. It says something about the way you as a foreigner are looked at if people are going to spit at you as you walk down the sidewalk. I guess they feel very strongly.

**ULRIC HAYNES, JR.**  
**Ambassador**  
**Algeria (1977-1981)**

*Ambassador Haynes was born and raised in New York City and educated at Amherst College and the Yale University Law School. Before serving as US Ambassador to Algeria from 1977 to 1981, he worked with the United Nations in Geneva, the Ford Foundation in Nigeria and Tunisia, the State Department and the National Security Council in Washington, DC. After his ambassadorship, Mr. Haynes continued to be heavily involved in business and academia. The Ambassador was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2011.*

*Q: Well, when you came back in '77 what'd you do?*

HAYNES: Well, I hadn't been back more than a couple of weeks when I had a call from the White House asking me if I would be interested in an ambassadorial appointment.

*Q: Well, had you been keeping up your political ties?*

HAYNES: Keeping up? I had many friends in the State Department, going back to my early days, and I had one benefactor who remembered me well, and that was W. Averell Harriman. He was no slouch when it came to pushing his secretary of state or his president. He was very much the respected elder statesman. And he was the one who recommended me for the post of ambassador to Algeria.

*Q: Now, this is during the early Carter administration.*

HAYNES: Very early Carter.

*Q: Had you ever had any contact with Carter before?*

HAYNES: None. And I never had contact with him face-to-face until after he left the presidency and after I had ceased to be an ambassador. Carter, you may recall, dispensed with the practice of meeting his ambassadors before they took up their overseas posts. It was regrettable, because those meetings produced, if nothing else, a photograph of the ambassador shaking hands with his president, which was a very impressive item in the ambassador's office when foreign visitors came.

*Q: Yes.*

HAYNES: But, Carter -- just as he dispensed with meeting his ambassadors -- did not serve liquor at state dinners or at any official function in the White House. He was a strange duck.



*Q: How did Algeria come bubbling out of the thing? Did you ever find out how that worked?*

HAYNES: President Carter had set up a committee of elder statesmen to make ambassadorial recommendations for political ambassadorial appointees to him. And this is because he had no background in foreign affairs, and no direct personal contacts with anyone in foreign affairs. Remember, he'd only been governor of Georgia. So he was pretty dependent on this committee to make ambassadorial suggestions to him, most of which he followed. Also, Algeria at that time was supplying 10% of the United States' imported crude oil. A significant amount.

*Q: Yes.*

HAYNES: And also, the Algerian government had broken diplomatic relations with the United States over, if memory serves me U.S. support for Israel in the Six Day War. So we had not had an ambassador there for a long time. The first US Ambassador to Algeria after the break in diplomatic relations in 1967 was Ambassador Richard Parker who served for about one year before being named American Ambassador to Lebanon. I followed Ambassador Parker in June 1977. Remember Richard Parker?

*Q: Oh yes, he just died.*

HAYNES: He just died --

*Q: Actually, Dick Parker was the first president in my little Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training here.*

HAYNES: He was a great scholar of Middle Eastern affairs and culture and a very well respected man. And I was the first American ambassador after the resumption of diplomatic relations. And the Algerians had a very interesting policy. They scrupulously respected and encouraged Algeria's commercial relations with the United States, and equally so encouraged their military relations with the Soviet Union. So they were walking a very difficult thin line, but they did it very well.

*Q: Well now, prior to -- I mean obviously they got to go through congressional hearings and all that.*

HAYNES: Yes.

*Q: How did you prepare to go to Algeria?*

HAYNES: Well, you know, as someone who was addicted to international news, I didn't have to do very much preparation. I knew what the major issues of concern were between the United States and Algeria. And I had lived in Tunisia at the time of Algeria's independence. So I had lived through a period of very important modern Algerian history and nation building. So I didn't need to do a lot of preparation. Certainly among the more interesting people that I had to deal with in my hearings was Senator Richard Lugar. I found him both knowledgeable and well prepared for my hearing.

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

HAYNES: I had and still have the greatest respect for Senator Lugar. He is a very, very fine statesman, in addition to being an excellent senator. Also participating in my hearing was Senator Jacob Javits from New York who was in declining health.

So, in my senate hearing I was up against some heavyweights. Not against, I was in front of some heavyweights. They were a very friendly group.

*Q: Well --*

HAYNES: Didn't want to give you the impression they were adversaries.

*Q: Well, was this a period where we were -- was either side pushing to reestablish relations, or was it mutual, or how was this working?*

HAYNES: Both sides wanted to reestablish relations.

*Q: I would think that the Algerians -- I mean they had this, this tie that goes back to 1830 with, with the French, and they would be happy to bring somebody else in so they wouldn't be -- have to sort of be, if not subservient, but have to be overly careful about their relations with the French.*

HAYNES: You would think so. But, the residue of French culture and a respect for France and everything the French represented remains in Algeria to this day, and existed after independence. Look at the *huge* number of Algerians who have emigrated to France. They are the single largest number of Muslims in France to this day. And Algeria maintained, and still maintains, important commercial ties to France. And, I might add, one of the most important ties, oddly enough for a Muslim country, is supplying France with table wine. Much of the table wine that one drinks in France, when you go to a café or a bistro, comes from Algeria to this day.

*Q: What were our interests in Algeria when you were getting ready to go there?*

HAYNES: Well, obviously we did not want Algeria meddling in the Arab/Israeli crisis in a way that jeopardized our interest. And then of course we wanted to protect our access to Algerian oil and gas. Very important.

*Q: You went there in what, '77?*

HAYNES: Yes.

*Q: What was the situation in Algeria, sort of politically and economically when you went there?*

HAYNES: Well, Algeria has never had a very strong domestic economy. Politically, it was very oppressive. It was a police state, clearly.

*Q: Well, how about the fundamentalist, Islamic fundamentalist? Was this the factor that it later became or --*

HAYNES: Not at all. They didn't exist at that time.

*Q: What sort of questioning did you get through the Senate?*

HAYNES: Very polite. They handled me extremely gently. Nothing that indicated to me that they had a great understanding of American relations with Algeria, or a great interest. Remember, at that time, the Cold War was preeminent among the interests of most American foreign policy experts.

*Q: How did you find the people dealing with Algeria in the State Department treated you? Because you weren't the normal political appointee. I mean you'd certainly been around the block.*

HAYNES: I called myself an "inside outsider." I already knew so many of them. Harold Saunders, who was then the assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern Affairs had been a graduate student when I was a law student at Yale. And we served together on the National Security Council staff. So, I knew a lot of the people that I was dealing with. And that was a help. However, I will never forget, after having arrived in Algeria at the end of June, my first really official function before I presented my letters of credentials, was hosting the American embassy Fourth of July celebration. And as I passed -- on the grounds of my own embassy residence -- as I passed a group of American embassy wives I heard this snip of a conversation. One wife said to the other wife, "Have you seen what Washington sent us this time?" And the other wife replied, "Yes. And I'm not going to have it in *my* house." They were talking about me and my appointment.

*Q: Oh, my God.*

HAYNES: And the fact that I was a *black ambassador*, which was still pretty rare. You know, I was -- while Algeria's considered the Near East in the State Department, it was not a typical appointment for a black ambassador.

*Q: No, no, I -- yes, the -- well --*

HAYNES: Let me tell you how I dealt with that one.

*Q: Yes.*

HAYNES: One of my first official acts was to schedule a tour all of the American embassy residences rented or owned in Algiers to give the lie to the Embassy wife who said that I would never set foot in her house. Sure enough, when I got to her house, she did not offer me so much as a glass of water.

*Q: Oh, my God.*

HAYNES: And I'm going to tell you, it's -- from my point of view, that wrecked her husband's career. Because as soon as I could, I decided we could not afford to have an American family with this kind of prejudice representing us abroad, and I arranged for his transfer. It's something that we just cannot tolerate.

*Q: Absolutely not. I mean, you know, badmouthing and, I mean you're just not getting the full cooperation.*

HAYNES: Well, not only -- not only that, but if she had that attitude toward her ambassador, what did she think of the Algerians?

*Q: Oh, my God, yes.*

HAYNES: And I must say, I wasn't far from wrong. Not long afterwards, we constructed a swimming pool for the embassy staff and one of the administrative officers came to me and said he was speaking on behalf of the American families who did not want to have Algerians swimming in the same swimming pool with them. I was dumbfounded. When I recovered I said, "Listen. Do you know to whom you're addressing this request? You're addressing this to someone who as a little boy couldn't swim in public swimming pools because of the color of his skin. And you want me to turn around and treat other people the same way? Get out of here!" I was furious!

*Q: (sighs) How were you received when you arrived there?*

HAYNES: *(laughs)* With surprise. I'll give you a funny anecdote. When I presented my letters of credentials to President Boumediène in the presidential palace I was accompanied by my DCM who was white. And as I approached the president to present my letters of credentials, he extended his hand to my deputy, rather than to me. And I said, "Excuse me, Mr. President, but I'm the ambassador." I cannot tell you how embarrassed he was. And I later used that to my advantage. Thereafter, whenever I requested an appointment with the president, I got it. He was *so* embarrassed. But, hey, we have ourselves to blame too.

*Q: Oh yes! Well, okay, here's a country and we've been -- well, actually we've gone about 14 years without relations, weren't they?*

HAYNES: Oh, I don't remember the exact number of years.

*Q: But I mean anyway, significant number. What was there to do to sort of get the machinery running again?*

HAYNES: Not very much, because during this time our commercial relations had prospered, and there were many American oil executives based in Algeria. And this was a sector, as I said, the Algerians were very intent on maintaining with the United States. It took a little more doing to develop military relations, or as we call them, defense relations, and political relations with the

Algerians. The one thing they did not want the U.S. meddling in their internal political affairs, and this was one of the problems that they had with the Soviets who were a little bit heavy handed in this respect. But, in no time, I'm proud and happy to say, our embassy became a very popular place for Algerians, and a very important listening post for me. One of the reasons for this is attributable for my wife, Yolande, who decided that she would open a snack bar in an empty embassy garage adjacent to our chancery, because our staff lost precious time driving home to lunch every day. And that took a big chunk of time out of their workday. So she set up a snack bar and very quickly that snack bar became a popular place for middle level and some senior level Algerian officials to come for a quick bite to eat at lunchtime. And I'll tell you, quite frankly, it was probably a most important listening post to find out what was going on in Algeria.

*Q: No, but I mean just --*

HAYNES: The mood of the country.

*Q: Well, I can understand why -- I mean this is before the great influx of the McDonald's on the other thing. I mean the French, of course, had this tradition of a two to three hour lunch and all, which an awful lot of businesspeople, including the French, found a bit much.*

HAYNES: Exactly.

*Q: And going and having a hamburger or hotdog or something --*

HAYNES: Exactly.

*Q: -- you know, and sitting down, and you could have actually a pleasant lunch and leave in half an hour or so.*

HAYNES: Exactly. And in fact, we had other embassy -- other ambassadors from other embassies actually came to have lunch. The French ambassador was a regular. And it was a very lovely setting because we had people sit outside in the garden. So, it was a nice place to even come for a cup of coffee.

*Q: How about your dealings with the French?*

HAYNES: A lot, and they were very cordial. I had very good relations with the French ambassador.

*Q: Were there any -- we're often rivals commercially. I mean was this a problem or?*

HAYNES: No, the French were getting the lion's share of Algerian oil. We were getting 100% of Algeria's natural gas, which was very important. But our commercial interests with the French were complementary, not competitive. At this time, Algerian crude oil accounted for just 10% of US imported crude oil.

*Q: As ambassadors go, very few come in with the international experience that you'd had in, sort*

*of in the business world. Did you find this stood you well?*

HAYNES: It was enormously helpful, enormously helpful. It gave me credibility with the American business community in Algeria, as well as with the Algerians dealing with that community.

*Q: Well, as a new, newly open representation, were you able to set up the equivalent to the American Chamber of Commerce and relations with that?*

HAYNES: There was an American businessmen club, not a Chamber of Commerce.

*Q: How did you find that? Was this a good instrument to deal with?*

HAYNES: It was a very important source of information -- firsthand information about our commercial relations with Algeria.

*Q: I mean were there sort of problems with Algerian bureaucracy and all in getting things done?*

HAYNES: Oh, it didn't function like the American bureaucracy. It was excessively bureaucratic, if I can use that term again. But problems? No, we didn't have major problems.

*Q: How about the Polisario movement? What were we doing with that?*

HAYNES: My instructions from the department were that I was to have no direct contact, nor official contact with the representatives of the Polisario in Algeria. However, it was impossible to go to a diplomatic reception without running across them. I did not publicly shake hands or engage them in conversation. But I do recall on one occasion being invited to dinner at the home of a senior Algerian Foreign Ministry official, a dinner party at which the Polisario was present. Now, you can't be stupidly -- how can I say -- political in situations like that, and walk out, or refuse to say good evening. No, I -- yes, the Polisario was very much present, very active, and I dare say, very effective and well supported by the Algerians.

*Q: I mean obviously you were getting information on them, what was your reading on this movement?*

HAYNES: I must say that, to this day, I consider the Polisario to be a legitimate independence movement. I had visited what was then the Spanish Sahara with Soapy Williams way back in the early 1960s. And I remember our conversation with the, with the local Sahraoui administrators in which they were looking forward to being an independent nation. Remember that, I think it was the Green March --

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: -- or the Great March. When Hassan II, King Hassan II in Morocco just took hordes of Moroccans and marched them into this former Spanish Sahara and took it over. And in the proceedings before the International Court of Justice it has been declared an illegal takeover.

And, and the Moroccans have successfully resisted complying with the Court's ruling to this day.

*Q: Did you have relation with our ambassador in Morocco, for example, or?*

HAYNES: Our ambassador?

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: Oh, I knew him -- at the time -- it was, Angie Duke, Angier Biddle Duke.

*Q: Ah-ha.*

HAYNES: And he too was a friend from beforehand, so we had very close relations. And Angie, like many, many American ambassadors, had a bad case of "localities". He was a firm supporter of the Moroccan monarchy. They could do no wrong.

*Q: Yeah, that's -- coming back to Dick Parker, he, being absolutely fluent in Arabic, apparently knew too much and was persona non grata.*

HAYNES: In Morocco.

*Q: In Morocco.*

HAYNES: Very much so. He got to know them much too well and made them feel uneasy. He spoke their language. He spoke not just Arabic, but he spoke Maghrebi Arabic, their kind of Arabic. Which made them very, very uneasy.

*Q: I'm told -- somebody in one of my oral histories was saying the story was that in Algeria when Dick was ambassador there, there was a Cabinet meeting and Dick was present talking about things, and at one point Boumediène turned to his Cabinet and said, "How come the American ambassador speaks better Arabic than you do? Most of you speak French," you know (laughs).*

HAYNES: That's right. No, he was, he was absolutely fluent.

*Q: Yes.*

HAYNES: And, I daresay he was beloved by all Algerians who had nothing to do with -- and if they didn't love him, they respected him, which was just as important.

*Q: Well, let's see. You were there. How were the Algerians seeing the Americans at this point?*

HAYNES: Oh. They had a, a very important self-interest in maintaining good relations with the Americans. And the proof of the pudding was that they were willing to serve as our intermediaries years later in the Iran hostage crisis. And they did a magnificent job.

*Q: You were there during this, weren't you?*

HAYNES: Very much so.

*Q: I'm just thinking this might be a very good place to stop for this section so we can devote more time to your time during the hostage crisis. And you know, some other questions, how'd you find the -- I'll put it in here so I can put it in here next time -- how'd you find the officers of the embassy and all.*

HAYNES: Sure.

*Q: All right. Well, today is the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, 2011 with Ulric Haynes. And Rick, we've started -- we're in Algeria. And you were in Algeria from when to when?*

HAYNES: From 1977 to the beginning of 1981.

*Q: Before we get to some of the other developments, how did you find the embassy staff while you were there?*

HAYNES: I was a little disappointed in what I considered to be their lack of background and preparation for their assignments, with the exception of the public affairs officer who later became my DCM. His name is Christopher Ross. His father was Tony Ross, who was a very well known American ambassador, highly respected. Chris had served in Morocco before coming to Algeria and was fluent in Maghrebi Arabic, the Arabic that is spoken in Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco. He was also quite fluent in French. None of my other Foreign Service officers were fluent in French and none in Arabic, and that was a major drawback.

*Q: I can imagine. Well, then were you and the officers able to get out in the countryside, or was it dangerous?*

HAYNES: Oh no, not at all. I traveled extensively even into the Sahara Desert as a guest of the Algerian government down into the Hoggar and the Tassili. And I, my family and I also camped out on some of the beaches near on the Mediterranean coast.

*Q: Well was --*

HAYNES: Let me modify that with one -- in one respect. When President Boumediène fell ill and ultimately died, the restrictions on travel and the police surveillance was quite widespread.

*Q: Why? Was there fear of a coup or what?*

HAYNES: When Boumediène fell ill?

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: I would suspect that the military, who really have controlled Algeria since its



inception, were very conscious of the possibility of forces in the country that were opposed to their government taking advantage of the crisis in leadership. So, they took all sorts of steps to prevent that.

*Q: What was the problem with Boumediène?*

HAYNES: His illness?

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: Oh, I -- I cannot remember what it was ultimately -- I don't think we ever really knew what he was diagnosed with. But, he did have a terminal illness and in fact we arranged for an American Military medical unit to come over with a mobile CAT scanner and examine him. And it was, I believe, Waldenstrom's Syndrome, a rare non-Hodgkins lymphoma.

*Q: Did we have much, an active information program going on? I'm thinking of contact with the media, placement of things on TV, that sort of thing?*

HAYNES: Well, placement of things on TV was virtually impossible because the media and television were very tightly controlled by the government. But we did have quite an effective cultural program. For example, I remember Joan Baez came over to give a concert.

*Q: Ah.*

HAYNES: And it was very interesting because Joan Baez's father was working in Algeria at the time. Al Baez was his name. He was a scientist who taught for several years at the Boumerdes Technical Institute in Algeria. But he was responsible for bringing his daughter over, and our cultural affairs officer and public affairs officer collaborated in making the most of her visit. One of the interesting things about her visit -- and I will never forget it -- at her public concert, she got the Algerians, who are Muslims and mostly Arab to sing along with her the Israeli national anthem, Hagan Navila.

*Q: Ah-ha.*

HAYNES: And it was very moving. The audience lit candles or pieces of paper and waved them in the air. Joan Baez struck a very moving blow for Arab/Israeli relations.

*Q: Now, in so many of the Arab countries, we're beaten on the head with our relations with Israel. How about in Algeria?*

HAYNES: Much less than elsewhere in the Arab world. It is not such a great -- in fact, the further away in North Africa you get from the Middle East, the less important it becomes. For example, Morocco, at that time, was the only Arab country that had diplomatic relations with Israel. And to this day, there is a significant Jewish community in Morocco. Indeed, one of the financial advisors to King Mohammed VI is a prominent member of the Moroccan Jewish community. I'm talking about the present king.

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: And, in Algeria the president of the Bar Association of the capitol of Algiers was an Algerian Jew. When the French controlled Algeria, early on they gave French citizenship to Algerian Jews, but denied it to Algerian Muslims. As a consequence of which, several enterprising Muslim families in Algeria just changed their religion to Jewish. These were, generally speaking, very well educated Muslims, or Muslims in the business world. The Jewish president of the Algerian Bar Association during my time was Roger Said, S-A-I-D, with an Arab name who was the offspring of one of these families that had just up and changed their religion, as a matter of convenience.

*Q: Hm.*

HAYNES: Now, another thing that happened while I was in Algeria. Shortly after I arrived, some young Algerian hoodlums took it upon themselves to desecrate the one synagogue that still existed in the city of Algiers. The Boumediène government condemned their act and actually rebuilt, restored the synagogue even though there were not many practicing Jews in Algeria at the time.

*Q: How stood relations between Arabs and the Berbers when you were there?*

HAYNES: Very tense. The Berbers tended to be more westernized and better educated. Indeed, some Berber families even converted to Roman Catholicism and were practicing Christians. But the tensions arose over the Arab majority's refusal to allow the Berbers to teach their language or use their language in public schools. It was an attempt on the part of the Arabs to establish the Arab culture as the dominant culture of Algeria. And this is despite the fact that many of the top government officials and particularly civil servants were Berbers.

They did not call themselves Berbers in Algeria. They called themselves Kabyles.

*Q: Mm-hmm.*

HAYNES: And the region where they were most popular was called the Kabylie.

*Q: Was there a problem of, you know, from your standpoint of sort of American be nice to one and not the other, I mean did we get caught in between them or not or did they try to --*

HAYNES: No. We maintained good relations during my time with both communities. And on the local embassy staff there were Berbers as well as Arabs.

*Q: How about migration to France?*

HAYNES: Oh, that was the dream of all young Algerians. And I'm told it still is because of the massive unemployment in Algeria. There just are no opportunities for even university educated Algerians in the country. So France is looked to as a kind of Mecca.

*Q: Well, I mean looking at it as an outsider, did you see that the Algerians weren't taking advantage of what I'm told is, you know, very rich soil and real agricultural and other opportunities there, or not?*

HAYNES: No. Farming was quite important, but the Algerian government, which called itself socialist, did not encourage the private ownership of the means of production. And as a result, farmland, particularly along the Mediterranean coast that had been considered the breadbasket as far back of the time of the Romans certainly was not as productive under the independent government of Algeria.

*Q: Well, did we get involved with assistance, or did the French get involved with helping with agricultural assistance? Or was it just it was not the methods, but it was just the -- sort of the socialist policy that was screwing things up?*

HAYNES: It was the socialist policy that was screwing things up. And it continues to do so to this day.

*Q: Was there --*

HAYNES: There were, you know, in a country that had been virtually self-sufficient in terms of food, there are, and have been since its inception, serious food shortages.

*Q: Well --*

HAYNES: Indeed, let me just give you a little anecdote. We had a five-acre embassy compound -- quite a lot of land. And my wife planted a very extensive vegetable garden, which provided us and some of our embassy staff with vegetables in season. And she also had chickens. Now, all of this, the five acres, could be pretty well concealed without sacrificing the beautiful landscaping of, of the embassy grounds and gardens.

*Q: Well, now turning to events outside, how did the initial problem in Iran with the Shah, did that -- was that over the horizon and not of --*

HAYNES: It was not of great concern. When you say the problems with the Shah, Iran had an embassy in Algeria and Algeria maintained correct relations with the regime of the Shah while I was there.

*Q: Well --*

HAYNES: You must remember that the Arabs of North Africa and the Middle East do not consider the Iranians as cultural brothers. The Iranians themselves don't like to be confused with Arabs, and Iran doesn't like to be lumped in with the rest of the Middle East. So they had correct, but not warm relations.

*Q: Well, when our embassy was taken over, did that put you all on the alert or not, or were you*

*sort of away from that?*

HAYNES: We did not at all feel threatened in Algeria by the embassy takeover in Iran, no.

*Q: Well, were there attempts by the Iranians to incite the Algerians or not?*

HAYNES: No. Iran and Algeria did not have any common ground in the sense of political ideology or anything like that.

*Q: Well, this brings us to the Algerian Foreign Ministry. You know, in my time in the Foreign Service they've always been considered to have one of the more professional Foreign Services. Did you find that?*

HAYNES: Yes, they were very, very competent. And at the time that I was there, the foreign minister was Mohammed Ben Yahia. He was a very, very competent man who conducted with extraordinary skill the balancing of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union and later between the United States and Iran.

*Q: How about the Soviets? Their presence there?*

HAYNES: Oh, they were quite active, particularly in the area of military relations and military spies.

*Q: Did this concern us or not?*

HAYNES: We respected the careful balancing of relations that the Algerians maintained because they did so scrupulously and were so conscious of encouraging the commercial relations with the United States.

*Q: What did our attachés think of the Algerian Military?*

HAYNES: The general feeling was that they were very competent. At that time it was before the Muslim Brotherhood became active and an internal threat. But, it is to their credit that to this day they have been able to control the Muslim Brotherhood in Algeria. Mostly the Algerian Military was preoccupied with the situation of the Polisario and Morocco in the Western Sahara and with maintaining internal security.

*Q: Well, down in that western border, how stood things? I mean could we go down there and look at it, where the Polisario were doing their thing?*

HAYNES: We could go down to the Algerian side of the border. But certainly the Moroccans would not allow us across the border into the Western Sahara, which was not legally Moroccan territory. I do remember that Andrew Young, as American ambassador to the United Nations, paid a visit to the disputed region and to the Polisario camps on the Algerian side. I did not.

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: I did not because I was instructed by the department not to.

*Q: How stood Moroccan relations with Egypt?*

HAYNES: I'm not aware that there was any difficulty between their relations.

*Q: Yeah, I can't think of any particular reason.*

HAYNES: An interesting thing. The Maghreb -- Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco, not Libya, but Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco -- distance themselves from the political problems of the Middle East pretty much.

*Q: Well, I mean I suppose that the big event would be all the European tourists descending on you.*

HAYNES: In Algeria?

*Q: Yes. Or not?*

HAYNES: Algerian tourism was not as well developed as the tourism in the neighboring countries of Morocco and Tunisia. No, we did not have a large influx of tourists there.

*Q: This is because of government policy?*

HAYNES: Well, the development of tourism was not a high priority on the part of the Algerian government. So there were not a lot of world class hotels and there was not an infrastructure in Algeria to accommodate tourists such as there were in Morocco and in Tunisia, even though there were places of enormous touristic value and interest in Algeria, Roman ruins and the Tuareg culture in the Southern Sahara, fascinating, but undeveloped.

*Q: Yeah. It does seem like they sort of missed a lot of opportunities to get better employment and better economy and all?*

HAYNES: Oh, definitely. I think in the back of their mind was that they did not want to see an influx of former French residents, the pieds-noirs, returning to Algeria as tourists.

*Q: Yeah.*

HAYNES: So I think that discouraged them from developing tourism. But as I say, we -- my family and I visited some very, very interesting and impressive Roman ruins all along the Algerian Mediterranean coast. Not as vast and impressive as Leptis Magna in Libya. But, the Romans occupied that entire North African coast. In traveling to Morocco we encountered many, many Roman ruins.

*Q: Well, now was there anything to recall the World War II? The American and British, French*

*armies? German armies? Going over that area?*

HAYNES: Yes. There were American and British military cemeteries in Algeria. And as I recall on D-Day the British ambassador and I would pay formal ceremonial visits to those cemeteries.

*Q: How much were you involved as our ambassador there to doing the negotiations regarding the hostages in Iran? Or was this sort of taken away out of your hands and off and --*

HAYNES: Not, not at all. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher enlisted me particularly in the last 14 days of the negotiation process as an active participant in his negotiating. And prior to that, I had suggested that the Algerians be considered as intermediaries because we had broken diplomatic relations with Iran, of course. The Algerians had impeccable Islamic credentials as well as impeccable revolutionary credentials. They were acceptable to both sides. For the Algerians this was a chance to play a major role on the world stage.

*Q: Well, from your perspective, how did the negotiations -- how were they done and how did they work out?*

HAYNES: Permit me to give you some background recollections of what preceded the Iranian siege of the American embassy in Tehran and the seizing of 52 American hostages. My recollections begin with the arrival of the American delegation to the funeral of Algerian President Houari Boumedienne, President Carter's National Security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in early January 1979. Let me explain.

The American delegation to the funeral was lodged at the Aurassi Hotel in Algiers. In the course of an encounter with Brzezinski at the hotel, he told me of his intention to ask the Iranians at the funeral to arrange a meeting for him with Iran's newly appointed revolutionary Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan. I asked him if he had checked with the White House and the Secretary of State about having such a meeting. He snapped back at me that it was not necessary for him to do so. I then asked him if he wanted me to accompany him in order to compile a record of the meeting and Brzezinski abruptly told me that he preferred to go alone. Therefore, I have no idea of the substance of their discussion at their meeting nor of who else from the Iranian side might have been present.

However, it is a matter of record that almost immediately after Prime Minister Bazargan's return to Iran, he was forced to resign and shortly thereafter Iranian "students" invaded the American Embassy in Tehran and the American hostages were taken. I am convinced to this day that Brzezinski's unauthorized meeting with Bazargan was a contributing factor because the new revolutionary regime of the Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran did not want it to appear that they were in the pockets of the Americans as the Shah had been.

On the same occasion of the Algerian presidential funeral, the Spanish Ambassador to Algeria invited Brzezinski and me to have lunch at his residence with the Spanish Foreign Minister. To my great embarrassment at that lunch, Brzezinski berated the Spanish Foreign Minister for Spain's recognition of the Castro regime in Cuba. The Spaniards were greatly offended and I considered Brzezinski's behavior very inappropriate. However, I was beginning to have a taste of

his obsession with the Cold War aspects of US foreign affairs and of the threat of global communism. Indeed, his personal style was very different from the measured emphasis on quiet but forceful diplomacy that so characterized Secretary of State Cyrus Vance for whom I had the greatest respect. You will recall that Vance finally resigned as Secretary of State when President Carter approved the disastrous US military attempt to recover our hostages in Iran. Brzezinski was a prime advocate of that ill-fated, ill-advised escapade.

Two other anecdotes about the Brzezinski visit to Algiers come to mind. The first involved a pair of cufflinks that I loaned to him because he had neglected to pack his own. Those cufflinks bore the presidential seal and had been a Christmas gift from President Johnson to the National Security Council staff when I was a staff member. As Brzezinski was boarding the plane to return to Washington, I realized that he had not returned my cufflinks to me. Fearlessly, my wife, Yolande, bolted up the stairs to the plane and made Brzezinski retrieve his suitcase and my cufflinks from the hold!

The second anecdote involved playing tennis with Brzezinski at the Embassy residence in the course of which he cheated blatantly. He had a member of his National Security Council staff serve as umpire and that loyal staff member always called the close plays in his boss's favor. Clearly, he knew that his boss did not like to lose.

But, the icing on the cake came after Carter lost the election and Reagan was inaugurated as President. Brzezinski sent me a personal letter saying what a pleasure it had been to work with me and how, if Carter had been re-elected, he had planned to recommend me for the post of Ambassador to his native Poland!!! That letter occupies a prominent place in my personal archives!

There were enormous logistical problems. Because we did not meet, we could not meet -- we the American government side, could not meet face-to-face with the Iranians because we had broken diplomatic relations with Iran -- we had to do everything through the Algerians. There was a lot of shuttle diplomacy between Tehran, Algiers, and Washington which was very time consuming and logistically complicated. Documents had to be translated into Farsi, the language of Iran, English, the language of the United States, French, the working language, I should say -- of Algeria, and Arabic, the official language of Algeria. And with all that translation going on, the opportunity for misinterpretation, confusion, delay, was just rampant. And it was in the last month of the negotiations, in December 1980, that I suggested to the department that Warren Christopher, our chief negotiator, and his team come to Algiers to facilitate and expedite these negotiations. Fortunately it was one of those rare instances where the department listened to its ambassador, and our negotiating team did come to Algiers for the last 14 days of the negotiation process. Actually, they came for 48 hours and stayed 14 days.

*Q: Uh-huh.*

HAYNES: Once Warren Christopher arrived, he realized how -- with the clock ticking on Carter's presidency, that time was running out. And time was of the essence.

*Q: How did things work out for you all there?*

HAYNES: Well, it was a very difficult time because, on the one hand, on the personal level, my family and I were packing up to leave Algiers. And at the same time we had to accommodate a team of I would say -- well, let's see -- I would say five or six American negotiators. Warren Christopher came over with Hal Saunders, who was the assistant secretary for Near Eastern Affairs, and with Arnold Raphel who later died in a tragic plane crash when he was American ambassador to Pakistan.

The British also sent over the governor of the Bank of England -- I believe that was his title, the governor -- I believe his family name was Lascelles. He was related to the queen, to her mother, the queen mother. This was primarily because the Bank of England was a depository for a lot of Iranian funds held in banks outside of Iran. It was an exhausting time because we could never sleep in Algiers. When Washington was awake, we had to be awake. When Tehran was awake, we had to be awake. We were at a pivotal, pivotal point where we had to be awake and on the alert 24 hours a day because of the time differences between Washington and Tehran.

*Q: Well, did --*

HAYNES: And by the way, one of the interesting things is that I ended up doing a significant amount of translation and interpreting even though Washington, the department, sent over a very gifted bilingual interpreter, Alec Toumayan, who had interpreted for several American presidents. Alec was a highly respected Belgian-born American and an extraordinarily gifted linguist. But, he had to be present at the meetings between the Algerians and the Americans because the Algerians were using French as their working language. And none of the American team members except myself was fluent in French. Again, this was a shortcoming that I've emphasized over and over again. Our pitiful, self-defeating lack of the language competence is something that plagues us to this day. But, if Alec Toumayan was interpreting at meetings that were going on and a document had to be translated from French into English it fell upon me to do it. I didn't even have an embassy secretary who was fluent in French. And the department was unable to send a bilingual secretary to accompany the negotiators coming over from Washington. I was shocked. I was appalled.

*Q: My God, no, that's really -- does strike home.*

HAYNES: And you would think that we would -- would have awakened to this basic weakness by now. But I'm afraid it goes beyond the department to the American system of education which does not encourage the study of foreign languages. Unfortunately, there are so many American communities that have tried to establish English as their official language. In the process, they discourage the study of foreign languages. We've got to wake up to this basic weakness in our culture.

*Q: Now, were you all looking toward the inauguration date of Reagan? Just prior to it as sort of the goal to be, to be observed?*

HAYNES: Oh very definite, very definitely, because Reagan had announced publicly that if a resolution to the crisis was not reached -- he would have no choice but to start all over from the



beginning with negotiations. And that was a sobering fact, I think, to the Iranians. But what we didn't know, and what has yet to be proven and documented, was the -- was it -- I believe it was called, in the press, the media, the "October Surprise". This was the allegation that Reagan and his team had sent people to, I believe, Germany, without the knowledge of negotiators or the Carter administration, to encourage the Iranians to delay the release of the hostages until after Reagan's inauguration as president. Yes, I believe -- it was called the "October Surprise" in the media.

*Q: Yeah. Well, did you have any contact with the Iranians who were in Algeria?*

HAYNES: None, because there was no functioning Iranian embassy. Remember, this was a revolutionary government that had just taken over in Iran and they had not yet appointed new ambassadors. And the Iranian embassy in Algeria was a holdover from the days of the Shah, and there was no ambassador. And it was not a functioning embassy. It was useless. Useless to us in the negotiations process. Furthermore, having broken diplomatic relations with Iran, we were effectively prevented from having any contact with the Iranians.

*Q: Well, in the last days what were you up to?*

HAYNES: We were working out such things as whether the blocked Iranian funds in American banks, British banks, and other European banks would be released and how, and under what conditions the hostages would be returned to us, whose planes would fly them out of Iran, and so forth. There were all sorts of little details like that.

*Q: When did you leave Algeria?*

HAYNES: Oh, I left within days of the inauguration of President Reagan. I had submitted my resignation as all American Ambassadors do when there is a change of administration. It had been accepted, and we packed up and we left within a week of the Reagan inauguration.

*Q: Well now, did the hostages pass through Algiers?*

HAYNES: Yes, the Algerian government sent two Air Algérie planes -- Air Algérie being their commercial airline -- to Tehran. And they sent two because they did not want the rest of the world to know on which of the two planes the hostages were. So one plane was a decoy.

*Q: Why would that be?*

HAYNES: Well, they were afraid of someone taking the opportunity to shoot the plane with the hostages out of the air. They were just super cautious. And we respected that caution. So the planes flew from Tehran, as I recall, to Athens to re-fuel, and Athens to Algiers. At about two or three in the morning, all of us negotiating, staff and Algerian officials went to the airport to receive the hostages. We saw the two planes in the air. We did not know in which one the hostages actually were, not until they landed and they opened the doors.

*Q: What sort of reception were they given?*

HAYNES: Oh, they were treated royally by the Algerians. For example, the Algerians, knowing that they were all Americans and they'd been prisoners for 444 days and not, not -- *(laughs)* not having any alcohol and not having any pork, arranged for them to have ham sandwiches and champagne!

*Q: (laughs)*

HAYNES: Which I thought was a very sensitive touch. And I'll never forget. Warren Christopher, my wife and I went to the bottom of the stairs, when the door of the Air Algerie plane opened. It took a little while and we were a little concerned, but shortly (the hostages were deciding in what order to leave) our Iranian embassy DCM --

*Q: Bruce Laingen.*

HAYNES: Bruce Laingen, and the two ladies who had been prisoners, I believe both with USIA, came off with locked arms. It was a very, very moving moment. And recorded on television around the world.

*Q: Well, then you left, came back. This would be --*

HAYNES: Excuse me. I should mention that Warren Christopher signed the official document acknowledging that all the hostages were accounted for. They were given coffee and juice and some hors d'oeuvres and almost immediately loaded on American Military planes and flown to Wiesbaden, Germany for medical examination before coming to the United States.

*Q: Okay, so what about you and your wife and family?*

HAYNES: We packed up and left and returned to our home in Columbus, Indiana.

### **RICHARD SACKETT THOMPSON**

**Political Counselor**

**Algiers (1980-1982)**

*Richard Sackett Thompson was born in 1933 in Pullman, Washington. He graduated from Washington State University in 1955, after studying for one year at the Institute of Political Studies in Paris, France. He was a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford University and obtained a master's degree from Georgetown University in 1980. He spent two years in the U.S. Army in 1958-1960. In addition to Algeria, Mr. Thompson served with the Foreign Service in Aruba, Nigeria, France, Vietnam, and Greece. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on February 25, 1994.*

*Q: When did you arrive in Algiers?*

THOMPSON: It would have been the summer of 1980, probably July or August, and I spent a two year tour there.

*Q: What was our policy towards Algeria at that time?*

THOMPSON: Well, at the time of the 1967 war...

*Q: Arab-Israeli war of 1967.*

THOMPSON: In 1967 all the Arab countries cut relations with the United States, and we established an interests section technically in the Swiss embassy, but physically located in our old embassy building. In 1974 we renewed diplomatic relations directly with Algeria. When I got there in 1980, we had an embassy but still no Marine Guards, which they do have now in Algiers. We didn't have Marine Guards so we were not quite a full-fledged embassy like in other countries. But we had pretty much the full range. We had a military attaché, etc.

The basically military government of Algeria at that time still also claiming to represent the FLN, the Liberation Party, was really a fairly cautious and conservative government. There had been a recent election which had brought to power the senior colonel in the army (they had no generals) as the president. He and his associates were relatively conservative people and were trying to slowly bring Algeria out of the socialist state-directed economy, tight straitjacket that they had been in before. So they were gradually liberalizing the economy. But it was pretty tough. Living there was very close to living in Eastern Europe, according to people who had been there. Both sides wanted to gradually improve relations. I should mention that economic relations were very important because we were a big customer for Algerian oil and natural gas. So we had an important economic tie.

*Q: Before we move to the Iran hostage business, how did you find when you got there contacts with Algerians? I have always heard that they were more like the Syrians, rather dour people? How was your entree to doing your work?*

THOMPSON: Officialdom tended to be reserved with spots of greater friendliness. The people who dealt with the oil interests all spoke fluent English, which is the language of the oil industry around the world, and would deal with our delegations and embassy on the oil issue. On strict foreign policy issues we would deal with the Foreign Ministry and the Directorate which was responsible for relations with the United States was quite friendly and open in that they would receive us at rather short notice and hear our demarches on whatever issue we wanted to raise. Other parts of the Foreign Ministry tended to be somewhat suspicious, although now and then we could have an entree with them. In previous years the Foreign Minister almost never saw an American Ambassador, but that gradually opened up when I was there, especially during the Iran-hostage event.

In general, in Algerian officialdom, I think there was great concern on the part of the officials that relationships with the Americans might be unfortunate for their careers. So I think Algerian officials in general were very leery of being seen with us, except perhaps in dealing with some

issue that was very much in the Algerian national interest.

Now in the political realm, of course there was only one legal political party, but old-timers who had been in the Algerian revolution and were assured of their own political position were much more relaxed about seeing us. So there were a few retired colonels, and businessman, etc. who were quite glad to talk to Americans. I guess their positions were so firm that they didn't have the same concern as the Algerian official would have.

Coupled with this political reticence was, I think, the fact that Arabs do tend to focus on their own family, more broadly on their own village. Saddam Hussein runs his country with people from his own village. That sort of thing I think plays a role, so that Arabs generally tend to be reserved about making new friends and getting much outside the circle of people that they know very well as symbolized by the high walls around their houses and compounds.

Whenever anyone said, "Well, I have a good Algerian friend," the person would generally turn out to be not Arab but Berber. The Berbers were in Northern Africa before the Arabs came in. Morocco is probably mostly Berber and the people are much more friendly than in most Arab countries. In Algeria there is a group called the Kabylie who had a leading role in...they tended to be much more educated, many of them were civil servants even under the French, and they are widely represented in the officialdom. The Kabylie are Berbers, not Arabs, and tend to be more open to foreigners than the average Arab.

*Q: How did you find being political counselor there? Was it interesting?*

THOMPSON: Well, I thoroughly enjoyed it. Algeria had a very active role in world affairs. It considered itself one of the leaders of the non-aligned countries in the world, and they were one of the relatively few countries that would approach an international conference or issue the same way the United States would, i.e. figure out a position well ahead of time, send cables around the world with demarches to a lot of countries trying to persuade them to take the same approach at the conference, and then they come to the conference with large delegations and then assign liaison responsibilities to massage all the other delegations to try to make their point of view prevail. So they were an important actor on the world diplomatic scene beyond the size of the country. At the same time, they had a definite position on a lot of issues, usually somewhat different from the US position. So a lot of our discussions were pretty cut-and-dried. We would have instructions to go in and talk to them. We would do it, but we knew what their position was and they knew what we were going to say, so we were very often just going through the motions in a sense, but you had to do it so that everybody would continue to know what the positions were and they were showing a little movement on some issues and we were happy to encourage that. Then, of course, the Iran issue became one in which we cooperated very closely.

*Q: I have heard in many of my interviews the Foreign Service people speak very highly of the Algerian Foreign Service. Why is this?*

THOMPSON: Well, remember they were at war for years. It is very similar to our revolution, even before the revolution the American states had envoys to countries in Europe other than Britain, so we had some diplomatic experience in that way. Then American diplomats during the

war were trying to encourage French and Dutch support for the revolution. When we gained independence, this experience gave us a cadre of people who had been engaged in diplomatic efforts for some years. Algeria had the same thing. They had representatives around the world who had been advancing the Algerian cause against the official French diplomatic line in various countries around the world. They had a long period of negotiations on their own independence. When they became independent, they had people who had been in effect diplomats already for years. Once they became independent, I think they followed the French system of a very centralized educational system where top people go into certain areas...in France the top people become inspecteurs de finances, whatever that is, a very high government position which is of immediate importance. I think the second or third thing people go into is diplomacy, so I think this mandarinal system encouraged very intelligent Algerians to go in to diplomacy. I think they are also probably encouraged by the fact that life in Algeria is very uncomfortable, so if you have the chance of living abroad part of your life, you probably tried to do so. For whatever reason they did have very, very able diplomats and that fit into what I said earlier about their role in the world.

Then you asked why they wanted to get involved in the Iran hostage situation.

*Q: Because this is a history, you might want to explain briefly what the Iran hostage situation was.*

THOMPSON: Well, I am trying to remember the exact timing.

*Q: November, 1979 was when our embassy was taken over.*

THOMPSON: Okay, well in November, 1979, Iranian militants, in the beginning I don't think they were fully supported by their government, took over the US embassy in Tehran and took hostage the Americans therein. There were also three or four Americans from the embassy, including the chargé, Bruce Laingen, in the Foreign Ministry at that time and they were held there under better accommodations than those at the embassy, but nevertheless they couldn't leave the Ministry.

The Algerians were interested in this because they had been closely involved in relations between Iran and Iraq. They had brought about a peace agreement between those two countries which had been broken by Iraq when the war between Iran and Iraq broke out. The Algerians felt very concerned about that because they were the people who had brokered the agreement which was broken by that war. As a result of that war, most Arab countries sided with Iraq and broke relations with Iran, but not Algeria. So Algeria was one of the few Arab countries that had relations with Iran and they felt, in a broader sense, that they wanted to bring Iran with its extremist revolution back into the world diplomatic community. A big obstacle to that was the fact that the Iranian government was holding American diplomats as hostages, which made Iran something of an outcast to the world. So the Algerians were not doing this to be nice to Americans, but for their broader interest of uniting Muslims and bringing Iran back into the community of nations. They felt they should help Iran find a way to get around this obstacle of having these Americans as hostages. So they played a very active role in mediating between the United States and Iran.

There were several rounds of discussions in which they acted as mediators in the course of 1980. These were led on the American side by Warren Christopher, the Deputy Secretary of State, who was the point man for the administration on this issue. So there were several rounds of discussion. Christopher came a couple of times to Algiers where it was easy to communicate quickly with the Iranians through the Algerian Foreign Ministry, but these efforts had been unsuccessful. In early December, as I recall, we got instructions for our Chargé then, Chris Ross, now ambassador to Syria, to go to the Foreign Ministry and ask them if the Carter Administration should make one last effort to arrive at an agreement, or whether they should just give up and leave it to the Reagan administration -- Reagan had already been elected by then.

By then the American officials involved were rather weary of the situation and the Algerians also. Chris Ross and I called on the Secretary General of the Foreign Ministry and delivered this message -- should we keep trying or just let the next administration handle this. The Algerians said, "Well, let us think about it." They came back the next day and said that they thought it was worthwhile to try again. So, there were various exchanges back and forth trying to lay the groundwork for this. Finally in January, Warren Christopher came over with a delegation for a few days of discussion which went pretty much day and night.

*Q: January 20 is when the new administration would come in.*

THOMPSON: Yes, that is right. So it was a few days before that that Christopher came back because the preliminary discussions had shown promise. He spent most of his time at the Foreign Ministry with his delegation meeting with the Algerians who had direct connections with Tehran. Those of us at the embassy were largely in a support role, driving people around and carrying documents back and forth, etc. Almost a day and night operation for several days. In fact, finally an agreement was reached. There were some amazing aspects to that. There was a Treasury delegation that came in when it looked like things were showing some success, headed by an American Treasury official, but it included two lawyers who represented the American banking system. A whole complicated arrangement had been arrived at whereby at the right moment when the hostages were out, a button would be pushed and billions of dollars would flow from various places around the world to a special account in London which would be held to pay off Iranian claims. It was really an amazing agreement with all kinds of complex aspects to it. Under the agreement then, an Algerian airplane went to Tehran to pick up the Americans and there was some delay there, but they finally got on the plane and flew to Algiers. The plane did not take off until Carter was out and Reagan was in, I guess because of their animosity against Carter. So the plane then flew to Algiers. The hostages got off the plane and came into the VIP lounge at the airport and there was a ceremony there in which the Algerians handed them over to the Americans and they then got on an American aircraft and flew to Wiesbaden where they were medically checked out before going back to the United States.

Unfortunately for me in a sense, I was the one staff member left back at the embassy instead of going to the airport. I had an open telephone line to Washington in case something came up and we needed to communicate with the Department. It turned out Department officials were watching TV and telling me what was going on out at the airport as I sat in the embassy in Algiers. All three American networks had been there for some time covering these talks, so they

were on the scene.

*Q: Did this really magnificent assistance out of a very difficult situation for the United States do anything to change our relations with Algeria?*

THOMPSON: I think it gave a great jump start to our gradually improving relations. The Algerian embassy in Washington was flooded with handwritten letters of thanks to the Algerians from school children from all over the country. We received many similar letters at our embassy in Algiers which we handed over to the Foreign Ministry. We couldn't begin to answer them all, but there was a tremendous outpouring of American gratitude to Algiers for their mediation in this. These sorts of things don't last very long, but they are very uplifting and encouraging when they do happen.

On the official level the new Reagan Administration was a little less friendly on ideological grounds toward Algeria than the Carter administration had been. So Algeria did not get any direct economic benefits in the negotiations on the price of gas, etc. out of this. It may have encouraged them to some degree in their efforts to liberalize their own economy.

*Q: How did you and the embassy feel about the relations between Algeria and France at that time?*

THOMPSON: Well, overall between Algeria and France there is a love/hate relationship because Algerians loved French culture and would visit France if they could, and there were hundreds of thousands living in France, but at the same time there was a sharp gradually decreasing but still sharp, ideological difference between the still socialist, repressive Algerians and the capitalist and democratic French. I would say they had pretty good relations while I was there. They had a large embassy, a large establishment of French teachers, etc.

One very interesting footnote to their relations is the domestic relationship problem. The Algerian students in France would from time to time, and there are hundreds of such cases, marry French women. If the French woman came back to Algeria she was virtually the slave of her mother-in-law under Algerian custom which she would find difficult. But if the French wife went back to France she couldn't take their children because the Algerians very much wanted to keep the children. If there was a divorce in France the father would try to keep the children and take them back to Algeria. So the French had a very large number of very complicated custody cases. It was rather nice that both parents wanted the children instead of abandoning them, but it was really heartbreaking for the people involved and a great thorn in the side for the French embassy and the consul general who was trying to deal with these family problems.

*Q: Did we have any of these problems?*

THOMPSON: I can't remember any such. We had a couple of Americans in prison while I was there that the consul would visit regularly, but I don't recall that sort of problem.

*Q: What was the relationship with Qadhafi and Libya at that time?*

THOMPSON: Well, the Algerians called him a crazy man in private, but again it is a little bit like their relationship with Iran. They wanted Libya to moderate its behavior somewhat and move more into the family of nations. So again they were trying to mediate between the US and Libya. At one point General Vernon Walters, who I think had the title of Ambassador at Large at that time and undertook various missions for President Reagan, went to Algeria basically with some photographs of Libyan military preparations, etc. designed to alarm the Algerians and get them to show more concern about their Libyan neighbor. He wrote a good cable at that time something like, "My meetings with Benjedid and Qadhafi." Benjedid was the president of Algeria and Walters had a meeting with him to carry out his instruction, but also while driving through town he saw Qadhafi surrounded by his female bodyguards walking down the street. He didn't actually meet him, but he saw him, so General Walters had a sense of humor and put meeting with Qadhafi in the title of his cable. In a little paragraph he put something about seeing Qadhafi downtown in the cable and I think it probably caused something of a jolt in Washington when they received this cable.

Vernon Walters is a great character, as you know. I don't know if he is appropriate for your series or not.

*Q: Oh, yes, we are trying to get him.*

THOMPSON: You should set more than a few hours, a week aside if you really want to record the full flavor of his life.

*Q: What about the other side, Morocco, at that time?*

THOMPSON: Relations were gradually improving. The two countries were divided over the issue of the Western Sahara, one of the less-known conflicts around the world. There was the former colony of Spanish Sahara between Morocco and Mauritania and when the Spaniards left the country, the Moroccans and Mauritania both claimed part of it. The Mauriticians soon gave up their claim and while I was there, it was claimed by Morocco on the one hand and on the other hand by a group called the Polisario, the liberation organization of the Sahrawi people, who are from the Western Sahara and supported by Algeria. Most of the Sahrawi people seemed to be in a tent city near Tindouf just over the border in Algeria. Algeria was giving them support in their military efforts against Morocco. Morocco and Algeria were gradually giving this conflict a lesser place in their relations and trying to develop relations. I can't remember if they had diplomats in each other capitals while I was there or not. They were improving relations and may even have established political relations. So they were gradually improving. The Western Sahara dispute is still with us today. In theory everybody has agreed on a referendum, but there is a big dispute over who will vote in a referendum. Morocco has poured settlers into the area, can they vote? Will it only be people who were registered earlier as Sahrawi? It is still an issue but one in which other countries...there is some effort to find a solution at the very least.

*Q: I recall that there were some congressional staffers who were in important positions who sort of took the Polisario position as one of their own. Did you run across any of this?*

THOMPSON: If so, I don't recall it.



*Q: I may be way off about this. Well, what about something that now has become quite a serious matter in Algeria, Islamic fundamentalists, and sort of anti-Westernism. Was that much worse, were we seeing that as a problem?*

THOMPSON: We were seeing it as a growing problem. When I was there there would be fundamentalist activity here and there around the country. They would seize a mosque on the edge of the desert and after some time the government police or troops would retake the mosque and maybe someone would be killed. So there was sporadic violence now and then around the country and cassettes were being circulated from Iran promoting fundamentalism, but it was not a nation-wide movement. I remember one report reviewing the possible threats to the government from various sources, and the one group that did appear capable of posing a threat to the government was fundamentalism, if they got organized on a national basis. Now, apparently that did happen since I was there.

Policywise I think our government policy is correct. Now we are -- as you will recall there was an election and from the results of the first round it looked like the fundamentalists were poised to win. So the second round of the election was canceled and a military government was formed to block their victory. We have been pushing this government to negotiate with the fundamentalists, and try to proceed with democracy and forming a government representing the people. The French have been much more concerned about a possible fundamentalist government and have been more supportive of the military government as a reasonable alternative. I think it just shows what happens when you suppress the democratic feelings of the people, you encourage this terrorism which is now taking place. A number of foreigners are being killed. Our own embassy is now pretty much restricted to two compounds on either side of a street. Everybody lives there, they don't live around town in houses the way they used to. Dependents have been sent out and the American School is closed. So Algiers is not a desirable post to work in right now. It takes an armored convoy to take people to and from the airport. It is a country which has come to symbolize the possible conflict in countries where fundamentalism is important between democracy on the one hand versus the danger that once you let the fundamentalists in they will create a theocracy which will be perhaps inimical to Western interests and certainly to Western values, and which will not permit any further free elections.

*Q: How about the Soviets? What was their influence there as we saw it then?*

THOMPSON: It was important but again fortunately waning. There was a large Soviet embassy and the Algerians bought most of their military equipment from the Soviets, but they were gradually shifting to us. While I was there they bought several C-130s and that was a big breakthrough. These were large cargo transports used by both military and civilian organizations around the world. Our planes were much better than Soviet planes. Soviet tanks and AK47s were probably pretty good. But on the other hand, we have the best airplanes.

*Q: AK47s are an assault rifle.*

THOMPSON: Yes, that is right. The Soviets had been supporters of the Algerian revolution and that carried over as main suppliers of their military equipment. The Algerian government

obviously was wanting to diversify sources for military equipment to improve its relations with the United States and reduce dependence on the Soviets, so they were buying these C-130s while I was there. There was a Soviet submarine which had been for years in a harbor in eastern Algeria and we never knew really quite why it was there. But, on the other hand, the Algerians were gradually reducing the Russian influence in the country.

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

THOMPSON: Until late January, 1981, it was Ulric Haynes, Jr., who came from Cummins International, which is a large company selling stationary generating plants and engines, and who went back to them afterward. He was quite an active and dynamic person. He had a Haitian wife, spoke very good French and has remained active in public life in various ways. He stayed only a few days after January 20, because he said that he couldn't stand being there with Reagan president. Once the hostages were released on the 20th, he packed up and left within a few days.

We had Christopher Ross as chargé for eight months and then Michael Newlin, a career ambassador, arrived around October, 1981 and was the ambassador the rest of the time I was there.

**EDMUND JAMES HULL**  
**Algeria Desk Officer**  
**Washington, DC (1980-1982)**

*Ambassador Hull was born in Iowa and raised in Illinois. He was educated at Princeton and Oxford Universities. After service in the Peace Corps, Mr. Hull joined the Foreign Service in 1974 and had postings in Amman, Beirut, Jerusalem, Tunis and Cairo as well as serving as Ambassador to Yemen from 2001 to 2004. In Washington, the Ambassador served on the National Security Council and as Advisor to the Secretary of State on Counterterrorism. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2005*

*Q: By 1980 you moved on?*

HULL: Yes. In the summer of 1980 while the hostage crisis was still prevailing I was relieved, and I chose to take the Algerian Desk which was a bit unusual because normally staff aides would go to desks closer to the heart of the peace process (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon). I thought the Algerians were particularly important at that time, given their role in mediating the release of the hostages, and I wanted to do what I could to improve U.S.- Algerian relations, in part with that in mind.

*Q: When you moved there in the summer of 1980, was it that apparent that the Algerians were playing that much of a role in the hostage negotiations?*

HULL: We had used a number of mediators. There was a lot of cloak-and-dagger surrounding

some of them. They were not professional diplomats, and we were just driven to use these channels because we couldn't do anything directly with the Iranians, and we found no official party to work through. All of those attempts had failed. So when the Algerians, because of their revolutionary credentials, did manage to connect in Tehran with people who seemed to have influence and power, there was great satisfaction because Warren Christopher and Hal Saunders finally had some channel in which to work the problem; where they could work in a professional, purposeful and effective way. So the Algerians were valued very highly by the Department. They turned out to be formidable diplomats and to play a very important role in resolving the issue. As I recall this was becoming evident in the summer of 1980.

*Q: Talk a little bit about what was happening in Algeria at the time, the situation there and the diplomatic process.*

HULL: The major issue for the Algerians was the war in the Western Sahara where the Polisario, a group supported by Algeria, was battling Morocco which had a few years before marched into the Western Sahara to annex the territory to Morocco. That was the issue most important to the Algerians. Beyond that there were important issues of liquefied natural gas (LNG). The Algerians were supplying us with LNG to a significant extent, and we had invested a good deal of money in that.

*Q: What sort of government did they have?*

HULL: The Algerians had a government that really flowed out of their revolutionary experience and the National Liberation Front (the FLN) had evolved into a dominant party, in a one-party state. President Bendjedid was in power, a relatively benign leader, one of the very few Arab heads of state who had ever given up power, but it was a state where you had a very strong single party, a very strong military which again had revolutionary roots. You had a minority Berber population, which was talented and somewhat restive, but you still had a society where there was a good deal of cohesion and national purpose.

*Q: Did we see at that time any of the fundamentalist force which sometime later set upon a rather vicious war?*

HULL: Yes. Not at the time. I think we, of course, had seen it in places like Saudi Arabia, but it was not apparent at least to me in Algeria until a bit later. However, I do remember one striking thing. In the course of my responsibilities I traveled to Algiers, and at that time we could move around the country relatively freely. I remember on Fridays seeing vast numbers of Algerians overflowing the mosques and occupying adjacent streets as prayer places. It was very striking to me the numbers of Algerians praying. The elite was still French-educated and extremely sophisticated and French speaking, but the masses were obviously were taking a different direction.

*Q: Wasn't there the migration to France that caused a lot of problems in France today?*

HULL: Yes, it was going on very much at that time.

*Q: Let's talk about Algerian diplomacy. Who were the diplomats and how did they develop their various skills?*

HULL: Well, of the ambassador here was Redha Malek, who was a consummate Algerian diplomat. He did not speak English and so meetings would take place in French with Alec Toumayan interpreting. Alec was one in a long series of State Department interpreters, like Stephanie Van Reigersberg and later Gamal Helal, who were really more than interpreters. They were cultural bridges, and their contributions to our diplomacy have never received adequate credit, in my view. Malek himself wouldn't take a lot of notes, but at an important point in the conversation he would pull an envelope out and he'd scratch a few notes to himself. We soon learned he was quite a reliable interlocutor and got things straight, and that Algiers would be well-informed and eventually Tehran would be well-informed. He became a very, very important channel for us. At the time we had Rick Haynes as our ambassador in Algiers, a non-career ambassador, but a very good one, and we had Chris Ross as the deputy chief of mission who knew North Africa and particularly Algeria extremely well. He had excellent French and excellent Arabic. We had an extremely strong team in Algiers, and the Algerians had a very strong team in Washington, not just Malek, but his deputy Slim Debagha. Their Foreign Ministry threw itself into the process: the Foreign Minister, and his assistant ministers, some of whom died tragically in a plane crash a few years afterwards. They fielded a thoroughly professional team without which I doubt that the hostage crisis could have been resolved successfully.

*Q: One of the things you pointed out that is sometimes forgotten is that diplomats are judging other diplomats. And you're saying you found he was an excellent interlocutor because he was accurate. One of the problems sometimes being if you try to talk to another party and you have an intermediary in between, they are usually putting their own spin on it. In a way, you were searching for somebody who was going to give you the real stuff?*

HULL: We wanted a professional. We had had experience with talented amateurs who had connections in Tehran who seemed to be able to influence the Iranians and then had never delivered. That had been a very great investment with a great deal of time and effort through those channels including White House time and effort. We needed something that was more reliable, more professional.

*Q: How did, from your position there, when you were staff aide, how did you view the White House? You know Carter, Brzezinski and all, were they helpful or sort of tending to run off in different directions or what?*

HULL: The President was extremely helpful and dedicated to resolving the hostage question. Of course, Saunders had worked with him previously on Camp David so there was a great deal of familiarity and respect. The whole team from Carter through Vance and then Muskie after Vance left, Warren Christopher, Hal Saunders, Henry Precht and, in fact Jody Powell and Ham Jordan, played important roles, rather unusually given it was a foreign issue. There was this tension with Brzezinski and the NSC (National Security Council) staff. Gary Sick was the responsible person. State did not see eye to eye with NSC on many of the issues. There was this friction, but it did not impede working with the President, I think, because these people knew each other so well from the Camp David experience.

*Q: How about particularly working on the Algerian desk, how did you find the role of the French with Algiers and with the Iranian crisis?*

HULL: The French, I think, like most of our friends and allies tried to be helpful, but didn't have much influence. We tried every normal channel and some very unusual channels to find influence in the Tehran, and no one really had it.

*Q: One of the interesting things I think is Algeria, although once you go back to Senator Kennedy, Senator Jack Kennedy, getting up and making his famous talk that sent the French up the wall about how Algeria should be freed and all that. We've never really been able to warm up to Algeria. Even today, I mean, do you see any reason for that? Maybe I'm wrong.*

HULL: We did have a warming period at this time. After the Algerians delivered on the hostage issue, I and others who had worked with them, felt we needed to do more in that relationship. One of the first things that we did was to allow Chris Ross and me to go to Tindouf and meet with the Polisario. This had been off limits, and Saunders and the others decided to go forward with it in light of what the Algerians were doing for us. It also made a certain amount of sense since we had learned in the Middle East that it is generally a better idea to talk to all the parties in a dispute than to be one-sided. We made that trip, Chris and I, and it was a great encouragement to the Algerians and to the Polisario themselves, although on that trip we made a special effort to interact with the Moroccan prisoners of war.

*Q: Some are still there, aren't they?*

HULL: Some are still there. We had been briefed that we would be exposed to the Moroccan POWs (prisoners of war) and we hit on a plan so that meeting would not be an exploitative exposure. We brought with us writing equipment, pens, pencils, paper. The Moroccan POWs had been arrayed in the sun obviously for some time before we were brought to the scene to examine the seized equipment and the prisoners of war. What Chris and I did was, instead of just reviewing them, we approached them, and we explained in Arabic that we brought paper and pencils with us and, if they wanted to send messages back to their families, we would be happy to take those messages. Initially, there was disbelief. They didn't know how to react, but then gradually they understood the opportunity, and they broke out of their ranks into these small groups, and there would be one in each group who could write. They would scribble off their messages to their families. The Polisario didn't know how to react. Finally after fifteen to thirty minutes, they decided this was not the kind of encounter that they had planned. We collected all of the messages, and I brought them back to Washington. Initially, the Moroccan government had been appalled even by the idea of the visit and said they had no interest in our communications, but then in a fairly short time they decided that, no, they did want to facilitate the messages getting to the families so we handed them over to the Moroccans. I think for many families, it was the first communications they had with the prisoners.

In the grander scheme of things, my purpose was to improve U.S.-Algerian relations. The visit to Tindouf was one thing we could do. Another thing we could do was that the Algerians were very interested in getting C-130 aircraft. I was working with Deputy Assistant Secretaries Morris

Draper and Peter Constable on a deal whereby the Algerians could obtain not C-130s, the military version, but the civilian version of the airplane. Of course, these are transport airplanes, not lethal in themselves. We were working this issue, but the election occurred and, of course, the release of the American hostages didn't happen until Reagan was sworn in. But then we found a new regime in the White House and Al Haig as Secretary of State, and there was such animosity towards the Carter Administration and such an aversion to dealing with the Iranian issue or anyone associated with the Iranian issue, including the Algerians, that we had this glacial chill which stopped our efforts almost dead in their tracks. At the lower levels, Peter Constable and myself, we continued to push because we thought the Algerians had earned this positive action on our part.

Finally, the new administration sent General Vernon Walters out to the area to assess the situation. Walters had had long, long good relations with King Hassan in Morocco, and on this trip he met President Chadli Bendjedid in Algiers. Walters was a consummate diplomat, a gifted linguist, and one of the most original envoys I have ever met. He would fly commercial airplanes with no regard to his personal security or perks of the job. He would just go and get the job done. So Vernon Walters was designated to go out and have a look at the situation. I remember the battles over the talking points because there was a very strong Moroccan lobby in the Department that didn't want to give an inch, and therefore drafting the talking points for the visit was a rather agonizing experience. General Walters said at one point he didn't care who drafted the talking points; what he cared about was who delivered the talking points, and Vernon Walters would decide how those talking points were delivered. I learned something from that. So General Walters made his trip and he came back. General Walters saw that we had an opportunity with Algeria, and he liked Bendjedid. He told me that Bendjedid reminded him of his father, and he wanted to do something to improve the relationship. So Vernon Walters put his shoulder behind the L-100 airplane deal.

*Q: The L-100 being the?*

HULL: The civilian equivalent to the C-130. So Vernon Walters came back and dipped his oar in the water and lo and behold, the action memo, which had been languishing for months, came back from Secretary Haig with an approved sign on it. I got word of it quickly. (Staff aide generally establish their own communication network that somehow race ahead of the official notice) So, I got word of this and ran up to Peter Constable and told him that we had finally gotten a decision. I had press guidance so that we could announce it that day, lest any of the Moroccan lobby in the Department try to reverse it. Peter initially was skeptical and wanted to make sure before he signed off on a public statement, and I produced for him the actual document with Al Haig's OK. Peter agreed, and we did announce it. We made the deal, and we felt that the Algerians had got not only a symbolic, but also a more tangible expression of thanks for their good work. Generally, I think at least as long as any of us who had been engaged in the hostage crisis were around, the Algerian embassy received a very warm welcome in the State Department.

*Q: You mentioned something which over the course of twenty years that I've been doing interviews comes back again and again and that is how King Hassan sort of captured particularly our ambassadors. If he felt somebody like Dick Parker was a little too objective he'd*

*get him PNG'd (persona non grata). Particularly political appointees just lapped it up, for example, the ambassador would say, "Our King" in his telegrams. Would you talk a little bit about being the Algerian desk officer against this mighty Moroccan machine in the Department?*

HULL: You're right. Of course, the Dick Parker story is the classic one. Personally, I had not only the general situation, but when the Reagan Administration came in, Carl Coon was made head of North African affairs. Carl was a professional diplomat and competent, but he was very one-sided on this question. He was very pro-Moroccan. I think Carl came in with a determination not to allow what the Algerians had done in the Iranian crisis to threaten the U.S.- Moroccan relationship. I got my wings clipped pretty short by Carl, and I maneuvered within that constraint for the rest of my term as Algerian desk officer.

*Q: Let's talk a little bit about the Polisario. One, what was the general feeling about the cause? Was there a right and a wrong or was it just one of these Middle Eastern things and who the Polisarios were as we saw them?*

HULL: At that time I think people were divided on the issue. There was a group that felt the Moroccans had been high-handed in their Green March to seize control of the Western Sahara and that legally we were constrained by that illegal occupation in what we could do with Morocco. There was the other camp that was willing to turn a blind eye to the international legal questions involved and to put greater value on the historic U.S.- Moroccan relationship. As I said, anything dealing with the Western Sahara was very hotly contested within the Department and very problematic. Chris Ross and I had spent about three days with the Polisario in Tindouf. They struck one as extremely competent warriors, and we traveled with them in the desert, and I think into the Western Sahara, truth be told, in their jeeps and vehicles which they could not only drive with remarkable skill but could maintain with remarkable skill.

*Q: Were they Berbers mainly?*

HULL: They are Arabs from the Western Sahara. They had their own dialect of Arabic, their camps around Tindouf were extremely well-disciplined and orderly, they had projects for the women, and they were living in an extremely austere environment. They struck one as a revolutionary, disciplined, competent movement.

*Q: I've always been troubled by the prisoner issue because there are people who have been in prison or POWs for 30 years or so. We sent missions out, I know Inderfurth went out with a group later on and was able to get some released. We've made efforts, but what's their point of view of keeping these people?*

HULL: I think the Polisario feel they have very few levers vis-à-vis the Moroccans, and I think the prisoners are viewed as a lever to influence Moroccan policy.

*Q: Was there a winner or a loser in this thing? At the time you are talking about was basically a stabilized border? Had the berm been built?*

HULL: No. There was a more dynamic situation. It was still, I think, undecided how it was going

to turn out. The Moroccans were taking some painful losses, but the Moroccan rulers were still pouring investment into El Aaiun, the capital in the Moroccan-controlled area, which I also visited on the trip. I think the turning point came with the construction of the berm and the enclosure of “the Sahara utile” (the useful Sahara). That structure increased Polisario casualties in a way that the Polisario, because of their very limited numbers and limited resources, could not easily absorb.

*Q: Were the Polisarios a distinct group or was this something to which the Algerians were feeding troops into?*

HULL: We saw no indication of Algerian troops in the camps. Chris Ross probably knew Algeria as well as anybody non-Algerian, and Chris never had that impression.

*Q: But what about looking at the other side? I take it there was no particular problem with Tunisia?*

HULL: Nothing that was, to my knowledge, pressing. Later on, of course, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Algeria would be very much of a concern to the Tunisians, but that was later in the nineties.

*Q: What about the real trouble-maker in the area, Muammar Qadhafi in Libya?*

HULL: I would leave the Libya discussion for later when I was actually assigned to Tunisia.

*Q: Was our embassy able, you say Chris Ross and I take it the others were able to get out, was there a hinterland and the cities and Algiers and all that? Were these two distinct areas?*

HULL: I traveled with Chris a bit in Algeria. You did have different areas. The cities, Oran or Algiers itself, were in some ways very similar to European cities whereas the hinterlands were very Algerian. Then you had the Berber regions which were distinctive in themselves. Yes, you could distinguish.

*Q: Again this is with very superficial knowledge, but it seems that Algeria and much of that area had been sort of the breadbasket of the Roman empire at one point. The French had seemed to do a pretty good job with agriculture. What was the situation? Were Algerians as Algerians able to move into, to continue the agricultural side of things?*

HULL: Culturally, the Algerians were trying to Arabize. There had been great efforts to introduce in Arabic into the education system. They had brought in a lot of Egyptian teachers, for example. The dominant issue, I think, was economic and the Algerian government was following a socialist model and was failing miserably in developing the country economically. The oil and, even more important, the gas deposits were perhaps a hindrance in this regard because they provided a lifeline economically that forestalled the kinds of reforms that were needed. The housing was shabby and there was a great dearth of it. We had the earthquake that occurred to which we responded with alacrity. One of the impressions that you got in looking at the earthquake damage was how flimsy the housing constructed by the government actually was and



how bitter the people felt that their basic needs were not being met by their government.

*Q: Everybody says the Egyptians are a lot of fun to work with, no matter what government they have. But to the Algerians, fun does not seem to be an operative word. I don't know. Do you have any feel on this?*

HULL: I think there is a revolutionary angst and then socialist seriousness that did dampen spirits a bit, although people like Redha Malek and his impressive wife (an activist in Algeria's revolution) were very gracious and very hospitable. But overall, no, you certainly didn't have the "joie de vivre" that you find in a place like Egypt. On the other hand, I must say political humor in Algeria to some extent echoed the humor in Egypt. You had very acerbic political cartoons and caricatures. So the Algerians were not devoid of a sense of humor.

**BARBARA H. NIELSEN**  
**Cultural Affairs Officer, USIS**  
**Algiers (1981-1983)**

*Barbara H. Nielsen was born in New York in 1949. She attended Middlebury College, Indiana University, and Yale University. She has also served in the Peace Corps in Katmandu from 1972 to 1974. Her career has included positions in Montevideo, Tegucigalpa, Dakar, Santiago, Algiers, Stockholm, and Athens. Ms. Nielsen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on December 16, 2004.*

*Q: Today is February 3, 2005. We're in 1981 and you are off to Algeria. You served there from when to when?*

NIELSEN: For two years. I can't recall exactly what month we arrived in Algeria, but we were there for roughly two years.

*Q: What was your job?*

NIELSEN: CAO. There were two USIS officers. It was a small USIS operation and a small embassy for that matter. At that time, we were still under some limitations in terms of what we could do programwise.

*Q: What was the situation in Algeria in 1981?*

NIELSEN: It was peaceful, relatively speaking. We were enjoying an "era of good feelings" following the resolution of the hostage crisis. The Algerians had played an important facilitative role in that. There was a bit of a rapprochement between the two governments, not that they loved us, but at least we had some areas that we could cooperate in.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

NIELSEN: Michael Newlin.

*Q: What sort of things were you doing?*

NIELSEN: In the public diplomacy realm, we were doing English teaching, American studies. The Algerians were happy to have us bring our experts in to talk about American literature and about English language teaching. They weren't very interested in any of the other policy fields, American foreign policy or even journalism. We had a very restricted program. We could send some Algerians to the U.S. in the cultural field, university teaching, administration, library science, but there were fairly marked constraints on what we could do.

*Q: What was the Algerian government like at that time?*

NIELSEN: Suspicious of the West.

*Q: Were there lots of controls on their citizens?*

NIELSEN: Yes. It was a very difficult environment to get anything done for foreigners and for Algerians, probably more difficult for Algerians actually. There were strict controls on money. You couldn't get hard currency and yet if you were going to travel outside the country, you needed to have access to hard currency, so that was one area. If you wanted to establish a business or engage in commerce, you had to have a lot of permissions. Housing was a big problem. There was insufficient housing, so if you needed some, you had to know someone. What most Algerians did was kind of make do with moving in with relatives, doubling up with friends, but it was a rather harsh society for most people.

*Q: I've heard people say that the Algerians were not a very open people.*

NIELSEN: Yes, that's right. For whatever historical reason – I'm not sure I ever figured it out – they were suspicious of one another. They perhaps were no more or no less suspicious of foreigners. They had some ideas of what foreigners were like and they were as friendly to them as they were to their fellow Algerians, and probably a little more so in many cases.

*Q: Did the French play any role there?*

NIELSEN: Only as a legacy. French was still spoken and the educational system owed a lot to the French. We employed in the embassy a great many third country nationals, some of whom were French. There was a lot of back and forth with France. Some people had French connections and there was a good deal of French influence, but the Algerian government had made a big point to sever a lot of its historical ties. They were Arabizing. The policy was to teach everyone Arabic and to identify with the Arab world and to espouse the causes of their fellow Arabs and to downplay any of their residual ties with the French.

*Q: Did teaching English cause a problem? Or as long as it wasn't in French, it was considered a little more benign?*

NIELSEN: The Algerians were very francophone and they saw that there was something to be gained by teaching English. It was the language of technology and they were a developing country. They saw their future being brighter if they took advantage of science and technology, and English was a tool to further that goal.

*Q: What sort of students were you getting to learn English?*

NIELSEN: Young professionals, which was by design. We established at the time I was there the first English teaching program in a long time under embassy auspices. There had been a cultural center cum library which was closed at some point and never reopened. In this vacuum, we did establish an English teaching program on site, inviting the students into our compound there. The students we recruited were professionals. We weren't targeting youth at that point but rather young professionals.

*Q: Were there any other cultural activities – films, art shows, that sort of thing? Was this permitted?*

NIELSEN: I'm not going to say it was forbidden, but there certainly were no large groups that we sponsored. I don't remember any performing artists. That's not to say there weren't a couple, but it was not a big deal for sure. We didn't have the San Francisco Ballet or anything.

*Q: What was the situation with the fundamentalists in Algeria? Now it's stopped everything out of that country.*

NIELSEN: They were beginning to be noticed. The government was aware of the nascent organization of the fundamentalists and they were trying to keep them under control. The violence hadn't begun, but people were aware that there were some stirrings of unrest among Islamic fundamentalists.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the Algerian press? Who was the public affairs officer?*

NIELSEN: The public affairs officer was first, Ed Penny and then, John Archibald. I did not read Arabic, so I didn't read the Algerian press. From what I understood - we had a local employee who made translations of the relevant articles each day so we could keep tabs on the editorials – the press was largely propagandistic. It's not a free press as we would think of one and therefore not particularly worth reading either for most news.

*Q: What was the social life like?*

NIELSEN: My own experience was fine. I enjoyed the time that I spent there. Virtually any country has something to offer if you're not planning to be there for 10 years. You socialized with other embassy folks. We had a very good, small Anglican church that we attended and had a number of activities that stemmed from that group. The country has a lot of natural beauty, so if you traveled, you could see things that you wouldn't see elsewhere. This was the first time that I had visited the Sahara and the Roman ruins along the coast and some of the really ancient cities – for example Constantine and Annaba, the birthplace of St. Augustine. There really was a lot to

study. I found that was just fine. My successor also enjoyed her tour there. In her case, she was into sailing and a number of people in the embassy did enjoy that, so if you had a boat or wanted to be on the water, that was also possible.

*Q: Were there any incidents or high level visits?*

NIELSEN: There were no high level visits. I think relations were not sufficiently strong or friendly. Today you might well have certainly more attention paid. Travel wasn't as easy as it is now. But we didn't really have any high level visits. The closest we came was, the Secretary of State came to neighboring Morocco. I went over there to help. In Algeria itself we didn't even have Marines. They weren't allowed in the country until the very end of the time I was there. When we got our first contingent, it was a big deal.

*Q: Was there any problem when Israel invaded Lebanon? This was around '82 or so.*

NIELSEN: The massacre at the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps occurred during that period, and it was a major source of criticism. The Algerians blamed us for allowing that to happen. Of course, we were continually criticized for our Israeli and Middle East policy.

*Q: Were you able to develop Algerian friends?*

NIELSEN: Yes. You would call them professional friends as opposed to really close personal friends. But there were a few people that you got to know on a personal level. The Algerians are hospitable once you somehow establish a rapport with them. There is a stereotype of Arab hospitality and they do practice it as well. They're very generous and welcoming, but it did take some effort. Because of limited supplies of many items, entertaining was quite difficult. Getting the food that you might want was a struggle.

*Q: This used to be the breadbasket of Europe.*

NIELSEN: Yes, they produced a lot on their farms, but they became importers of virtually everything except petroleum products. And there were shortages, so if you were planning a meal, you had to have lots of contingency plans in the event that you couldn't get eggs or you couldn't get cheese or you couldn't get meat.

*Q: Was there a feeling among your colleagues at the embassy and with yourself that here is a country that's got a lot of potential but really has gotten into the wrong hands and the wrong policies and is on a downward trend rather than the reverse?*

NIELSEN: Yes, I think we felt that. Clearly they had natural resources and oil wealth, which could have done a lot for their development. But they were inept. They felt that they wanted to model themselves after the socialist economies and societies of Eastern Europe, which, as we now know, was not the right model to choose for a lot of reasons. They stifled the creativity of their own people and drove many of them abroad.

*Q: Today, France is full of Algerians. Had that exodus been in place while you were there?*

NIELSEN: I think there were probably waves. Following independence, a lot of “Pieds Noirs” returned to France. Those folks might have been in Algeria all their life, but since they had the possibility to go back to France and were culturally French, they chose to leave. The Algerians who studied in France and studied in the U.S., too, in the ‘60s and ‘70s, many of them were enthusiastic to come home and try and build their new society. Then, many of them became aware that things were not developing in a very positive way and they would try to leave. That would be the end of the ‘80s and ‘90s where you saw another exodus and a very different group going to France in the ‘80s.

*Q: In the circles that you were working with, diplomats and all, did they seem to keep their eye on what was happening in France? Was that where the action was?*

NIELSEN: They certainly did, yes. They kept closely in touch with what was going on in France. They were very interested in the U.S., too. The ones we met were interested in the United States and its technology and its education system. I don’t recall, and I guess I wouldn’t have dealt with the business community particularly, so I’m not sure how they viewed us. Culturally though, they were experimenting with their Arab roots and that made it important for them to develop their ties with other Arab countries, with other third world countries as well. They saw themselves as leaders in that sphere. The U.S. was not their most important partner.

*Q: How about American movies and TV? Were they around?*

NIELSEN: I’m sure they were. I never went to the cinema there. It was not prohibited, but it wasn’t terribly recommended. Women were made to feel uncomfortable if they went. I couldn’t tell you when they got recent movies. Of course, they wouldn’t have been in English necessarily. They might have been dubbed into French with Arabic subtitles.

*Q: You left there in ‘83. Where did you go?*

NIELSEN: I went to Dakar, Senegal.

*Q: That must have been more fun.*

NIELSEN: Yes, it was a big breath of fresh air actually. Algeria was a dour country, but the experience was valuable and it was certainly interesting to experience Eastern Europe without being quite as heavy-handed as Romania, Bulgaria, or the former Yugoslavia would have been, and the climate was a bit better.

**MICHAEL H. NEWLIN**  
**Ambassador**  
**Algeria (1981-1985)**

*Ambassador Newlin was born in North Carolina and was raised there and in the*

*Panama canal zone. After graduating from Harvard he joined the Foreign Service in 1952 and was posted to Frankfurt, Oslo, Paris, Kinshasa and Jerusalem, where he served as Consul General. During his distinguished career, Ambassador Newlin served in several high level positions dealing with the United Nations and its agencies and NATO. He served as Ambassador to Algeria from 1981 to 1985 and as US representative to the United Nations Agencies in Vienna, 1988-1991.*

1997 Interview

*Q: What were the state of our relations with Algiers?*

NEWLIN: They were in a sort of limbo. For years and years we'd had broken relations because of the '67 war. We had an Interest Section there and, in effect, an Ambassador, but he wasn't accredited. It was a minimal kind of thing. The Algerians had come to the conclusion that they wanted to improve their relations with us and that showed in their deep involvement in solving the hostage crisis. So I arrived at a very opportune moment. Indeed, during the three years that I was there, our relations steadily improved. I don't take any great personal credit for it, but they improved dramatically. I gained direct access to the President and his closest advisors.

*Q: How large was our Embassy?*

NEWLIN: It wasn't very large. I would say rather modest. Life in Algiers was difficult. We didn't have a very large embassy.

*Q: Difficult in what way? High cost of living? Security problems?*

NEWLIN: Yes. The security problems were really not serious then--we knew the fundamentalists were increasing their influence and everything, but there were no terrorist attacks, no assassinations at that time.

*Q: Did you have any constituent post in Algiers?*

NEWLIN: Yes, Oran. It was an interesting post near the Moroccan border and when I arrived there was a sizeable American presence at the liquid natural gas plant there.

*Q: And you were able to travel around?*

NEWLIN: Yes. We traveled everywhere even to Tamanrasset in the middle of the Sahara.

*Q: How were Americans received there?*

NEWLIN: Very warmly received. A warm welcome.

*Q: Can you say something about the lingering French presence?*

NEWLIN: There again, it's like the Belgians and the Zaireans. The French and the Algerians

were condemned to cooperate. There were always continuous frictions and problems. But the French still had a sizeable presence there. Of course, there were many Algerians living in France.  
*Q: And influence.*

NEWLIN: And influence.

*Q: What about the Soviets?*

NEWLIN: The Algerians were desirous of reducing their military and other dependence on the Soviets. I helped be responsible for establishing modest military cooperation with them. We sold them C-130 transport aircraft which they were eager to obtain.

Then we tried to increase our cooperation across the board which, I'm happy to say, we were able to do. But they definitely wanted to decrease their dependence on the Soviets for their military equipment.

*Q: Did you have more than perfunctory relations with the Soviets or other communist missions there?*

NEWLIN: The Russians had a sizeable presence in technical training and maintenance of equipment. The Algerians complained about the expense and the fact that MIG engines had to be sent to the Soviet Union for maintenance.

*Q: What were your principal concerns as Ambassador there?*

NEWLIN: To improve the political and economic relationship. I lobbied hard for grain sales and investment and tried to help American businessmen. Of course, the protection of American citizens living there. Occasionally they would be arrested for things that they're not really responsible for. It culminated, just before we left, at the time of the highjacking of the TWA plane, that our contacts at the senior levels were very important.

*Q: What was the Algerian interest in the Middle East?*

NEWLIN: They were eager to play a role, if they could, but they were so far removed they weren't really active players.

*Q: Did you get out and make speeches?*

NEWLIN: No. Algiers is not the place where you're asked to make speeches. I was on television after I presented my credentials. Occasionally, I would have a chance to do some public relations, but it was minimal.

*Q: Yes. Any other comments on your tour of duty in Algiers?*

NEWLIN: I believe President Benjedid wanted to move away from a one party state and socialism toward pluralism and a market economy. The diehard socialist elite resisted change so

when reforms came they were overtaken by fundamentalism

#### 2006 Interview

*Q: You were now in Algeria from when to when?*

NEWLIN: I was there from 1981 to '85, late '81 to '85.

*Q: When you arrived in '81 what was sort of the political, economic relations with the U.S. position with Algeria?*

NEWLIN: Well we owed the Algerians a tremendous debt of gratitude for their key role in working with the Iranians to get our hostages released. Warren Christopher the Deputy Secretary of State at that time came to Algiers and stayed there while the Algerians negotiated with the Iranians. Complicated issues such as the release of blocked Iranian funds had to be ironed out.

At the outset of my departure for Algiers to the extent they were aware of Algeria at all, the views of senior members of the new Reagan administration were negative. The Algerian foreign minister had played a major role in resolving the hostage crisis in Tehran. Instead of gratitude, the attitude was the hostage crisis didn't happen on our watch and we don't owe the Algerians anything

Our policy toward North Africa then was heavily biased toward Morocco and Tunisia. When visiting Morocco with Secretary Haig, Nick Veliotis reported he regarded the Algerians as Nasserites.

When I first arrived, to meet with Algerian officials I had to send a diplomatic note to the foreign ministry which entailed a long wait. It was not until Bendjedid sent a back channel message to one of President Reagan's friends at a meeting in Paris indicating a desire for better relations did things begin to change. And change they certainly did.

In Washington they decided to send the station chief from Paris because he was somebody who could speak French fluently, Chuck Cogan, to come and talk to the Algerians about setting up an exchange of intelligence, mainly about Qadhafi. So we had a meeting with Cogan and then a rather large delegation on the side of the Algerians including the chief of military security. This is one of the main posts because President Bendjedid was a military officer, he had been a general. He was chosen when Boumedienne died to be the new man. So he really came out of the military background. The person that had sealed his presidency was then the head of military security. Cogan started off the meeting and made his pitch that it was in our mutual interest, that we had a serious problem with Qadhafi, and that it would be in the interest of both parties if we compared notes. So the head of military security said, "Well, we are a socialist country, and we are unable to collaborate as you suggest." Then he proceeded to dismiss most of the people on the Algerian side from the room. Once they had left the atmosphere changed and it was sort of let's get down to business. How do you suggest we proceed? Well it turned out that in addition to being the U.S. ambassador I was sort of an ex officio station chief because I became the key contact between the Algerians and the United States. Then I had a very good DCM who helped



me.

*Q: Who was DCM?*

NEWLIN: The DCM was Nat Howell. Nat Howell was an Arabist and spoke Arabic fluently, as well as French. So Nat and I would go get in my private car, not the official car, drive out to a suburb to a safe house. There we would meet with the head of military security. We would then exchange intelligence assessments. Then relations began to improve. It got so that I could call up the chief of staff to President Bendjedid, who was the second most powerful man in Algeria, any time that I had to see the president or if I had something I wanted to pass on and didn't need to see the president, I could see him. I would just drive over, no notes or anything like that.

My first real coup, the Algerians were so dissatisfied with the Soviets, with their furnishing military equipment to them. The Russians of course provided them with all the heavy military equipment including their aircraft. The MIGs. It was particularly galling to them that the engines of the MIGs had to be flown back to Russia for servicing. They couldn't be serviced in Algiers. They wanted very much to buy our cargo plane the C-130, a propeller driven but wonderful cargo plane. You can land them on a short airfield and take off. So I took up the cudgels and finally I got permission that we could sell them three C-130s. Before the deal could be consummated I found out from Washington the Algerians had shipped some military assistance to Nicaragua, to the Sandinistas. I then bearded the minister of defense and said, "Now look, I went out on a limb on this, and we got it." He said, "Mr. Ambassador, I assure you this had not been authorized by the central committee and by President Bendjedid. I can promise you that something like this will never happen again, and that we will adhere to the agreement as to how these planes will be used." So that was the beginning of a new relationship with them in that area, in addition to what was happening then on the intelligence side.

Then we began to get some high level visits and Secretary Baldrige, the Secretary of Commerce came with a large delegation. We were able to arrange American businessmen meeting with Algerians. Then Baldrige and I wound up having a meeting with President Bendjedid. When we got into his office he was still working on some notes. He then, made a pitch to Baldrige for better U.S.-Algerian relations. Baldrige took that back.

In the meantime I had re-established contact with my former boss at USUN when I was political counselor there, with George H.W. Bush. Every time I would come back to Washington I would go over to the executive office building and call on him. He would always see me. The first time I went back I called on him. I said, "You know it would be wonderful if you could come to Algiers. They want to have better relations and you could advance the process." He said, "I would like to do that. I have a memo from my staff assistant that says 'Ambassador Newlin will probably urge you to come to Algiers, and you have this trip lined up for Africa and there is no way Algiers can be fitted into that, so by all means tell him no.'" He read me the memo and said, "However, I would very much like to go to Algiers." "Can you line up the State Department?" I said, "Well I think I can. I will certainly try." I went back to the State Department and the African Bureau said, "Absolutely not." Every minute is accounted for in this trip. So we didn't succeed in that effort. Then every time I went back on business or on leave I would touch base. So finally I was told the vice president was making a trip to Morocco, Algeria and Tunis. So this

was a big deal from our standpoint. President Bendjedid went out of his way to invite the Vice President and Barbara Bush to a private luncheon, just the four of them with a translator, with Mrs. Bendjedid and himself. Senior George Bush was able to meet all of the main Algerian officials. That was a big plus for us.

Then I had actually started saying my good byes, my tour was up in the summer of '85. It was a Friday afternoon in Ramadan. Fridays were the Muslim Sunday of course and in summer time everybody was out of town. The phone rang and the operations center from the State Department said, "A TWA airplane has been hijacked from Athens. It is reportedly headed towards Algiers. It will be there momentarily. You are to get in touch with the President of Algeria and ask that they let the plane land. Algeria because of a previous hijacking had said they were not going to let hijacked aircraft land. And get firm assurances that they will not let that airplane take off again." I did manage to get in touch with my contact, the president's chief of staff. I relayed my instructions. He said, "Well, on humanitarian grounds, we will let the airplane land." The operations center called and said, "Here is a message that you are to deliver to President Bendjedid immediately." So I started taking it down. I said to Nat Howell, "Get in the car and go to the airport, the plane will be landing soon. I have got to take down this darn message." So I remember at one stage I said, "This is far too long." By the time I got the message written and started having it translated, I left for the airport and got there after the plane just landed. There were two hijackers on board. One of the hijackers who they later called Castro, leaned out the window of the cockpit with a .45 pistol. The Algerians shouted at him, "Get back in that plane; no display of weapons." Then we heard that there had been a third hijacker who for some reason had not been able to get on the plane in Athens. And that the Greeks were eager to get rid of this individual. They didn't want him incarcerated in Greece. I called the operations center and said, "Well now this may be an opening here that can be used." They said, "Absolutely no negotiations with the hijackers. You can't talk to the hijackers." I said, "I am not talking with the hijackers. I am telling you we ought to see if this doesn't present an opening." So sure enough the Greeks put the third hijacker onboard a plane for Algiers. So then we set up a unit out at the airport with the Algerian negotiators and senior officials and myself and Nat Howell. Sure enough the plane arrived from Athens with the hijacker on board and Greek officials. So the Algerians used that bait to get the women and children released from the plane. I didn't know, I had no idea that they had then agreed the plane could fly to Beirut. So I was greeting the women and the children as they got off the bus from the plane when the plane started up and took off for Beirut. So we took the women and the stewardess to our residence and tried to reassure them that we were going to work on getting everybody released. The stewardess furnished us a report on the hijacking and her description of the hijackers. Well the plane when it landed in Beirut, the hijackers shot and killed a navy seal that they had found from his navy credentials and threw the body out on to the tarmac to show that they were serious. They got several other hijackers to join them and then they flew back to Algiers. The plane was kept at the far end of the runway. Then the Algerians started negotiating with them. Their demands were for release of some prisoners that the Israelis were holding. I think there were 400 of them or something like that. So these negotiations sort of took on a life of their own. Finally, about another third of the passengers were released in Algiers. They were men. In the meantime we began to get word in the media that a delta strike force was being sent to Italy. I was very concerned over that. So I told Washington, "Tell Secretary Shultz that under no circumstances should this strike force try to rescue these people by force. The Algerians will resist and certainly the hijackers will blow up

the plane. It will be a disaster.” They said, “Yes, we will pass that on.” So then a couple of days negotiations dragged on, and the Algerians hinted to me that they were about to assure the hijackers that they could arrange for the Israeli prisoners to be released if they would release all of the remaining hostages. I said, “Well I cannot speak to that. I don’t know that.” The hijackers could on their own radio hear that the delta force was in Italy. It was early one morning, and we had developed in the embassy the ability to monitor unclassified communications. So I was told that there was a great commotion on the runway and the hijackers were threatening to kill more of the passengers. They got the pilot to say that he was being tortured. I was in touch with my contact urging him not to let the plane take off. The Algerians finally let the plane take off, they did not want Americans killed on the Tarmac in Algiers. That was the end of my involvement in it.

*Q: What happened to the plane?*

NEWLIN: The Plane flew to Beirut and immediately the hostages were dispersed. Then Bob McFarland went to Beirut. It turned out the Israelis were prepared to release the prisoners for their own reasons. So I think that it worked out that finally some prisoners were released as a result of the negotiations that McFarland had.

*Q: McFarland was...*

NEWLIN: ...on the National Security Council. I think he was deputy at that particular moment. So all of the hostages were finally released. But thanks to the Algerians it was possible for 2/3 of them to get released in Algiers.

*Q: Mike, speaking of airplanes and all, were you in Algeria when we bombed Qadhafi and all?*

NEWLIN: No, I don’t think I was at that time. But we did have a successful comparing of notes. The Algerians were worried about Qadhafi. All of our discussions were secret. The other thing that I should mention, the famous General Walters.

*Q: Yes, Vernon Walters.*

NEWLIN: Vernon Walters. Well Vernon Walters was sort of a roving ambassador by that time. He had had many claims and I guess he did speak six or seven languages. Vernon Walters was a very close friend to King Hassan of Morocco. He claimed that in the American invasion of WWII, he had given the young prince a ride in his tank. So he was very close to the king. So close to the king that whenever he would come to Morocco, he would meet with the king privately without the American ambassador present. So Walters, then wanted to be sort of a roving super ambassador to the Maghreb countries. He wanted to include Algiers and Tunisia as well as Morocco. I was very happy to see Walters. He was certainly an extraordinary individual, but I was not about to have happen in Algiers what had happened in Rabat. So I was very keen that Walters did not get involved in the kind of liaison work that I was doing. He respected that. President Bendjedid always received him when he came, and we arranged for him to meet top officials with me present.

The capstone to my assignment to Algiers was when I got word from the Department that a state visit slot in the spring of '85 had come open. The person they were trying to have couldn't come, so therefore they were inviting President Bendjedid to come. Well now if you want to ever live high on the hog, you want to be part of a state visit, particularly with the Reagan administration. So my wife and I were members of the official delegation of course. We couldn't stay at the Blair House because that was being renovated, but we had the top floor of the Madison Hotel. Everything went off beautifully. 21 gun reception on the south lawn, the state dinner and meetings in the oval office as well as the family quarters. After that, President Bendjedid went to California. He visited San Francisco as well as Los Angeles. That all went very well. Before the formal meeting in the oval office, I went over with Secretary Shultz and Arnie Raphel who was acting assistant secretary for NEA. We drove in the back gate of the White House and got out and started going through the rabbit warren the White House is on the ground floor. As we got to the main floor, Shultz and Arnie Raphel were nabbed by somebody in an office that wanted to talk to them. The military officer that was escorting us kept going. I thought I had better keep up with him. I kept going until I got to a small office that had two secretaries in it. Then a door out of the wall opened and out came Ronald Reagan. Reagan was such an actor. He had met me before, but he didn't remember. I said, "Mr. President, I am Mike Newlin. I am your ambassador to Algiers. Secretary Shultz is right behind me. He will be here in just a minute." He acted as though he was so delighted to meet me, that it made his day. It was perfect.

*Q: How did the Algerians react to this opening to the United States.*

NEWLIN: It was controversial. But the people that he had, his closest advisors and everything at that time were in favor. It was sort of a half-life of Sadat. Remember Sadat got fed up with the Russians too. He said, "If you get involved with the Russians they will grab you by the throat." It was particularly true on the military thing. This was a little bit of that. Of course earlier even in the days under Boumedienne, George Shultz built their liquefied natural gas plant and infrastructure. In the Sahara gas fields I was shown a small house that was called the Shultz villa.

*Q: Well did, were the Algerians impressed with anything or just the things they say? Had they any idea of the United States would you say at the top level? I mean the United States is a big country, and for people who have lived in Algiers they have gone to France. I mean it is a different thing. Did you feel they were getting a pretty good picture of the United States?*

NEWLIN: I think the top echelons were pretty much clued in. I do think that there was this residual revolutionary background and third world kind of thing. Some of that was no doubt in the background. But President Bendjedid managed to make a very good impression on President Reagan. In their meeting in the Oval Office, they had developed an interesting convoluted understanding that they would try to help with the other hostages being held in Beirut. I would receive messages and they would forward them to Beirut. But because they were dealing with Hezbollah and these people, while they tried, they were not able to do anything in that department.

*Q: Did the Polisario movement confrontation in Morocco intrude while you were there?*

NEWLIN: It didn't because the Algerians, while they had a formal position of support for

Polisario self determination in southern Sahara, did not really stir up things. I did get permission for Nat Howell to go to the southern Sahara and to actually meet with some of the Polisario people, but that did not become a major issue. It was an issue for me when I first got there because Walters said that there was the Qadhafi trail through Algeria, that the Qadhafi trail started in Tripoli and went across the southern Sahara to the Polisario. I had a hard time confronting him on that. I finally got him off that tack. But he was so hip on that.

*Q: What was your impression of the Algerian foreign ministry?*

NEWLIN: Superb. Absolutely superb. The foreign minister that had played the key role with Warren Christopher in the release of our hostages in Tehran, his plane had crashed on a trip to central Africa. They first announced that everybody had been killed. He survived, but he was seriously handicapped as a result. But he was very capable. Then after I was there for several months, I got a call from somebody in the foreign ministry at night at home saying that he was on his way to Tehran in an Algerian plane, and that the plane was overdue. Could we check with airports in the area in case the plane had made an emergency landing. So I got in touch with the operations center and said, "Check at these airports and see if an Algerian plane has landed there." Well it turned out the Iraqis had mistakenly shot the plane down with everybody on board. So then they had a new foreign minister, I think Ibrahimi. He was very good. He made I think, a very good impression in Washington.

*Q: What was your impression of the French Algerian connection while you were there?*

NEWLIN: They were condemned to cooperate. I don't think the life of the French ambassador was always a happy one, but obviously so many Algerians were in France of course. Later on, after I left, I think relations did improve, and I think Chirac actually made a visit to Algiers. But the French, there were so many wounds and everything left. The other thing that happened that was sort of a cloud on the horizon was the growth of Moslem sentiment while I was there.

*Q: The extreme, the fundamentalist.*

NEWLIN: The fundamentalist. Algeria was ostensibly a secular socialist state, with respect for all religions. Certainly the Catholic church was able to operate and so forth. But I noticed while I was there, we used to go up to the Atlas Mountains to a wonderful place called Chréa during the weekend for a picnic. We went through a town called Blida which is right at the base of the mountains. There was a rather small mosque to one side of the road. When we first were there for the first couple of years, we would drive up on Friday. There would be men in the mosque and out in the courtyard. By the time we left there were so many people they were out on both sides of the road and almost closing the road. So this was a sign of things changing. Then, of course, after I left, they had a reasonably free and fair election where the fundamentalist party won. Then the military stepped in and cancelled the result of the election.

*Q: How were relations with Tunisia?*

NEWLIN: I think the relations were proper. The Tunisians were not very much of a factor. Bendjedid did meet with Hassan of Morocco while I was there. They made nice noises about

how they were going to cooperate and everything, but I don't think anything came of it. One coup that I had was that we heard early morning on the radio that Qadhafi was going to meet with Hassan, and they were going to unify their two countries. So I fired off a flash message to Washington saying, "Guess what is happening. There is going to be unity between..." This caught the embassy in Rabat by surprise. During my stay I did manage to have very good relations with my counterpart, Joseph Verner Reed in Rabat. He was delightful.

*Q: He also had the reputation of being absolutely captivated and almost a captive of the Moroccan court. I mean I think there is something about he would refer to our king or something like that. I mean this is sort of a, I won't say a laughing stock of the foreign service, but considered a bad case of clientitis.*

NEWLIN: Well as a result of this report, and after the meeting took place between Qadhafi and Hassan, then Joseph got his marching orders to go see the king. So I got a blow by blow of this from Joseph later. He went, I guess the king was maybe in Marrakech at that time, so he went to Marrakech. The King had a special van, royal van with two facing seats. I guess they rode all the way back to Rabat while Joseph delivered his message about this extraordinary development.

*Q: What was the message?*

NEWLIN: I guess expressing surprise and warning the king that he had better watch his step.

*Q: Well I mean when this thing was announced, in the first place you know, it is almost laughable. You wonder how King Hassan got into this.*

NEWLIN: I don't know what his idea was for that. Maybe to show the Algerians that he was going to try to play a wider role in the Maghreb. I don't know what his thinking was.

*Q: Did anybody take it seriously?*

NEWLIN: No, I don't think so.

*Q: Yes because we had been through this with Nasser before with Syria and Yemen. We had already gone through the United Arab Republic and this sort of thing.*

NEWLIN: Futile.

*Q: Yes, these gestures. Nationality takes over very quickly.*

NEWLIN: It does.

*Q: Well just to finish up on this, what was life like? How did you find, I have always heard Algerians were rather dour people.*

NEWLIN: They could have that reputation. They had been through a lot. The French pulled out I guess in '60 or '61 overnight. They had never done anything to educate any of the Algerians or

any of bring them into the administration. They were just left empty handed. The French took with them the maps of the electric and the sewage grid and much other useful material. The Algerians were thrown into a very difficult situation. The Algerians were not fortunate in having Ben Bella as the leader of opposition to French colonialism, his airplane had been commandeered by the French. He was in prison for quite some time, so therefore he was the national hero. The Algerian elite got together and caucused after the French left, and they decided, this was at the height of the non aligned movement, they would become a socialist country and they would be non aligned. They would be with Nasser and Nkrumah and all of those people. They did start to develop their infrastructure. They did bring in the United States to develop their sizable natural gas reserves. But they adopted a fairly radical brand of nonalignment. At one time they had Stokely Carmichael in Algiers as sort of an unofficial American representative. They broke diplomatic relations with us of course after the Six Day War, the '67 Six Day War. So we didn't have formal diplomatic relations. We had in effect a mission there, but under the Spanish flag.

They let agriculture which had been the breadbasket of France collapse. The French plantations were wonderful, wine and wheat and all these things. They tried to socialize it. They would go out and tell illiterate peasants, "You and the people own this now. This is going to be communal property. The state will provide seeds and things." The peasants grew just enough for their families. Prices, everything had to be imported practically. We were supposed to change our money legally. I think the United States and the British embassy were the only ones that changed their money at the official rate. So when the foreign service inspectors came, by that time the foreign service inspectors were not allowed to accept embassy hospitality. Previously the ambassador would have said come stay at the residence. No, they had to go to an Algerian hotel. They had to eat on the Algerian economy. So we met them and sent them to the hotel. They came the next morning to the embassy and said, "Something is very wrong here. Either this post is not reporting to Washington what the cost is here or Washington is not providing an adequate offset." So that was fine. My predecessor's wife opened the snack bar. That was one of the few places the diplomatic community liked to come, to the American snack bar. Decent food at reasonable prices. Just before the inspectors arrived the administrative officer said, "Well I am sorry, Ramadan is coming up and we have to close the snack bar." I said, "but the inspectors are coming. You can't close it." He said, "I cannot have Algerians cooking and serving food all day when they can't even have a sip of water." So I said, "All right, close the snack bar." After a day or two of hotel food the inspectors decided they would go to the market. They looked around at prices and everything. Finally they bought a watermelon about the size of a basketball for \$15.00. We got our allowances improved as a result.

*Q: How about socializing with them? Were there any problems?*

NEWLIN: No, there was not. I would have no problem getting ministers, for example the minister of petroleum or the commerce minister to come to the residence whenever we had official delegations. It was sort of funny though. Bendjedid I don't think was a fundamentalist, but he did not drink alcohol. So at official receptions, the Algerians would always take soft drinks until the senior minister arrived. If the senior minister ordered a scotch and soda, then it was all right to have scotch and soda. We had a rather feisty Algerian member of our staff. She advised my wife, "One thing you ought to serve are these delicious dates wrapped with bacon."

My wife said, “Bacon? Would the Algerians eat that?” She said, “Oh they would love it.” So she offered some to the petroleum minister and he said in French, “You are an Algerian and you are serving bacon?” She said, “Well you are drinking scotch.”

**ANN B. SIDES**  
**Consular Officer**  
**Oran, Algeria (1985-1987)**

*Ms. Sides was born in Massachusetts and raised in Connecticut and Florida. She was educated at Broward (FL) Junior College and the University of Florida. Joining the Foreign Service in 1988, Ms. Sides specialized in Consular work, serving abroad in Niamey, Oran, Dakar, Belgrade (twice), Dublin, and Athens. In Belgrade and Athens Ms. Sides was Consul General. She also served two tours at the Department of State in Washington. Ms. Sides was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2010.*

*Q: Well, then you left there when?*

SIDES: We left in 1985. I had been assigned to a small consulate in Oran, on the coast of Algeria. It is closed now. It was a two-officer post, housed in a beautiful little French colonial villa into which you could have gotten with a can opener. Barbara Schell was the consul, the Principal Officer, and I was her deputy. My title was vice consul. We were the only American direct-hires at post.

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

SIDES: 1985-1987.

*Q: Probably the only time it came into American news was in WWII. That was one of the places we landed troops.*

SIDES: That’s right, and in fact our consulate was in the villa that General Eisenhower used for his headquarters. Apparently during the colonial war between the French and the Algerians, it may have been used for other purposes by the colonists, because we found a couple of weapons hidden in the heating system pipes while I was there.

*Q: What was the situation in Algeria, at least from the optic of Oran?*

SIDES: Well, Oran was Algeria’s commercial capital, a much more open, lively place it was said, than Algiers. I wouldn’t describe it as “vibrant;” Algeria was a pretty grim, buttoned up place. However, Oran had a big port, and there was a lot of oil and gas extraction going on in the area. Remember that the revolution in Algeria had taken place in the 60’s and it was very fresh in people’s minds. The ruling party, the FLN—which is still in power, by the way—was led by those who fought the French in the Algerian revolutionary movement. They were good fighters



in their day, but by 1985 they'd pretty well run into a ditch the economic structure they'd inherited from the French. They had adopted all the worst socialist ideas. To be fair, though, the FLN government did raise the general level of basic education and medical care in the countryside. But there wasn't much of a future for young people, educated or not. It was a beautiful country, but tough to live in.

*Q: Was this the time of Boumediène?*

SIDES: Boumediène was no longer the president at that time, he'd been overthrown from within by the FLN party, which remained in power. Chadli Benjedid was the president. Now it's Abdulaziz Bouteflika, another long-time FLN figure. Everybody that we dealt with in the Algerian bureaucracy professed to hate the French, although most people spoke French, having been educated during the colonial era. French was the business language. This was before the "FIS," the Muslim fundamentalists, became as powerful and influential as they were to become. During my time there, most women in the city did not cover their heads. But that began to change; the FIS put pressure on women to conform. The thing that I remember particularly about Oran was that young men hung around the street corners all day because they had no work. You just knew that sooner or later the devil finds work for idle hands, and this would not turn out well for Algeria, or perhaps for us.

*Q: Did Oran represent a particular tribal region?*

SIDES: Well not in the specific sense, but it was very near the Kabile ethnic homeland. Many of the business and professional elite were Kabiles. Our landlord, the owner of our apartment, was a Kabile doctor. Dr. Taleb and his sons were all fair-haired and blue eyed. They looked like Vikings, not at all like Arabs. He sent them to France to be educated and they must have fit right in. Oran was considered much more progressive than Algiers. There were a lot of bright young people there, very keen to learn. We had an English language program; Randy helped with that. We did a lot of commercial work. I handled the GSO, consular and public affairs portfolios, and Barbara, the consul, did the political and economic work and the overall management of the post. Administering a small, two-officer post with two FSNs and a few contract guards took almost as much time as running a much bigger mission. We had to file all the same reports and have the same procedures and controls as Embassy Algiers. I would estimate we spent about 50% of our time administering each other!

*Q: What was the relationship with the embassy?*

SIDES: Well, like most constituent posts we considered that we were forgotten and neglected by the mother ship. The ambassador occasionally came out to see us, but mostly we were on our own.

*Q: Who was the ambassador?*

SIDES: Craig Johnstone was the ambassador. I only remember him coming once or twice, but I may be mistaken. We used to go to Algiers once a month, either Barbara or I did, to pick up the classified bag, and take it back so we could read the classified message traffic and shred it. If we

had any classified traffic to send, we had to take it to Algiers. There were no Marine guards or security officers. I would say it was a “lock and leave” post at night, but the fact is that Barbara and her husband, John, lived in the upstairs part of the consulate. They had a couple of bedrooms and a living room up there. The kitchen was downstairs with the offices. We used to do a radio check with Algiers once a week. We had a teletype machine. I was the teletypist, and sent messages back and forth to Algiers, unclassified messages. Occasionally I used it for consular work. The consular work, such as it was, was pretty bizarre. We had 55 Americans in the consular district, which was the western half of Algeria. I knew all the Americans in my consular district by name. In those days we didn’t have bullet-proof teller windows, the way consular officers do now. Oran had just an open counter, and the consular assistant and I received the public at that counter; no protection whatsoever. The Americans in the consular district, if they were in Oran, would come around the counter through a little wooden gate, walk into the kitchen, get a cup of coffee and sit around and chat. It was a completely different environment than would be possible now. The Algerian visa applicants could walk in anytime during business hours and submit their applications; no appointments or lines. I could interview them for as long as I wanted. We didn’t do immigration, just nonimmigrant visas—about 500 a year—passports, and protection and welfare. There wasn’t a lot of protection and welfare work, though, with so few Americans in the district. The Algerians seemed convinced that we were there for some intelligence purpose. Barbara warned me that they thought that she was just kind of a front, and that her husband, John Laylin, was an agent. I think they had the same idea about Randy and me. The idea that two women could be running the consulate, and our men were just accompanying spouses, was apparently a little too hard for the Algerians to accept. Barbara had worked in Iran until just before the November, 1979 takeover, and she knew how to handle herself in the Middle East. Sadly, she was killed in 1994 while on a mission to the Iraqi Kurds. She’s on the Memorial Plaque in the lobby at Main State. God rest her feisty soul.

*Q: She was killed in a helicopter shot down by our own...*

SIDES: That’s right. The Friendly Fire incident. She was in the Blackhawk that some Air Force throttle-jockey shot out of the sky. She was a very good mentor. She taught me a lot about nuts and bolts diplomatic work that I never would have learned in a larger post where I was one cog on the wheel. There is a picture of her in the corridor in the State Department, outside the NEA Bureau, I think. We stayed in touch with John, her husband, till he died a few years later.

*Q: What was your impression of dealing with Algerian officials?*

SIDES: Well, they were not easy to deal with because they found it difficult to take women seriously as professionals. It was surprising, because women fought in the revolution with the men. Also, they were pretty paranoid about us spying on them. Most Algerians, the ordinary people in the street, were afraid to socialize or be seen with us because then they would be questioned by the intelligence services. So for us it was a very lonely life. Barbara and John and Randy and I were thrown together a great deal, and although we got on well, we were different people, with different interests. We knew some people at the French and Spanish consulates, and sometimes saw them socially. Also, there was a small group of students from Third World countries who were studying in Algeria on scholarships. We got to know some of them. Eventually we became friendly with one of Randy’s Algerian students and her family. They were

strong FLN supporters—had fought in the war against the French—and I suppose the authorities sanctioned the friendship. They used to invite us over from time to time and we got to know them rather well. They were nice people. Of course, we were under surveillance by the intelligence service all the time. They listened to our telephone calls, and they used to interrupt when I was having a conversation with my mother. If I had been on the phone too long, this voice would come on the line saying, “It is time for you to hang up now.”

“But I am talking to my mother.”

“Eh bien, I will give you five more minutes.”

They went through our trash. Things got back to us that told us they were reading our correspondence. Barbara would put some things out that she thought would amuse them. Randy started emptying kitty litter on top of our trash. We liked thinking of their gumshoes poking around in the cat litter looking for some tidbit from our discarded letters and bills. We occasionally said things designed to shock our presumed eavesdroppers, like suggesting we were into esoteric sex practices and such. I wonder if they realized we were messing with them? We also were very safe, because they never let anything happen to us. Police states have their uses. When it got nasty was when the U.S. government bombed Tripoli. That was in retaliation for...

*Q: A Berlin nightclub.*

SIDES: That’s right, the Berlin nightclub thing. Qadhafi was on the radio all over North Africa telling people to take revenge for those killed by our air attack on Tripoli. When I walked to work that morning, I noticed there was something odd in the air. The streets around the consulate were practically empty, and there were people just standing around on the street corners watching it, police-y looking men plain clothes. I just had the feeling something wasn’t right, and when I got into the office the consular assistant, who was a Christian Arab named Danielle, told me that Qadhafi was on the radio asking people to take revenge and attack us. There was a demonstration forming up at the Oran University, and it was on its way. This was serious; during the Six Day war, the Algerian government allowed mobs to overrun our consulates and attack the embassy. Barbara was on the phone trying to get the police to make a commitment to protect us. She also called Algiers to let them know we were in trouble and ask them to see what they could do at the national level. She had good relations with the Oran police chief. He seemed kind of evasive, but finally promised to send us help. I was quite alarmed by the whole thing. Barbara was a pretty tough cookie, and she had a very dry sense of humor. However, she seemed uncharacteristically nervous. She said, “Ann, do you know how to use a weapon?” Me, a flower child. I said, “Oh my God, Barbara, no. Do we have any guns?” She said, “Yes we do. They are in my safe. We have a shotgun and two pistols. Do you know how to use them?” I said, “No, I am afraid I don’t. I could try...” She said, “I’m not planning on using them unless we have to. I don’t know about you, but after what we went through in Teheran,” --she’d been there for the first take over-- “nobody is going to take my post without resistance.” Barb normally didn’t go in for dramatics, but then she said, “I don’t know about you, but I plan to take one with me if I go.” I thought, “Holy shit, this is like a movie.” I was an untenured junior officer, and I wanted to seem steady and reliable, so I said nothing and just followed Barbara’s lead. We went upstairs and she hauled in the American flag. This rather shocked me; as a naval officer’s daughter, I felt

we were, you know, “striking the colors.” But she said, “Why make it easy for them to find the consulate if they don’t know where it is,” and of course she was right. So we pulled in the flag and sent home the FSN’s and closed the shutters, and we destroyed any sensitive material we had around. Then she told me to get ready to destroy the visa printing equipment if we had to, and the passport blanks. We had a mallet for smashing up the visa machine. I was ready to do it. We peeped outside again and, to my infinite relief, the police had formed a cordon around the Consulate and the crowd never got close. So that was my big adventure in Oran, Algeria.

*Q: Well did you get any news from the rather exotic international community in Tangiers?*

SIDES: Oh, weren’t they exotic! Oh yes. I knew the consul in Tangiers. She had some real stories. That was the go-to place for sex change operations at the time. Americans who’d undergone the transformation surgery then applied for passports in their new gender. She said she had a vice consul who was brought up in a strict religious family and was pretty shocked by the goings-on in Tangiers.

*Q: Could you go out into the countryside much?*

SIDES: We did, but we had to get permission from the Algerian government. We used to use my consular work as an excuse to go out into the country. The authorities didn’t like us touring around. They had missile silos and stuff out in the desert. There was an American married to an Algerian man who lived near what they call the Great Western Erg. I used to visit her, using her children’s passport applications as an excuse to go out and do some traveling in the desert region. Everywhere we went we were met by the local police, taken to the Prefecture to meet the police chief, and then to the local mayor. They were very interested in what I was doing. We stayed in small, very spartan hotels in oasis towns. It was beautiful out there in the desert. It was such an immense emptiness, dunes and valleys of sand stretching to the horizon.

*Q: Did you get any feel for the fundamentalists kind of thing?*

SIDES: We began to see it, yes. The thing I think seemed to be the starting point was that the University of Oran had a reception in honor of International Women’s Day. The FIS, the fundamentalists, crashed into the party, turned over all the tables, smashed all the glass and stuff and frightened the women away. That was the first real manifestation that these people were extremely violent, dangerous. Then I began to notice more and more women covering. We heard that the FIS were starting to throw acid into the faces of unveiled women. I was always very modest in the way I dressed, out of respect for cultural norms, but I certainly didn’t veil up or anything. Modern women, as opposed to those who lived and dressed traditionally, began to worry. Our doctor, who was a Frenchwoman married to an Algerian, and other westernized women I knew began to talk about leaving. Foreigners were not targeted by the FIS at that time. Later, it got a lot uglier. The FIS murdered some monks in their monastery. They blew up our friend, Pierre Claverie, the bishop of Oran, in his car. The monks and the bishop were among the French people who stayed in Algeria and asked for Algerian citizenship after independence. They were committed to the country, and they were killed. The FLN party, with all its faults, encouraged women’s education and permitted women to enter professions; the FIS used resentment against westernized women, foreigners, and Christians to attract followers. They

were vicious, primitive types—Maghrebian Taliban.

*Q: I take it those who left went to France.*

SIDES: Yes, mostly, although our FSN, Danielle, a few years later emigrated to Canada with her Algerian husband. She was a Christian of mixed Moroccan-German parentage; a stateless person. A lot of Algerians went to Francophone Canada.

*Q: Was there any migration to the United States?*

SIDES: You know, at the time there was really very little. There is an Algerian community in the United States but it was very small at the time. Most of the visa applications we got were from business people or academics. I think they had to get permission from the party or something to travel. It was, in so many ways, like the USSR with palm trees. We had very austere life. It was difficult to get food or anything else. We usually would buy a lot at the commissary in Algiers. At the corner bakery we had to queue up for bread. A couple of times I went into what had once been a French department store, nationalized after independence. There would be nothing on the shelves but fly paper and matches. All around Algeria in those times there were reminders of the French era; upscale residences occupied by government functionaries who threw trash out in the street, elegant shops that were empty or filled with shoddy imported goods from the USSR. On my travels in the country I saw lots of run-down farms with irrigation systems falling apart because they weren't maintained after the Pieds-Noirs left.

*Q: These were French settlers.*

SIDES: These were French settlers. They called them "Pieds-Noirs." Most of them were against the Algerian revolution and when the French government left Algeria, they left also. They were despised by the Algerians, who considered them as occupiers and exploiters. However, by the mid-80's many Algerians told us privately that they were better off in the French era. The revolution had not turned out the way they expected. Because our social relations with Algerians were so circumscribed, we did a lot with third country nationals, and one of the places we would go to meet people was church. We would go to the Catholic Mass. There were a lot of Filipinos working as contractors for the Algerians in the oil and gas fields, and a few other foreigners, whom we could meet at Mass. There was a Methodist missionary couple from the United States who had a small Protestant congregation, mostly foreign students from Africa. Randy is Methodist, so we would go to the Methodist service too, and chat with the missionary couple. They led a very precarious life. They were absolutely forbidden to proselytize, and were restricted to ministering to the already persuaded. The Algerian police sometimes harassed Algerian Christians.

*Q: The FIS, were they essentially country people?*

SIDES: Yes, they were. The countryside in Algeria was, not surprisingly, far more religious than the city. I remember we went to a city called Ghardaia, deep in the desert, for New Years and stayed in a hotel. In the town of Ghardaia, on the buses, the women all had to ride in the back of the bus and the men rode in the front. The women were all fully veiled, only the foreigners were

not. When I say veiled, I mean that they wore the long clothing, a head covering, and a niqab across the nose that looked like an embroidered doily. They also wore little lacy gloves. You could only see their eyes.

*Q: Was there any residue of good feeling because of the role that Algerian diplomats played in the release of our diplomats from Tehran?*

SIDES: There was. We hadn't forgotten their help. And the Algerians hadn't forgotten President Kennedy's support for their independence. We didn't expect a warm, cozy relationship with a militantly socialist country like Algeria, but we wanted a correct and mutually productive one, and that, for the most part, is what we had. They were, I understand, a useful line of communication to other parties in the world with whom we could not have open dealings. However, their relentless suspicion of us and surveillance of our activities certainly didn't make us feel at all comfortable.

*Q: Well also too, they are putting an awful lot of money in to an intelligence service that has a life of its own.*

SIDES: You have really got a point about that. Some of the things we heard about what happened to them in the independence struggle helped me to understand why they were the kind of people they were. But what was sad about Algeria in those times, I don't know about Algeria now; we have never been back, was the wasted potential. Morocco, two hours away by road from Oran, was another world. The standard of living was so much better. You never saw bread lines. The shops were full of goods. People were out hustling, selling things, buying things. It had its problems, but the atmosphere was so different.

*Q: Did the French play much of a role or were they more circumscribed?*

SIDES: They had a huge consulate in Oran. The French needed Algeria and the Algerians needed the French. The French did a lot of commercial work, but they were very careful how they operated. We had a good friend who was a French commercial attaché. He was doing this job as an alternative to French military service. He had been born in Oran, and left as a baby with his parents at independence. They were supportive of independence; his father had even been jailed by the French authorities for helping the revolutionaries, but they had to leave like everybody else. Our friend was really interested in Algeria, but found it very difficult to establish relationships that went beyond the formal, business level. The Algerians did business with the French but without warmth or trust.

*Q: I have been told that the Algerians as a race are quite dour.*

SIDES: Yes, I found them so. I didn't know whether it was their national personality or whether it was the very sad and limited lives they had. Women and men couldn't mingle freely. Life for the young people was dull. We used to show movies at the consulate that were very popular because the kids told us it gave them an excuse to go someplace respectable to meet each other. Taking English lessons and watching movies was a way they could get out of the house. Large, extended families were crowded into these shabby apartment buildings because so many people

had left the countryside during and after the revolution. I remember during Eid al Fitr they'd slaughter sheep on their balconies. You would hear the terrible baaing turning into a gurgle and see the blood running down the side of the building. The garbage in Oran didn't get collected regularly, and there were rats all over the place. Having read Camus' novel, "The Plague"—which is set in Oran, by the way—and looking out at the rats crawling over the garbage in the street really gave me the creeps.

*Q: Well then you left there when?*

SIDES: We left there in the summer of 1987.

**HAYWOOD RANKIN**  
**Deputy Chief of Mission**  
**Algiers (1992-1994)**

*Haywood Rankin was born in the District of Columbia in 1946. He received both his bachelor's degree and law degree from the University of North Carolina in 1968 and 1971, respectively. His career has included positions in Tangier, Algiers, Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Muscat, and Abidjan. Haywood Rankin was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on July 24, 1998.*

*Q: I think we'll go on because I'm looking at the clock here. You left Oman in 1992, we're doing short shrift of this but still, then where did you go?*

RANKIN: I went on direct assignment to Algiers.

*Q: You were in Algiers from when?*

RANKIN: I was in Algiers from 1992 to 1994. I was deputy chief of mission to Ambassador Mary Ann Casey.

*Q: This is an interesting period. I think we ought to hit this and then maybe stop at that point. Can you describe the situation in Algiers in 1992 when you arrived?*

RANKIN: I arrived at a moment that was beginning to be difficult and gradually got worse in the course of the two years I was in Algiers. I was meant to serve a three-year tour but served only two years. I arrived with my family at the beginning of September 1992. On August 26, just a few days before we arrived, a massive bomb had gone off at Algiers International Airport killing nine people.

Algerian history leading up to my arrival bears a little review. In December 1991, legislative elections had been held and it was meant to be a two-tier election. A further set of elections was to be held in January of '92 but, on the basis of the December results, it appeared that the Islamists, the FIS (Front Islamique du Salut), were going to win those elections. When I say win,

it was with a minority of the votes.

The FLN, the dominant party at the time under Benjedid, had so stacked the rules that a plurality of the vote would give them a vast majority of the seats. The FLN assumed they would get a plurality, as they had been in power since independence. This is a very common way that ruling parties over the face of the world try to maintain their power when they feel pressure - i.e., external pressure from the U.S. and Europe - to establish legislatures and a multi-party system. It is a well-known trick. Well, this is a trick that massively backfired on the FLN. It was the FIS that won the plurality. The army panicked, canceled the elections, and threw Benjedid out. The army took power and that is the scene when I arrived.

When I arrived there had been a number of terrorist incidents. You were beginning to see unrest throughout the country, an incipient type of civil war if you like. My family and I knew when we went that we were going into a difficult situation.

Within a few weeks of our arrival, Ambassador Casey - under enormous pressure from the NEA front office, in particular Mark Parris, then the principal deputy assistant secretary who had Algeria directly under his wing - took the decision to evacuate children. That was the way it was stated. Children.

It so happened that, curiously, the American mission in Algiers was very much a family mission. There were a lot of families, a lot of children, many families with four children. On the face of it, an evacuation of children was odd since the American school was located within the American mission compound and therefore relatively safe. The real reason for focusing on children was that it was a way to cut the American embassy presence in the country dramatically.

My own background - Baghdad during the Iran-Iraq War, which was certainly much more dangerous than Algiers in October 1992, and Muscat, where we had confronted with this issue as well - strongly inclined one to disagree with Parris and Casey. I was cast in a very difficult position. Leave aside the fact that I hardly wanted to have to part with my family, I as deputy chief of mission wanted and was required to be loyal to an ambassador who was a great friend and whom I deeply admired, and also loyal to the orders of the State Department. At the same time, I had to commiserate with families who were about to be broken up and who passionately opposed the evacuation order.

I argued with the State Department that the way to go was a voluntary departure. The State Department was concerned about covering itself in case some American got killed or injured. I argued that the point is if you are trying to cover yourself, then you've covered yourself by offering people an opportunity to leave. The Department's response to that was, "We know in Algiers that nobody will leave." There simply was no perception in Algiers of danger. It was the polar opposite of the situation in Muscat. In Muscat, there had been no danger but a few people could have jumped at the chance to evacuate. In Algiers, there were the first inchoate signals of danger, but not one single family would vote to leave.

At any rate, it was decided that what was essential was that people leave and the only way to do that was to order people to leave. The choice then was do you order families to leave, or do you



order some staff to leave, or what? The decision was made to put it in terms of children. Obviously the mothers would also have to leave. So in fact a substantial number of people were made to leave, including my own family.

It caused a bitterness such as I have never encountered in the Foreign Service among all those officers who were left there without their families at a time when nothing was happening against foreigners. Most of those, in fact all of them except for myself, did then curtail and left by the next summer. They were all replaced by officers without family members.

It was not until exactly a year later that you began to see actual killings of foreigners. When that happened of course the temperature changed enormously in the fall of 1993. By December 1993 we actually had to call for another stage of evacuation in which the embassy was reduced to a small corps. By that time it was obvious to everyone that a rigorous evacuation was called for.

*Q: Sometimes, I've had this at other times, particularly the situations in the Middle East there is a tendency to cover your ass back in Washington. There have been more evacuations than really were deserved because back in Washington nobody really wanted to face Congress.*

RANKIN: This was complicated by the fact that we had a female ambassador. Mary Ann Casey was the second female ambassador in NEA. The first one was April Glaspie. I subsequently learned from the executive director and others in NEA that the great motive for this precipitate, very early, and unusual ordered evacuation was that the NEA front office, and in particular Mark Parris, wanted to take absolutely no chances with NEA's second female ambassador running into another set of problems. NEA had put its second female ambassador into what NEA had thought was a relatively tranquil country, which was indeed the case in the summer and fall of 1991. It was just bad luck that things were falling apart under this second female ambassador, and NEA was taking no chances.

*Q: Can you talk a bit about the background of Mary Ann Casey?*

RANKIN: Mary Ann Casey is one of the brightest, most able diplomats I have ever met. She is an excellent Arabist and also very fluent in French; a very fast riser in NEA and an extremely hard worker. She loved North Africa. We were both junior officers in Morocco together, she as the vice consul in Rabat and I as vice consul in Tangier. She then served on various desks in NEA. She was a political officer in Tunisia and then became head of our North Arabian Affairs office during a very difficult time in the Middle East crisis. She was someone who had risen very fast and done extremely well. She had never served as a DCM and this was her first ambassadorship. Subsequently, she was to go out to Tunisia as ambassador, after Algiers. Her external career was entirely North Africa. She is an extremely able person, whom I like and admire enormously.

I felt very much for her in this period, October 1992. I think the last thing in the world that Mary Ann wanted was to create the terrible distress that she caused and to engender the animosity that she did and had then to suffer through for the next year. It was very unfortunate.

I did my best to support her even though I disagreed with her. I should say I totally disagreed

with the NEA front office. She and I have remained good friends since. I can't say the same for NEA. NEA never forgave me and I never had another assignment with NEA. It was the end of my career. I curtailed in Algiers after two years. I think two years is enough to be without your family, especially a family that is as close as mine is. I could no longer get an assignment with NEA. I went on to become deputy director and director of INR's office for NESA (Near East and South Asia). My last assignment was as political-economic counselor in Abidjan, an assignment I loved very much.

*Q: What about the Algerian government? Did we have much contact with them? How were our relations with them during the '92 to '94 period?*

RANKIN: Our relationship was open and good. The military regime was always perplexed at the American government's attitudes towards it. It is true that the American government could never quite make up its mind. On the one hand, I think the majority attitude in the State Department and elsewhere, people that actually followed Algeria, was that we really did not want the Islamists taking over in Algeria. There tends to be a negative view towards Islamists which dates from our Iranian exposure.

Yet here is a military regime that brought to an end the democratic spring in Algeria. These are military officers with very poor political instincts. They are trying to deal with the Islamist problem with a sledge hammer rather than with political finesse. So here again was this ancient dichotomy. These are thuggish types, military types, trying to deal with a political problem that they made a total mish-mash out of one the one hand, and Islamic fundamentalists on the other.

In the State Department and elsewhere in the U.S. government, one tended to see constant contradictoriness. We had people in senior positions that tended to say, "Let's go with the known quantity, the military types. The one thing we don't want is the fundamentalists to take over. So far, the military has managed to hold back this tide. Let's stick with them." On the other hand, there were senior advisors who said, "Maybe not all Islamists are bad. Maybe we would find that if the democratic process were to go forward, even if the Islamists were to succeed, their regime would be better than what we are seeing now." You saw this dichotomy inside the State Department, in the academic community, in INR and the CIA, everywhere. Of course the regime itself would see manifestations of this dichotomy and be perplexed, sometimes angered, sometimes hurt, and it would express its perplexity to us.

But I have to say that for the most part they were open with us, they realized they were in an incredibly bad position and could hardly be demanding toward us. That was the nature of the relationship as we went on. We had relatively little to offer them. We didn't have much leverage with them. The principal theater was the French-Algerian theater which was an incredibly complex relationship. It became even more complex during this period. Our relations were pretty open. After having served in Iraq, and even having served in Oman, because the Omanis were very covert and unforthcoming, I found the Algerian people and even the Algerian government to be amazingly open. Again it was very difficult to get inside the military. Very difficult. It was a very opaque military.

*Q: Towards the end there, how much constraint was there as far as getting around because there*

*were attacks, particularly on the French, weren't there?*

RANKIN: There were attacks on all sorts of people. Actually the first to be killed were two French geologists but then Spaniards were killed, Croatians were killed, Russians were killed. It became a campaign to kill any foreigners. I think the last trip I made outside Algiers was in November of 1993. After that there was no traveling except to the far south. I also went to the far south in November. But the far south is the middle of the Sahara desert. It is just a question of getting to the airport and getting on a plane. As far as I know, the unpleasantness never reached into the desert.

*Q: Were there any attempts made to contact the fundamentalists, the Islamists or whatever you want to call them?*

RANKIN: No, not within the country. I as DCM and my officers, the political officers and so on, had relations with Islamists who were not part of the FIS. But we were never permitted, the State Department never allowed us, nor frankly did I want, to develop any type of relationship with the various arms of the underground FIS. It would have been incredibly difficult and dangerous and it was hard to see how we could have utilized such an overture. There was contact both in Washington and in Germany with some of the FIS members abroad. That was another source of some consternation on the part of the government but we just had to grin and bear it. We always said that we are interested in everybody's points of view. We never pursued within Algeria itself.

**NANCY E. JOHNSON**  
**Political Officer**  
**Algiers (1994-1996)**

*Ms. Johnson was born in Washington, DC and was raised in Germany and the Washington, DC area. She was educated at Oberlin College and attended several colleges and Universities in the United Kingdom. After returning to the U.S. Ms. Johnson joined the State Department as a contract employee and later joined the Foreign Service, serving as Political Officer in Colombo, London, Algiers and Baghdad. Her Washington assignments were primarily in the Near East, South Asia bureau. Ms. Johnson was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2007.*

*Q: Okay then. Where did you go?*

JOHNSON: I came home and did six months of French and went to Algiers at a time when they were killing foreigners. It was pretty tough. It was in '94 and the fundamentalists had won an election. The old party did not want them to have power. The government canceled the results of the election. Then began a modest civil war. They began killing each other and killing foreigners.

When we went to visit our folks in Indonesia in 1960, I remember asking my father a question. And he said, "You know, Nancy, all foreigners here are Dutch. Dutch Dutch. British Dutch. American Dutch. But, we're all Dutch." I was reminded of that in Algiers, that we were all

French. American French or French French. Algerians really did hate the French French because France had done a job on Algeria, on its society and culture and everything else. In a certain situation when they were killing foreigners, I don't think they ever came after us, personally, because the United States was not a big player. We were concerned about being in the wrong place at the wrong time. For example, driving along when a bomb went off. That kind of thing. It was physically very difficult because we were essentially prisoners of the Embassy. We lived on the Embassy grounds. We had quite an extensive area with three chunks of land linked together. But, we didn't go out at night very often. I think I went to two dinner parties in two years.

*Q: You were there two years. It was '94 to . . . ?*

JOHNSON: '96. Ron Neumann was the ambassador. He is wonderful, very able guy and ran a nice Embassy. It was very pleasant, but it was also difficult because we couldn't even do our own shopping. You gave your basket and your shopping list and some money to one of the drivers and he went and did everybody's shopping every other day. There was a little snack bar we all ate lunch at, Americans and FSN's, because we couldn't get out.

*Q: Talk about the situation in Algiers in '94 to '96. I mean the government. Where things were going.*

JOHNSON: Things weren't going anywhere in particular. It was just a question of whether they could, among themselves, come up with some sort of resolution. We were not big players there. I think Ron was under a lot of pressure to close the embassy, close it down entirely. He fought that and I agreed with him. I can remember a staff meeting in the most secure part of the embassy when we talked about whether we should close it down and took a vote. It came out about even. Some people thought yes and some people thought no, but it was very fraught. We decided to stay because we had contacts with people.

For example, to go to the Foreign Ministry involved moving in armored cars with cars in front and cars behind and racing through the town. We didn't do it very often. Often I'd make a demarche on the phone in French. It was interesting because there was not a lot of English spoken. It was in French.

*Q: Here is a country that had an election. From our perspective 'bad guys' won. But it was a democratic election which was canceled by, from our perspective, the more or less 'good guys,' you know, policy wise. But this was completely opposed to our policy of promoting democracy. How did we handle that?*

JOHNSON: We didn't. We didn't go in and badger them about it as I recall. It's hard to admit I don't remember some of these things. The people who had overthrown the election were the old liners who had fought against the French, the National Liberation Front. They began to start taking steps to undo the damage. They set up a presidential election while I was there. They hadn't resolved some of the problems. After a certain point killing people just didn't seem to work. It was very ugly. There is a town called Blida south of Algiers which was very violent, a lot of people were killed there over a long time. Bodies every day and that sort of thing. Or, you'd hear about a couple of cars on the road heading toward the Moroccan border that were

stopped and all the occupants were killed. That sort of thing. They went ahead and organized a presidential election and turnout was amazing. Now they have a legitimately elected president.

They have made changes since. They have had a parliamentary election since. It was hard to even make contact with people when you are a prisoner of an embassy. You can't get out. The consular officer met Algerians because people would come and get visas. Everybody wanted to get out, especially the Francophone people . . . because of course the upper classes were raised speaking French and spoke an Arabic that was a mixture of Berber, Arabic and French. A lot of them had what they call "bolt holes." A lot of them had French visas and many people left. I bought a complete collection of Algerian stamps from somebody who had been a stamp dealer and was leaving. A lot of the middle class and upper middle class people just left.

*Q: What impressions about your albeit fragile connections to the Algerian Foreign Ministry? Because Algerian diplomats have quite a reputation, obviously enhanced by the Iranian crisis in which they played a key role, but even before that.*

JOHNSON: They were very helpful in some of the airplane hijackings in the eighties. They are very astute. And, of course, Algerians were in the non-aligned movement because they had won the battle with the French, however ugly that war was. They had a lot of standing. They were always polite, pleasant. They were as helpful as they could be most times if it was in their interest. If not, they weren't very. And Algerians themselves, most people are fascinating. Politicians were all quite happy to come and spend hours talking.

*Q: How could you talk to them? Where did you see them?*

JOHNSON: They would come to the Embassy. I had a little apartment in a house that was like a little English cottage. They loved to come and just sit around and have a natter all afternoon. That is when I became really sympathetic with foreigners living in this country. Because when you try spending four hours or five hours thinking and speaking in a foreign language, my computer—my brain-- goes kaput after a while. It's really hard. So if you think of people in this country who have to speak English all the time, it is hard. It's very hard. But, it was good fun. People were interesting. But it is sort of a weird life. I can remember sitting . . . [end of Tape 3]

The Embassy in Algiers was in a compound, high on a hill overlooking the city. My office overlooked the city. From my prison, I could look out over the town. I can remember one day there was this huge boom. There was a bomb down in the center of town. The fiancée of one of the Embassy guards was on a bus that was bombed. She and a bunch of other people were killed. It was a very brutal bombing. We could hear bombs regularly. We could hear gunfire regularly. The British Embassy was at the bottom of the hill. One night there was a gun battle at the intersection in front of their Embassy and everyone spent it at the ambassador's residence, on their stomachs, flat on the floor. So it was a difficult time.

*Q: To say the least. Did you have much contact with the French embassy? I was wondering what role they played there.*

JOHNSON: We had contact with them. I used to call our compound a ‘mighty fortress,’ but ours was nothing compared to theirs. We saw them at events occasionally. We’d go to the French embassy or occasionally they would come to us. But we didn’t have that much to do as I recall. I think the ambassador might have dealt with his French colleague on occasion, but I don’t recall.

*Q: What was our rationale finally, after all the debate, of staying on?*

JOHNSON: I think the irony was we really needed to be there. It was a poor country. It was not a hostile country. We needed to be there to report and get a sense of what was going on and see if we could help. I think we were selling them grain. There was some business as well. But mostly it was . . .

*Q: They had oil too . . .*

JOHNSON: They had oil. I’d forgotten about the oil. . . . It’s pretty safe down there. And, of course, the relations with Morocco and the Western Sahara issue. So, there were enough reasons to have a small embassy. And it was. It was a small embassy.

*Q: What about Western Sahara during your time? What was happening?*

JOHNSON: Nothing much was happening. There was still a discussion of how to construct the list of voters that would take part in a plebiscite of the Sahrawis to decide whether they would become part of Algeria or part of Morocco. Actually, I broke new ground because I went out . . . I should say to get in and out of Algiers after bombings and other events, we had a special procedure. There was a hijacking on Christmas Eve 1994 involving an Air France plane. I think a number of people were killed. It was reckoned thereafter that we wouldn’t come in and out on regular scheduled airlines. So we had a charter flight. And, of course, you couldn’t have it on the same day of the week. It was twice a month. There was never a regular interval. I went out on this little plane, in and out of Madrid. Then I went on to Morocco. The POL chief in Morocco and I went into Western Sahara together. We had a really fascinating time, and met Abdulaziz who is the president of the Polisario and did all kinds of things. We stayed overnight in a tent. The problem was just at an impasse. It is still at an impasse.

*Q: Did you get involved in the, you had some prisoners sitting out in the desert I guess?*

JOHNSON: I went and took photographs of them.

*Q: Yes. It strikes me as unusual and I . . .*

JOHNSON: Just insane. The Polisario would like to give them up. The Moroccans don’t want to, aren’t happy about taking them back. So they are sit there. I was taken to see them. We went to see them. I took photographs and then gave them to someone in the Embassy to try to give to their families in Morocco. There seemed to be no end in sight on that one. It was fun to go to Agadir because they had a big crisis there in what, 1907?

*Q: Yes. 1907.*

JOHNSON: Real pleasant town, Agadir.

*Q: The Germans came in a . .*

JOHNSON: Warship? Battleship wasn't it?

*Q: Yes. Tiger I think the name was. It vaguely comes back. This is Kaiser Wilhelm playing his early games and got the L\_\_\_\_\_ crisis. Just one of those diplomatic blips.*

JOHNSON: 1907 I think it was. 1908. So, yes. While I was in Algiers, of course the day after the flight out, my mother called and confirmed that my father was dying and, so, could I come home? One of those sort of Foreign Service things. People stayed in the Embassy to make it possible for me. The admin officer went to town. They decided to put me on Air Algerie flight the next day. She could only make Air Algerie reservations as far as London. So she called the Embassy in London and got a man, the only one in the embassy at 7:15 at night still there besides a marine, who said, "Yeah, I know Nancy Johnson. I'll take care of it." He made reservations for me on home from London. The next day, we went out to the airport. Unfortunately, the Air Algerie flight was three hours late. The security guys had to stay with me while we waited because they were concerned. But it worked. Eventually I got to London just as my United flight was leaving. So I overnighted and the airline, it was Lufthansa, put me up in a hotel at the airport. I made a lot of phone calls. And, I got my Dad. I said, "I won't be making it tonight because I missed the plane. But, I'll come tomorrow." Then I called my sister who was supposed to meet me. When they went to see Dad in the hospital, he said, "Nancy called and she's not going to be coming until tomorrow." They didn't believe him. They thought he was hallucinating, but he was right. I got home, that was in '95, and spent about ten days here during which Dad died. But I will never forget that all along the line, people were willing to go the extra mile for a colleague.

*Q: You left in '96? Anything else we should talk about do you think?*

JOHNSON: No. I came back and did a year at the Army War College, which was fun. Then I did Arabian Peninsula affairs. I was the deputy director for that. Then I did some inspecting for . . .

*Q: Maybe we could have another session? I think this is probably a good place to stop. We'll pick this up the next time. Is there anything else we haven't covered in Algeria?*

JOHNSON: I don't think so. I'll have to think about that.

*Q: If there is any incident or anything like that . . .*

JOHNSON: It was physically difficult, I mean we had crazy housing. The DCM's residence was an old Turkish house and there was a separate apartment in the basement of that. There were some apartment's in another building that we had to move out of because a bus crashed through the wall and they realized it wasn't safe to stay there. I was at first in a house near the apartment

building. The boiler and heat were down at the bottom of the hill and I didn't have heat most of the time in the winter. It was physically difficult. But, I'm not sure too crucial in policy terms.

*Q: How did this work people wise all you people cooped up together?*

JOHNSON: What was very interesting was on Friday, which was the Saturday, people did their own things. I stayed home and wrote letters. The beach bunnies went off to the pool at the ambassador's residence, on the ambassador's compound. The Embassy and the ambassador's residence and the Marine house were all on one chunk of land. My house and the apartment building were all on another. And then on a third was the DCM's residence and some other houses. Eventually we moved just to the two that were right across the street from one another. Crossing this busy street was always an adventure too. On Fridays people tended to stay in their own homes to get away from each other, I think is the way I would put it. We were very respectful of each other. I mean, we didn't pop in on somebody on a Friday.

*Q: Nobody killed anybody?*

JOHNSON: No. It was a very nice group. The embassy, being an old Turkish house, had an atrium that was covered. We brought in a table. The RSO got hysterical about us bringing in this table because it might have had been bugged. We started doing jigsaw puzzles. I can remember coming out of my office on the second floor offices, which opened onto the little balcony. The ladies room was right across the atrium, so you had to go all the way around. I could look down. Somebody had pooh-pooed the idea of the jigsaw puzzle, but every time I came out with the ambassador to go somewhere, his protection was sitting there waiting for him, and they'd be working away on the puzzle. Everybody worked on the puzzle. The most popular was one of a Harley Davidson motorcycle. The guys really liked that one. But everybody had a hand at this. There were things like that. The ambassador was very good about morale, sensitive to the issues of people being cooped up. Early on you realized that everyone had to get out every three months. You just couldn't be there more than about three months straight. And, hence, you had this little private plane that you could take out. It was cramped and small and an adventure. We didn't have any fights or anything. I think people were really good about avoiding the people they didn't like, if there were those things, and finding time to be alone so you didn't feel cooped up.

*Q: Marines had a happy hour and all that?*

JOHNSON: They did. They did. I have never been a beer drinker, so I generally didn't go. They were good guys.

(February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008)

*Q: Now, back to Algeria. You want to give us some extracts from letters?*

JOHNSON: The letters were like a diary and very detailed. From December '94, there was a hijacking of an Air France plane in Algiers and a couple of people were killed. So it was decided that the airport wasn't safe. They figured out that we would use a little charter plane to come in and out. And because we didn't have a regular mail service and the pouch service was lousy, we



started sending letters by anybody who was going home. You carried letters. It is a Foreign Service tradition. I'll never forget my first post to Sri Lanka, somebody's parents were there right before Christmas. The father took a bag full of Christmas cards. He said when he got home to his little town in Florida, he went to the post office and started putting our letters through the slot. The postmaster couldn't believe it. Because of this system, I felt free to be less circumspect in my letters to my folks than I was in Baghdad.

*Q: Nancy, do you think that it would be possible rather than read them here, could you put these on a . . .*

JOHNSON: I would love to read them, although it took me a whole morning just to read 1995.

*Q: Look, how about as an exercise. . .*

JOHNSON: I can give you the thrust of it. There were two things we were doing. For a long time the issue was whether we would stay there and what our role would be if we stayed there. The people who had been there before the troubles began wanted to close the shop. They saw it all collapse. And the people who came knowing it was a difficult situation, because we were essentially prisoners of the embassy, for them it wasn't a problem. We knew it was going to be this way. Until all the oldsters left, we had this discussion going on. Nobody wanted another Tehran. So security was a big issue. We lived on the compounds. I got out to three dinner parties in two years and very rarely got out during the day. I can remember, in one letter I complained that Ron Neumann, who was the ambassador, went out every day or every other day. He didn't realize what it was like for the rest of us who didn't go out. But, that was unfair to Ron. He made an effort to let us go out. The letters were very detailed.

*Q: I don't know if you have time or not, but you do use a word processor, do you?*

JOHNSON: I'm not sure I want all this on the record.

*Q: Okay. Take a look at the letters because I think sometimes the details of things --edit it as you see fit--add a great deal to the record.*

JOHNSON: The kind of thing that I wrote about, because it was safe, I could send home maps of the compound, what have you. I lived in a house that didn't have any heating and it got awfully chilly in Algiers in the winter. I wrote about sitting at my desk with a bar heater across the room and the reflection of it in the window as I wrote. One dreary Christmas, there was no heat in the house but I had a fire in the fireplace, which didn't even warm the large room. People came and we had spaghetti and pecan pie or something. A sense of how tired people were and how difficult living was comes out in the letters.

*Q: Well anyway, think about it. What we could do is, if you put this in computer language, what you want, not the whole thing, excerpts or something, we could put this into the thing. Because I think it would give an interesting insight into life there.*

JOHNSON: It really does. It brought it back just in an extraordinary way.

*Q: Well think about it. That can be sort of your project, if you like.*

JOHNSON: We lived in three compounds divided by a two lane highway and a very small side road. One of them had the embassy and the ambassador's residence and had a path around it. I wrote that I felt like a gerbil going round and round on this path. I wrote about the kind of pressures we were under and those sorts of things. I'm not sure how much the security people would get upset when I talk about some of the things . .

*Q: Okay. I will let you play with it. I suggest we move on. When you left Algeria, whither?*

**DONALD F. MCHENRY**  
**Participant, Eminent Persons Group for the Secretary General of the UN**  
**Algeria (1998)**

*Ambassador Donald F. McHenry was born in Missouri in 1936. He received his bachelor's degree from Illinois State University and his master's from Southern Illinois University. He taught at Howard University before entering the State Department in 1963. Ambassador McHenry was the U.S. Representative to the United Nations. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1993 with a continuation of the interview in 1998.*

McHENRY: I went to Algeria on so-called Eminent Persons Group for the Secretary General of the UN.

*Q: This is when?*

McHENRY: This is the summer of 1998. The Algerians had been sharply criticized since the early '90s, particularly around 1992, when they refused to go ahead with the elections because they were concerned that the Islamic fundamentalists would get control of the government. And the Algerians had used some pretty rough methods to put fundamentalists out. And the fundamentalists had in turn used some horrible methods and continue to use some pretty horrible methods as they fight the Algerian government. The Algerians had been criticized by the international community, human rights commission, various NGOs, they had been resistant to any international investigation or oversight of the developments within their country. They finally agreed to a visit by a group of eminent persons under the agency of the Secretary General to look at and report to the Secretary General on the developments within Algeria. The Secretary General put together a group consisting of the former president of Portugal, the former Prime Minister of India, the former Prime Minister of Jordan, the former Minister from France, the Attorney General from Kenya and myself. We went there, the five of us, and spent some time going around the country, meeting with government officials, NGOs, opposition groups, political leaders, the press, business, whole range of folks, and reported back to the Secretary General on our findings. It was a report which the Secretary General then made public. It was an experience which was quite different from my experience with the Contact Group on Namibia. And I would

say it was how not to run this kind of multiple participant group.

On the Namibia process, we had no chairman. We sort of informally designated someone to be the spokesperson or to lead the presentation and so forth. And it's true that the U.S. 90% of the time was that, but we had no chairman. Without the chairman you are relieved from all sort of hierarchy which goes into multilateral process. And if you have to ever be reminded that everybody is equal in the absence of the chairman, bring that on. The chairman brings on something of the idea that there is a pecking order. This is particularly true, I found this particularly true with the chairman who was selected. It was Mario Suarez from Portugal. It may have been that a different kind of personality would have done it differently. Suarez in the first place was up in age, that affected our work schedule, how quickly we could do things. Secondly, he had a tendency to treat staff in a manner in which I would not. Staff is staff and they know that but you can learn a lot from the staff. When someone gives you advice on the basis of their experience on how to handle a particular item, you would do well to at least listen and in too many instances the chairman was dismissive to the point of not even listening.

Well, I would say that while the process came out okay, it would have come out much better, we could have made more of an impact in the Algerian situation. As it is, the Algerians have the report, but if the report had been released in a different way in New York with the Committee members present it would have been quite different from the way it was released, sort of passed to the Secretary General who released it to the press without the kind of attention that you'd want to get.

*Q: How did you see the situation in Algeria, we're still talking about how it is today, what was the thrust of your Group?*

McHENRY: I think that Group believed that the Algerians had a particularly difficult situation. They have made a considerable process in changing the country from one with clear military dictatorship to one where there is a civilian government and various branches of the government. Changing the government from one where there was a heavy state ownership on everything to one where they are moving over for a capitalist society. And changing the government from one party to multi-parties. Those things they have done and those are substantial changes in structure. The trick, however, is to give life and substance to those things. To make sure that the public sees that the civilian government is in charge and is not suspicious that the military isn't still running it. To make sure that there is translation in the micro-economy of the kinds of changes that you have made in the macro-sense. You got to follow through with privatization of business, with competition and so forth. The public needs to see that protection of individuals in society are operating and therefore you've got to have transparency in the government, in the police, people have to have a swift trial and a fair trial, to be seen at those. I guess what I'm saying is they have made a number of structural changes which are very important, which changed the direction of their government, potentially. Now they have to go through the process of insuring that they work, of giving the people the confidence that they actually mean it. Not that it's the same thing under a different guise. And they have to do this under very adverse circumstances.

They have terrorism going on, from the Middle East who don't like the change and want to take the government in the opposite direction. They have very, very high growth rate with

unemployment, very high, 40% of the youth are unemployed and the youth make up 70% of the population. They have a severe housing shortage, they have corruption from the past, and they are trying to do all this in an economy which is based entirely on petroleum, at the time when petroleum is down. It's a very difficult process for them. I think they can do it but they are going to have to put their nose to the grindstone, which means they will have to do some things in very different ways than they have done.

*End of Reader*