

ERITREA

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EDWARD W. MULCAHY
Vice Consul
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1950)

Consular Officer
Asmara (1950-1952)

Edward Mulcahy was born in Massachusetts in 1921. He graduated from Tufts University in 1943, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1947, and served as a first Lieutenant overseas from 1943 to 1946 in the U.S. Marine Corps. His postings abroad included Mombasa, Munich, Addis Ababa, Athens, Southern, Tunisia, Lagos, and Chad. Mr. Mulcahy was interviewed in 1989 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

MULCAHY: This program is coming to an end within the next few months and I'd just as soon go back to Africa. I got a private telegram from two friends of mine in African Affairs who asked if I'd like to open a consulate at Asmara. I wrote back, "Ready, willing and able; sooner the better."

While I was in Kenya I learned a great deal about Asmara, about Eritrea and the ex-Italian colonies from some of my British friends who had been in the military service up there in the campaign against the Italians in East Africa. I knew what a delightful city Asmara was. On the map it looks dreadful, only this far away on the map from Massawa which is one of the hell-holes of the world climatically at least. But, Asmara is up at 7,600 feet and that's perpetual springtime there, about the same altitude as Mexico City. So I jumped at the chance of going there. This was in December of 1949. By the middle of January, I had my orders transferring me to Addis Ababa. We'd closed up our post at Amberg on January 10 and I was back in Munich.

Q: Why were we opening a post there? Why did we want one in Asmara?

MULCAHY: We had had an Army group there, Signal Corps, and Army Security Agency, since just after Pearl Harbor. The first Army group going out to establish a small communications station there were on board ship in Cape Town at the time of Pearl Harbor. The British, who had taken Eritrea from the Italians, were occupying it by then with a civil administration--a corporal's guard of colonial service and Indian civil service types who'd left India and were out of jobs--two British regiments of battalion strength, very small numbers of British. They kept Italian law and Italian customs but, with minor changes in force and something like 80 civilians and two regiments and few policemen, they ran this country of about a million and a half people.

Q: Was that part of Ethiopia at that time?

MULCAHY: No, it was not, and what it was to become was the subject of great dispute at the Big-Five Foreign Ministers' level, the whole question of the ex-Italian colonies. The reason for the rush in getting me out there, canceling the home leave that I was well over-due for, was the fact that the United Nations Commission of Inquiry, on which we were not represented, was going out to recommend to the General Assembly what the future of Eritrea should be. They

wanted me to get out there and keep Washington informed on a daily basis if possible what the tilt of the report or recommendations of this U. N. Commission of Inquiry would be. It consisted of South Africa, Burma, Guatemala, Norway, and a number of people from the secretariat, including two Americans. I lived in the hotel, the principal hotel, where they lived and saw them at practically all meal times and entertained them over at the small military base, then called Radio Marina. There were about 75 Americans, counting dependents, at the base then. In the three years I was there it grew to 400 people. It ultimately grew to 5,000.

Q: *That was Kagnev Station.*

MULCAHY: At that time it was called Radio Marina because it was located in a compound occupied before the liberation by the Italian navy. It was an Italian naval radio station that they took over. But the married people lived out in the town wherever they could rent houses. Life was very nice there. We had an APO, a commissary, officers' club, sergeants' club, enlisted men's club. It was a very nice post. If anyone fouled up, they got sent home as punishment!

Politically, the thing was difficult, because everybody, including the major powers, had their own view of what should happen. We and the British favored the partition of Eritrea when the Moslem northern part of the country where the people were largely nomadic in any case going to the Sudan. Most of the tribes spent part of their year in the Sudan and then moved back into Eritrea during the wet season. The Italians favored receiving it back as a trust territory. In the case of Somalia they received their old colony back in the form of a trust territory. They favored that for Eritrea. The Soviets favored a trust territory directly administered by the United Nations, by the Secretary General. Such a thing never happened. We gave up the idea. Ethiopia wanted to annex the whole thing as a province, as its new province.

The population was divided about evenly, maybe slightly more, maybe 52% or 53% were Coptic Christians, who spoke Tigrinya, the language of the people in the nearby providence of Tigre in Ethiopia. The northern Moslems spoke a language called Tigre, but they also spoke five other languages, mutually unintelligible one to the other, for the most part. They were Semitic languages in the northern half of the territory. Along the coast there were islands of barely related Hamitic languages. But they spoke Arabic among themselves, fairly good quality of Arabic, as a lingua franca.

While I was there I learned Italian, which I needed every day. Everybody needed Italian. That was the real lingua franca of the country. After I had a good grip on that, I went on to Arabic. It was the colloquial Arabic of the Red Sea area and a very useful form of Arabic, close to the classical. Those two languages would get you just about all over the country and nearby parts of Ethiopia. There was a great deal of Italian still spoken in Ethiopia in those days.

My record shows an assignment at Addis Ababa. Quite true. I had to be assigned someplace until I had a consulate open in Asmara, so I was attached to the embassy at Addis Ababa, where I spent a couple of weeks in early February of 1950 and where I called on the Emperor in top hat and morning clothes, borrowed; I didn't own those myself. Ambassador George Merrill (and later Rives Childs) at Addis Ababa and their staff were very generous in their support most of the time

that I was in Asmara running it as a two-man post with one Foreign Service female clerk in carrying the administrative load for me.

Q: How did it work? Were you under our embassy in Addis Ababa?

MULCAHY: Until Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia on the 15th of September, 1952, Asmara was an entirely independent consulate and I reported directly to the Department of State.

Q: How did the embassy in Addis Ababa feel about Eritrea?

MULCAHY: They were quite loyal. They used to have people over there from time to time and they had been doing what reporting there was on Eritrea available in the Department's files. But I think they were probably sympathetic to the Emperor's view that there ought to be a connection with Ethiopia. I think also they thought it would be a leavening and possibly a good example for Ethiopia to deal with a democratically elected, autonomous, internally autonomous, Eritrea. I, frankly, thought that, too. I firmly believed that that would have been exactly the best thing for Ethiopia and that the empire, which it indeed is, could thrive if run as a series of autonomous regions under a federal constitution, for example.

Q: Did you feel that you had any role in developing any policy towards this? The federation came. Did it come without our pushing or pulling or objections?

MULCAHY: I had regular consultations with the United Nations High Commissioner who eventually was sent out there, Don Eduardo Anze Matienzo, a distinguished former foreign minister of Bolivia, a very fine, erudite, cultured gentleman. Anze Matienzo was a good friend. We had a good personal relationship. I also had a close relationship with his Principal Secretary who was an Austrian, an old employee of the League of Nations, Ranshoven-Wertheimer, and with all the key members of his staff whom I saw frequently. Asmara was a city of only all told 50,000 or 60,000 people, about 15,000 Italians and 1,200 British, I suppose, counting dependents, and not counting a 2,000- man British battalions and a very, very small American community. We had a few American missionaries there besides that, three missionary establishments. We had a very close knit community and good relations among the different communities both internationally and ethnically. I was always being approached by the leaders of 16 different political factions when I went there. Some of them amalgamated with others after December 1950 when the General Assembly decreed in favor of federation of Eritrea with Ethiopia. They went down to about eight. To round up a good cross-section of Eritrean opinion on any subject, I would take my time over a three-day period to seek out the eight leaders of these factions. Sometimes I wouldn't need to go to all eight of them, but maybe five or six of them and have a chat with them. You could do that by sitting at a certain coffee shop near the cathedral on the main street in Asmara. If you were there, many people would see you and they'd want to get their word in with you or they'd come around to the Consulate to deliver their points of view.

Q: You did find yourself sort of captured by the American military community or by the British military community or by the Italian community.

MULCAHY: No, definitely not.

Q: How were relations with what we would call--I don't want to use the pejorative sense--the natives, the actual Eritreans?

MULCAHY: Very, very good. The Coptic Eritreans who were in the majority in the highlands around Asmara had favored outright annexation by Ethiopia. They were supporting what was called a shifita army, several guerrilla bands, always much less numerous than you'd ever believe. They were indistinguishable from the Tegrinya-speaking Ethiopian citizens who came in from across the border. But most of the Eritrean nobility--and they continued even under the Italians to have their stratification of society into azmatches, dejazmatches, caghazmatches, ect. similar to counts, earls, barons, dukes and what have you, old Ethiopian titles. A lot of them fielded little guerrilla bands of their own in order to show their loyalty to the Emperor. In the northern Moslem areas there were also guerrilla bands, who tended to favor a partition of Eritrea. They wanted to go with the Sudan with which they identified ethnically and religiously. That was their outlook. Now, the Moslems were divided in the country as a whole. Most of them in the cities and coastal areas favored the status of republic. But after the General Assembly voted in favor of federation and we and the British supported it when we saw that partition was a non-starter. After India, after Cyprus, after Palestine you couldn't talk partitions.

Q: After seeing the fighting that took place and the animosity, we just were not inclined to support partitions.

MULCAHY: That's right. Everybody came around, to believe that, if this federation concept could be well and fairly hammered out, it would be a good thing. In my office staff, I had an Italian who had been an active member of a party that favored an Eritrean republic. He had been a former member of the Italian Colonial Service but had resigned in 1938, resigned from the Fascist party, resigned his reserve commission in the army. I wouldn't call him a great democrat, but philosophically he was rooted there. He'd been there for almost 30 years and spoke flawless Arabic, was often consulted by the Mufti and the Qadi of Asmara on fine points in Koranic law, and used to lecture to the Moslem law students. I got him a job teaching Arabic at the little University of Maryland extension program we had at Asmara, which is where I also learned Arabic. I learned my Italian from him, largely on the job. I had him, a Christian Eritrean, a Moslem Eritrean, and an Armenian female. The Armenian Community were quite influential in Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Social relations among the communities were really quite good in Eritrea. I divided my time pretty equally between the British, the United Nations and the Italian communities. The Moslem and Christian communities were not very much engaged in social affairs by our standards-- cocktail parties and dinner parties--but they were continually inviting you to their weddings, to the mosque for feast days, to the Coptic cathedral for all their feast days. You were very often in touch with them. I also visited the political leaders when I went traveling, which I did a great deal of. A lot of visiting I tied in with hunting trips. Hunting was fabulous there because the British had taken guns away from all the Italians and didn't even let them have shotguns. There had been something like nine years of uninhibited growth of the wildlife population there. For birds and for four-legged animals it was a paradise for hunters.

Q: Was the continuation of our communications base in Asmara a major imperative as far as how we wanted to see Eritrea go?

MULCAHY: Whatever way Eritrea went, we wanted to be able to maintain the communications base there. At that time that little base was handling all of our military and diplomatic correspondence from the Middle East and nearby parts of Africa and boosting it to Washington--to a base near Washington, shall we say. I don't know whether that's still classified, so we'll just say near Washington--by high-speed telex so that it sounded like just a screech and was almost un-monitorable. I gather it was monitorable at the receiving end but it would be considered fairly primitive by today's methods. All diplomatic and military communications went there from a large part of the world. The beauty of Asmara at the edge of the Ethiopian plateau with sheer cliffs all around was that it had almost trouble-free radio communications except in times of sun spots. No black-outs or two days of black-outs, say, in the normal year where Frankfurt and Manila, the other comparable bases in the world, and Panama, were blacked out for as long as a month during the whole year. Often Asmara would get all of the traffic of Europe to relay to Washington.

Q: Did this have any effect on how we voted for federation?

MULCAHY: Yes, but I think we had no agreement. I wasn't aware of any even secret understanding that the Ethiopians would allow the base to stay there. The agreement on our remaining there and on the whole subject of military relations with Eritrea--the final agreement and the initialing of the papers--took place in my living room in Asmara in September 1952 between Akilu Habte Wold, the Foreign Minister, and our then-ambassador to Ethiopia, J. Rives Childs. To make a long story short, 25 years later, when it expired I was Acting Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in Washington and drafted the notification to the Ethiopians that we didn't intend to renew it.

EDWARD W. CLARK
Consular Officer
Asmara (1953-1956)

Edward W. Clark was born in New York and graduated from Princeton University and Cornell Law School. His postings abroad have included Panama, Asmara, Lima, and Buenos Aires. Mr. Clark was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1992.

Q: Then you got yourself out of Central America for a while and went to Asmara from 1953-56. What were you doing there?

CLARK: I was consul there.

Q: What was the situation at that time in Eritrea?

CLARK: Eritrea had just been federated with the Empire of Ethiopia by the United Nations. The British had just left. It was then turned over to a local Eritrean government but federated with the Ethiopian Empire. The Ethiopians had customs, immigration, defense and foreign affairs. The other things like garbage collection and local police and fire departments were part of the Eritrean government responsibility.

Q: How did the Eritreans feel about this situation at that time?

CLARK: One of my jobs was to keep track of how this federation was proceeding, whether it was being respected by the Ethiopians. The Eritreans and the Ethiopians had always been at odds. The Ethiopians over the centuries would every once in a while come down and beat up on the Eritreans and take back a bunch of their wives and make them pay them tribute and then they would go back. This went on for centuries. They didn't like each other. And the Eritreans had obviously good reasons for not liking the Ethiopians.

The Italians, of course, had been in Eritrea for some 40-50 years. They had a great influence on the Eritreans. They built a lot of roads, good schools. The Eritreans in many ways were better off and better educated than the Ethiopians.

It was obvious to everybody, I think, including the United Nations that this was not going to last. This was just the papering over of a problem in order to let the United Nations get out of there.

So the three years I was there you could see the gradual diminishing of this structure. The Ethiopians were gradual about it but obviously they were going to... Well we reported that but there wasn't much we could do. Our big interest there was the American military.

Q: Kagnew Station. Had Kagnew been established by that time?

CLARK: Kagnew Station was originally an Italian naval communications center. When the British took over from the Italians in 1942, they gave us that naval station, and we used it as a naval station at first. Then it expanded pretty quickly and was used as a station that could monitor nuclear explosions in the Soviet Union plus, because of its location, it was a good relay station for the military system across the world.

So by the time I got there, about 11 years later, it was a substantial station run by the Army with a smaller naval communications unit.

It was our major interest and our major problem because there were some 2,000 people there and they were getting into trouble. We had the usual PXs there and people would buy there and sell outside and the merchants would complain, etc.

They had the need for expansion and during the time I was there, there was negotiated a new agreement which provided for a new facility to house all the stations plus some receiving and sending antenna fields. Interestingly that was all negotiated in Asmara instead of Ethiopia, so that we, the American consul and the Commander of the post there were very, very much

involved in the negotiations. It was very interesting. I know of no other time when an agreement like that was negotiated.

Q: With whom were you negotiating with?

CLARK: We were negotiating with the local Ethiopian Federal Government. The Emperor's representative there in Asmara. The details were all worked out over a period of a year. When that was finally agreed to then we all went up to Addis and with the Ethiopian Government and the Embassy finally signed the agreement.

Q: The Ambassador in Addis Ababa was Joseph Simonson who was not a career officer. How did he operate?

CLARK: He was a minister of the church in Minneapolis and a Republican supporter. I think he had said the prayers at several Republican conventions. He really didn't know what he was doing.

Q: That was probably one reason why the negotiations were held at Asmara.

CLARK: No, I think it was because the details couldn't have been negotiated without being in Asmara and actually going out to the sites, etc.

He was not involved in it. He was unfortunate. Remember Nixon made a trip around Africa as Vice President?

Q: Yes, I interviewed somebody not long ago who accompanied him on that trip, Jules Walker.

CLARK: When Nixon came back from that he said that there was one meatball ambassador that has to go, and that was Simonson as it turned out. A terrible thing to say but...

Q: But from what I gather he wasn't doing anything.

CLARK: No, he was unfortunate. He was a nice guy but shouldn't have been in that position. There are lots of other ambassadors I know, political and otherwise, who shouldn't have been there either.

Q: Did this affect your work at all or was he over the hill and far away?

CLARK: We were able to report directly to Washington. I would send copies to the Embassy but they didn't have to go to the Embassy. So we were fairly independent. We handled all their mail for them because it came in through the APO. The military would turn it over to us and we would put the Embassy mail on the local Ethiopian airline planes. They were always calling us asking for their mail. At one point they accused us of holding it up, if you can imagine that, for Christmas.

Q: What was the impression you were getting from those in Eritrea of Haile Selassie in those days?

CLARK: The Eritrean people didn't like the Ethiopians so they didn't like the Emperor. He came there several times while I was there. They had a big reception up at the Emperor's representative's palace. But he didn't spend much time down there. But no, Eritrean people didn't like the Ethiopians, period. And they still don't.

Q: Now they are at least quasi independent, but I am not sure...Were there any other nationalities there that had any influence in that area?

CLARK: The Italians did. The Ethiopian policy towards the Italians was very well thought out. They advised their people to treat them properly. They wanted them to stay because they were the ones who could build the roads, fix the electricity, do all the things that the Ethiopians didn't know how to do to keep things going. So there was a substantial population of Italians of that level there. Plus some fairly well-to-do Italians. They had the beer plant there, a textile plant, they had a large dairy producing farm and a number of other things. So the Italians were very much in the ballpark there, very influential. I would say that the Italian Consul General was much more influential than any of us were at the time. Apart from that, no...

Q: No Soviet representation?

CLARK: No, no Soviets.

Q: Israeli?

CLARK: Well, the Israelis had a kosher meat packing plant there. Eritrea became a central place for produce for ARAMCO. They had an agent there who bought and they would send a plane over once or twice a week to take fresh produce back.

Q: I was in Dhahran from 1958-60 and I ate that food.

CLARK: They used to come over and take their R&R there too. Did you ever do that?

Q: No, I never got over.

JOHN PROPST BLANE
Consular Officer
Asmara (1957-1960)

Ambassador John Blane was born in Alabama. He attended the University of Tennessee and served in the US Army towards the end of the Korean War. He entered the Foreign Service in 1956. His career included positions in Somalia, Ethiopia, Austria, Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, and Rwanda. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy on August 8, 1990.

Q: You moved relatively soon then to Asmara, is that right? You were there how long?

BLANE: I was in Mogadishu just short of a year. Well, I was assigned to Mogadishu just short of a year. For several months of that period I was in a hospital in Nairobi, which is why I was transferred. I got a really dandy hepatitis, and I was evacuated to Nairobi and spent a couple of months in the hospital. Came back to Mogadishu for two or three weeks, had a relapse, went back to Nairobi to the hospital.

After the second time, the medical branch decided it would be just as well if I was moved from what was then a relatively hard to place to live. We had no air conditioning, we had no fresh water system. Medical services were rudimentary, I think you could say honestly.

And so without asking me (in those days they didn't ask you very much), I just, lying in my hospital bed one day, was brought a telegram by somebody from our consulate in Nairobi announcing my transfer to Asmara.

Q: The idea being it was higher, it was...

BLANE: Cool, high. We had an Army base in Asmara, medical facilities.

Q: I might add that, particularly in this period, hepatitis was sort of a Foreign Service disease, you might say. I mean, it was the main bane of Foreign Service personnel, because of health conditions.

BLANE: Yes, it almost killed me. I lost 60 pounds; I was in miserable shape.

Q: What were you doing in Asmara, and what was its relation in the Ethiopian context?

BLANE: Eritrea was at that point, to quote the formula: "an autonomous republic federated with the Empire of Ethiopia." It was not an integral part of the empire, but it was very closely associated with it. Now during the time I was there, the emperor, Haile Selassie, took a series of steps which clearly were aimed at incorporating Eritrea totally into the empire. And one year following my departure from Eritrea, that did in fact happen.

Now it was just as apparent as anything in the world that the Eritreans would not take kindly to being swallowed up by the empire, and it was pretty clear that they were going to fight. They've been fighting ever since, and they're doing it today.

All, we did so report. Nobody argued our conclusions. Everybody, I think, pretty well agreed that that was the likely scenario. And that is in fact what happened.

Now the Eritreans at that point had their own chief executive. They had their own parliament. They passed their own laws for governing most aspects of life: education, a legal system, what have you. And these autonomous powers were eroded bit by bit by bit.

First thing that happened, and this was in 1958, fairly early on, if my memory serves me, the emperor forbade Eritrea to have its own flag. Up until that point it had a flag. Well, he said no more Eritrean flag, just the Ethiopian flag.

And that just kept on and on and on. People were arrested. Opposition politicians did not fare well. There was some sporadic violence a couple of times, mostly the work of the labor unions. This was put down with great force, and the future of the territory was, as I said, perfectly apparent. And they haven't disappointed us, they have done exactly what we thought they would do.

Q: Now you're sitting in Asmara. We had a consulate general in Asmara, is that right?

BLANE: We did in fact.

Q: And there was an embassy in Addis.

BLANE: That's correct.

Q: Did you find yourself, as sometimes happens, you're sitting in one place and you're seeing what the situation is, and, I mean, were you getting this reflected in the relations, that you were saying, "Say, the Ethiopians shouldn't be doing this," and the embassy was more or less taking the empire line, or something like this?

BLANE: Yes, I think so. That normally happens. On the other hand, I think the people in the embassy were convinced, as we were, that the Eritreans were really quite serious in not wanting to be incorporated into the empire. Obviously embassy reporting tended to justify the emperor's moves. Whereas we, on the other end, were just about as outraged as our Eritrean colleagues.

I will say that Eritrea is the only place in my whole career where I became emotionally involved with the local politics. I was, in my heart of hearts, as fervent an Eritrean nationalist as existed. My little friends were being done wrong and I didn't like it.

Q: Why was this?

BLANE: I don't know, they were nice people, you could see them being mashed, they were unhappy--it was inevitable. I hoped that it didn't color our reporting too badly. I recognized the syndrome and tried to compensate for it, but nevertheless the feeling was there.

Q: How much did you feel that our military establishment, Kagnaw Station, was dictating everything we did in Ethiopia?

BLANE: Not very much. Because during those years technology was advancing all over, and Kagnaw was becoming less and less vital.

Q: Everyone understood this where you were. It was, what, basically a communications relay station, was that it, or was it a listening post?

BLANE: It was a listening post. Well, both, but its primary importance at that point was as a listening point. But some years later, strangely enough, the Army wanted to close the station, and it was only through the valiant efforts of the State Department that the station was kept open. Normally the roles would have been reversed.

Q: Absolutely, yes.

BLANE: But the Army ultimately said, "We don't need it any more, therefore we should shut it down." And the State Department, which was trying desperately to support the then-faltering emperor, felt that the economic dislocation would be so great--and it would, because the town lived off Kagnew: it employed a great many people, it pumped a lot of money into the economy--and the department's point of view was that if you shut that down now, this will be a real body blow to the emperor, and he's got all the troubles he can handle.

Q: This must have been in the late Seventies.

BLANE: Early Seventies. The emperor had all the trouble he could handle at that point without our adding to it.

CHARLES E. RUSHING
Deputy Principal Officer
Asmara (1960)

Charles E. Rushing was born in Illinois in 1929. He received his bachelor's degree from Augustana College in 1951 and his law degree from Duke University in 1954. He served in the US Army from 1954-1955. His career included positions in Italy, Eritrea, Southern Rhodesia, Congo, Laos, Liberia, Denmark, and Ireland. From 1985-1991 he served as an ambassador to the UN in Geneva. Mr. Rushing was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in July 1996.

Q: In 1960, after two years in Naples, you were transferred to East Africa, to Asmara. Why did this happen? Had you asked for a transfer? Was your time up?

RUSHING: My time was up. Naples was a two-year tour. I thought that Africa was interesting and perhaps would enhance promotion.

Q: In 1960 it looked that way.

RUSHING: I was first assigned to Benghazi, I think. Did we have a consulate in Benghazi?

Q: We had an embassy in Tripoli and, for a while, we had a consular office in Benghazi.

RUSHING: I think I was assigned to Benghazi first.

Q: Of course, either one of these assignments, with your Italian, would have made sense.

RUSHING: Yes. But Benghazi washed out for some reason that I don't remember. Then, I was reassigned to Asmara.

Q: Why did we have a post in Asmara?

RUSHING: For a couple of reasons. Asmara was the capital of Eritrea, which was at that time, ruled by Ethiopia. The Italians bought Eritrea from the Ethiopians at the end of the last century. Then, Mussolini used Eritrea as a jumping-off place in his invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. It was also one of the first pieces of Axis territory to be liberated. The Brits entered Asmara from Sudan in '41 or '42. Then, it was under UN trusteeship. Eventually, the Ethiopians, through the United Nations, assumed sovereignty and it was treated as a province. The U.S. military had a large communications base there called Kagnev Station. One interesting thing was that practically all of the message traffic during the Korean War, went from Washington to Asmara and then from Asmara to Korea. Eritrea was a very good place to have for this purpose. The installation and the city were high, at 8,000 feet, and not too far from the equator, where propagation was particularly favorable.

Q: Tell me a little bit about Asmara as a city. Had it been destroyed or not?

RUSHING: No. A beautiful city. It looked like something out of the movies. It had sidewalk cafes and a beautiful cathedral, excellent restaurants, there was a golf course, there were outdoor swimming pools. But it got so cold at night that the pool at the consulate would only get up to about 65 during the day and that was cold.

The consulate itself was in a compound. The office building, the principal officer's house, my house as the deputy principal officer, and the consular officer's house were all together. The compound included stables, swimming pool, and a tennis court. I've undoubtedly romanticized this, forgetting the high altitude fatigue (8,000 feet), the relative isolation, difficulty of having meaningful exchanges with local officials, etc.

Q: Yes, I presume that that made living more pleasant. What did you do? What was your job?

RUSHING: I was the deputy principal officer, although I'm not sure that that description existed in those days. I was number two, and there was also a consular/administrative officer, a CIA [Central Intelligence Agency] guy and his secretary, a USIA, and an AID [Agency for International Development] officer. There was also a State secretary.

Q: You covered most fronts that way.

RUSHING: My activities and reporting that I did tended to be on economic and commercial matters.

Q: And then the principal officer did most of the political reporting?

RUSHING: That's right.

Q: What was your relationship with the embassy in Addis Ababa? Did they supervise you or did you report directly to Washington?

RUSHING: As I recall, we reported directly to Washington with info to Addis. Because of the sensitivities of our position, we had to deal with Kagnev and the Ethiopians on a daily basis. At the time, Ed Streater was sort of my counterpart in Addis. I happened to be there when he got news of his next assignment. The communicator came in and said, "Mr. Streater, your next assignment is Rome!" Ed replied, "Gee, that's interesting. I had asked for another African assignment." The communicator said, "Well, it's a garble. They spelled it L-O-M-E." Of course, Ed was being assigned to Lome!

Q: During this period, there was an uprising against the Emperor although it was beaten back. Did that have any effect in Eritrea?

RUSHING: I'm not sure. I think, in the time I was there (only from January through September of 1960), there were two attempted coups. One of them held up my/our departure from Frankfurt via Ethiopian Airlines to Asmara. I remember a second one, but I don't remember whether that occurred after I had left, or while I was there.

Q: After these months in Asmara, you were suddenly transferred to Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. Tell me about that. How did that come about?

RUSHING: I met and married an Italian young woman who had been born in Asmara, as had her parents. Her grandparents were among those who came to Eritrea in the early 1900s from Sicily and Puglia. She was working for Aden Airways, which folded a long time ago. It was a part of the overseas operation of BOAC [British Overseas Airways Corporation].

She and I met at the airport when I was meeting the courier. I was duty officer which meant I had to be available 24 hours a day each week-end, every third week. One of the great things about Asmara was that you could hear the airplanes coming in to land from anywhere in town and you could beat them to the airport. So, it was never a question of having to call up and say, "Is it on time?" I was playing tennis and I heard the airplane, so I got into the car in grimy, smelly tennis clothes and drove out to the airport to meet the courier. Asmara was a big courier station. From Asmara, couriers would go to Aden and Khartoum before stopping at Addis and farther south and ending up in South Africa. Besides the courier, there was this lovely woman there.

Q: Who is now Mrs. Rushing and she is indeed lovely.

RUSHING: In those days, as you remember, if you married someone from the country to which you were assigned, you were transferred almost immediately. Of course, also in those days, you had to submit a request to marry a foreign national to the Secretary of State together with your letter of resignation. One or the other would be accepted.

Q: Happily, it all turned out well.

RUSHING: Yes, it did. So, therefore, after marrying, we were transferred to Southern Rhodesia, which was quite a change, although still Africa. Another beautiful city. Five thousand feet high, jacaranda trees, sophisticated infrastructure.

ROLAND K. KUCHEL
Consular Officer
Asmara (1964-1966)

Ambassador Roland K. Kuchel was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1938. He is a graduate of Princeton University. He began his career with the State Department in 1961. His overseas posts include Asmara, Lagos, Romania, Hungary, Nigeria, Rome, Sweden, and Yugoslavia. Ambassador Kuchel was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy and Nick Heyniger in 1997.

Q: We are in 1964; you are going to Asmara, and we will start from there. Asmara, could you give me what was Asmara like when you went there in oh '64?

KUCHEL: We went for two years. I would say that Asmara was a surprise in terms of someone coming to Africa even if you had studied and prepared for your post. Surprising in the sense that despite the fact that WWII was 20 years back, it was still very much an Italian colonial town in Africa, Italian in the sense that even the Eritreans all spoke Italian, liked to speak Italian, and worked in it. Most of the positions in the Consulate General were Italian language-designated. I fortunately benefited from my family fluency in Italian. At the time, Asmara had a large Italian, Greek and Levantine settler and expatriate community. There were Italians who had small businesses or restaurants. Often they were married to Eritreans. There evidently was never a color barrier that one found in former British colonies. And there were large Italian agro-businesses and small industries whose owners and managers were important Consulate contacts. Therefore the contacts of the consulate in the local community were both in the Eritrean establishment and government, but also among advisors and business people who were very much people who were involved with Italian culture.

Q: Well, what was the status of Eritrea at that time. It was in Ethiopia.

KUCHEL: It was a fully incorporated as a part of Ethiopia following the postwar UN trusteeship. There were tensions between the ruling Amhara and the native Eritrean Tigrinya peoples, but the later political and military issues were not yet evident at the time. At the same time Eritrea did enjoy a certain amount of autonomy, but real power was in Addis. The governor general was appointed by the emperor. At that time he was Asrate Kassa, a close relative of the Emperor. This was the pattern for practically everyone in government positions of authority. Haile Selassie would move them around periodically so none of them could build up local power bases.

Q: What was your impression of Haile Selassie and how his family was regarded in Eritrea from some of the people you were meeting?

KUCHEL: Well I think there was a reluctance of people there to address this issue politically even when you got to know them. I think they basically took it as a fait accompli. Eritrea had gone from Italian rule to British rule to UN trusteeship and then part of Ethiopia. The people there, both Eritrean and Ethiopian, I think probably realized that it wasn't a very useful question to discuss or talk about. You did get the sense that the Eritreans felt themselves superior to the Amharas -- the Italians had left them better educated relatively. They enjoyed a better infrastructure than the rest of Ethiopia. An odd situation where the two ethnic groups each felt superior to the other.

Q: Well now, what was the American representation there at this time?

KUCHEL: We had a consulate general.

Q: Who was the consul general?

KUCHEL: Sam Gammon. George Kelly was the deputy; he also had the economic and commercial function. I was the consular officer with the title of Vice Consul. We three families lived in residences on the Consulate General compound which also had a tennis court, horse stables and a vegetable garden. USIA had two American officers. USAID had a number of projects in Eritrea, the most important and influential being the nursing training school which was actually headed by a USAID nursing specialist, Mary Pavlick. A wonderful project that came to a sad end after Eritrea became independent and descended into chaos. In admin, we had a general services officer. All our communications were done by Kagnew Station, the military/NSA base that was certainly the primary reason for the Consulate General's presence in Asmara. Kagnew was then our primary US interest in Ethiopia, the vital link for all US military and government communications between our facilities in England and Australia. All of this was presatellite. All told, we had 6000 Americans at Kagnew. We benefited from their friendships, the hospital (where our second child was born), and the PX/Commissary. The hospital facility was also used by Embassy staff in Addis for serious cases as well as US and USAID staff in Aden -- still under British control -- in the Yemen,

Q: What was the importance of Kagnew Station? What was it doing?

KUCHEL: Kagnew Station was the primary communication relay station for the United States as well as allies, primarily for military communications. It was the most important relay station because of its location. Eritrea is at a very high altitude if I remember correctly, like five or six thousand feet, and located between facilities we had in Europe and India and Australia. It was the most important relay station for all kinds of communications, military ships. It was run by a US Army colonel. It remained incredibly important piece of real estate for us the United States government until the era of satellite communications developed.

Q: Which really moves into the '70s.

KUCHEL: That is right. So during the time that we were there and up until that time, holding on and maintaining our presence at Kagnev Station was critically important for U.S. interests. I think it helps explain why when you go back to the question what were the attitudes toward Eritrea and Eritrean liberation movements which were already beginning to lurk in the background, U.S. policy was so centered on maintaining Kagnev Station, and for that we saw as maintaining the relationship with the emperor and the royal family, that our policy was clearly a policy of maintaining Ethiopian unity of which Eritrea would be a part. Everything was done to maintain our posture and our presence there, and I think it certainly had to be number one on the objectives for our mission in Addis.

Q: Well now, 6,000 Americans, essentially a small town 5000 feet in the African hinterlands. Were the boys getting into trouble? Were there problems? How did it work out?

KUCHEL: I think where ever you had that large a collection of Americans and other people there were the odd difficulties in terms of relations with the local people. I have to say that that station did everything possible to minimize conflict. First of all it did the usual American thing of having an enormous wall around the place and having a self-contained life. There were all kinds of facilities from bowling alleys to PX, car clubs and the like. It didn't mean that you didn't see Americans out on the economy as the phrase went, but those who were living out on the economy were generally the officers, and all 16 the enlisted people were certainly on base. They were health issues at least as perceived by the military, although I thought it was a very healthy place to be. I remember Sam Gammon enjoyed riding. My wife started riding there. We owned one-half of a horse, shared with another officer. Sam would often ride with the Governor General Asrate Kassa, a good contact. The consulate general property itself adjoined a wall with Kagnev Station. One of Kagnev's earlier commanding officers kept his horse there. Concerned that his horse might be drinking putrid water, he had a pipe line built to end up in the horse stall so that his horse might drink Kagnev-treated water. That might give you a picture of how life was on Kagnev Station.

But as a vice consul I certainly got into the middle of any kind of difficulty that you might have had between base and town relations. There were from time to time situations where young people would maybe drink a bit too much, or just the normal car accident. I would say at least an average of about 10 or 15 Americans died each year at Kagnev Station. According to our Status of Forces Agreement and Ethiopian law, it was a requirement at that time for the vice consul to sign the documents that would enable the remains to be flown out of the country. Kagnev arranged the mortuary service. They brought somebody in from Germany to do the work, but we did the paperwork. They respected the Ethiopian requirement that legal documentation be obtained, so we did that in the consulate with the local Eritrean authorities and it was the vice consul's responsibility to view the remains. Sometimes they were not pretty. Particularly we had a number of very nasty car accidents. The other thing that we did was witness the marriage of Americans to individuals when the marriage occurred in Ethiopia. There was concern that the marriage, even if it took place in the Kagnev Station chapel on base might not be recognized as legal since there was no Ethiopian authority present. What we did then was counsel these people on marriage. Often they met local girls, and we went down and arranged a civil ceremony at the town hall. This was done in Italian. But the marriage document was written in Amhara. I

provided them with a Certificate of Witness to Marriage, complete with the Consulate General's seal, which could then serve in the US as proof of marriage.

Q: Was there a problem, we were still in the civil rights period where marriages between races in the south were a problem. Did you run into any problems over this?

KUCHEL: Well I didn't run into any problems, but I thought that many of these young married couples would find it difficult once they got back to the US. Many of them came from the segregated south. Indeed, most of the young men who married young Eritrean or Ethiopian girls came from places like Tennessee or Arkansas, Texas, Alabama. I couldn't help but think what they were getting into. On the other hand it was their choice and their right, and I certainly didn't want to get in the way of that. But you are absolutely right. I would say that is not a completely settled issue in our society today. It certainly was much more difficult then.

Q: What about from your perspective about students. This is the time, I know I was in Yugoslavia at the time, and I was getting following reports from the Soviet Union and particularly Bulgaria where they had gone in and recruited a lot of African students and a lot where Haile Selassie directed particularly the B team to Eastern Europe or the A team went to England or the United States or elsewhere. But were you seeing any reflections of students?

KUCHEL: Not really, although my recollection is exactly what you describe. There were some that were sent off to Yugoslavia and Moscow, the Soviet Union. They were really the B team in terms of where people's aspirations were. The Ethiopian authorities were very wary of two elements, the communist countries, although they felt if they were going to be leaders in Africa and the African Union, they had to welcome all kinds of Africans. This was a way I think of kind of balancing the pro American impression the emperor conveyed. Although Ethiopians in many ways felt they were not really African, descendants of the Queen of Sheba, they aspired politically to make Addis Ababa the capital of Africa. They therefore accepted a certain amount of Soviet bloc activity, relations with the Chinese, sending a few students. But clearly as soon as the students came back, he had his own people following them, and they were suspect and never well integrated into the Ethiopian government or society.

Q: How were relations between the consulate general from your perspective, and the embassy? I mean sometimes when you are off in another place, I mean lots of distance and all.

KUCHEL: Our ambassador at that time was Ed Korry, intelligent, very well liked and well plugged in with the New Frontier. Sheldon Banks was the DCM. As far as I could see the relationship was really very good. I don't really sense major issues that I could recall. Certainly if there were some, Sam Gammon kept them well under control. People from the embassy came up occasionally but not very often. Any conflicts we may have had were more managerial than policy in character.

Q: Did you travel much outside, because I used to hear about the Shiftas who were at one point called bandits, and later they were called freedom fighters.

KUCHEL: At that time they were bandits. The Shifta were of two varieties. I agree they were either outright bandits, or some of them were bandits that belonged to a free political movement, the Eritrean liberation front, and used that means of acquiring the resources to survive and continue their activities. During those years, '64 to '66, their activities became ever more pronounced. Banditry had become very active. We all carried a "Shifta wallet" -- a bit of money and a cheap watch, hiding our real wallet below the floor board of the vehicle. We used to travel around the country very frequently. The infrastructure was excellent. The roads left by the Italians... The roads going between Asmara and Massawa on the Red Sea, built in the thirties, descending 6000 ft. in an hour's drive, is still an engineering marvel. After it was all bombed and so forth during the Eritrean insurrection, I gather it still survives very well to this day. Our family shared an apartment in old town Massawa with the French vice consul and his family. We would go down to the Red Sea quite often. We went up into the lowlands by the Sudanese border, went up into the area just south of Port Sudan on the Red Sea where the Italians had large farms. I will always remember driving up there with my wife with ConGen's Toyota 4-wheel drive, lost many times trying to fall vehicle tracks by moonlight in the desert. Every so often camel caravans of Moslem Yemeni peoples whose women wore veils decorated with mother of pearl buttons.

My wife and I also participated very frequently on weekends in a group that Kagnev station would organize. It included some of the doctors and nurses from Kagnev's hospital, some military advisors who worked with the Ethiopian military, as well as USAID staff from the Asmara nursing project. It was a volunteer "civic action project" which was a feature of the Kennedy period, later expanded in Vietnam -- winning hearts and minds. Kagnev station at that time had a lot of unneeded medical and other equipment. Some drugs may have been out of date but still usable. The doctors came up with the kinds of things people could use, food items, and we would go off working often with counterparts in the Ethiopian army. The idea was get into the field, get into their own countryside rather than remain in the city. So we were very involved in supporting this effort. It had a humanitarian bent, but also a political agenda of solidifying central government influence in the hinterlands. We would go to areas in northwest Eritrea near the Sudanese border where the Moslem population was extremely impoverished. I tell you we saw tribes and people that come out of National Geographic, just unbelievable in terms of different dress, customs. We would go to a place and generally the Ethiopian army and Ethiopian authorities had gone in the day before and set up tents, and we would do a local clinic, take care of. I used to go along with my wife to help with sandwiches, bring out medicines, things like that, help nurses and medical staff that went along. But in so doing we saw parts of the country that one would normally never see, and we saw people, and we saw health conditions. I remember the doctors often had to remove camel dung from gaping wounds on people's heads because that was the traditional method of stopping bleeding but often caused infections. Also, I will never forget, the attitude of local people toward women. I mean the first people who came to be treated were not the people who were most sick. The first people who came were all the men. Generally they needed placebos and aspirin. Then the women came along. In some areas the women crawled on their knees, possibly to show deference. It was unnerving. All of these experiences were fantastic in my memories. But they had this political objective of supporting and trying to get Ethiopians to demonstrate a positive presence in distant areas. And we also had great fun with a wonderful group of people.

Q: At that time did you feel you were able to make contact basically with the Ethiopian officer corps?

KUCHEL: Yes I think we had a lot of military assistance teams and other advisors. We had a small medic group that was centered in Kagnew Station. . We also had very good relations and worked very closely with the Norwegian navy people who were assigned to Asmara where Haile Selassie was developing a small navy. We had with very good relations with them. All of these contacts put us into contact with Ethiopian military.

Q: I was saying as you work in civic action, did you find that many in the Ethiopian officer corps would sort of join in?

KUCHEL: Well, they didn't join in in the sense of Americans rolling up their shirts. They are very dignified, proud and somewhat aloof people. They certainly were friendly. They supported the operation, but they were followers rather than doers. Quite clearly again it is the kind of activity that you know as soon as you go away it was not self-sustaining. I think that is sort of the sad thing about so many things that we were involved with and people did. When you look back at what Americans did in Ethiopia at that time in terms of building up the health sector, the university structure, not much is left. TWA trained and did and taught maintenance for Ethiopian Airlines. I think that was the one thing that was never wrecked.

Q: Did the dispute with the Somalis over the Ogaden raise anything on your radar while you were there, or were you too far away?

KUCHEL: It was very much part of the embassy's concerns. Clearly being south it was on everybody's minds. I think people drew the conclusion that if you could have a separatist movement in Ogaden, you might have a separatist movement developing in Eritrea.

Q: Was there any Soviet presence or were there communists present in Eritrea and Asmara?

KUCHEL: I am trying to think. I believe there was a Yugoslav consul. Of course. they were not part of the Soviet bloc. Other than that, there were trade offices. The Bulgarians were there with a fishing project in Massawa, and I think maybe Hungarians and Czechs. They were selling or trying to sell Soviet manufactured goods. Quite clearly we had an interest in them as well as the station in trying to figure out what they were doing, who they were seeing. Did they get anywhere? I remember one of my first little duties as first vice consul was being asked by Sam Gammon to attend a Chinese ballet troupe that came through, sort of merge with the crowd and see how people reacted to the ballet.. My wife and I attended it and I wrote a report. We were still doing dispatches at that time on how the Chinese cultural penetration seemed to work. Very amusing from today's perspective.

Q: Well were there any major visits or major problems, hurricanes, typhoons, tidal waves during the time you were there?

KUCHEL: Not in terms of natural disasters. Haile Selassie would come up at least twice a year and spend a week or two at his palace. That always caused a certain amount of commotion. We

were introduced as members of the small consular corps. I think in terms of American visitors, the most notable was Robert Kennedy, although he made just an airport stop after a visit centered on the Peace Corps in Addis. But I remember to this day great crowds of Eritreans who came out to the airport just to see him and shake his hand and listen to him speak at the ramp of the aircraft. He was coming back from South Africa. I think the most exciting and most momentous thing that happened in terms of visits was the visit of Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip, who came to Asmara for a couple of days as part of the royal visit to Ethiopia. Everybody wanted an invitation to the reception. I think it was terribly exciting for Maryanne and me to be included in that. How to bow or curtsy, be presented. The British Consul General had to have a plumed Consular uniform sent in from London.

Q: Well you left there in '66, is that right?

KUCHEL: I left there in '66. Asmara was really one of the happiest posts, and I think you always remember that. I had a second daughter born there at Kagnev Station. I still have the fond memories of the place and people there. We were assigned then to Lagos, Nigeria. Even though my hope was to become a political officer, I was assigned to the economic section, a four person section headed by Bob Brand. The deputy was Tom Smith who later served as Ambassador to Ghana and Nigeria. We had a petroleum officer, and I was the junior economic officer.

SAMUEL R. GAMMON, III
Consul General
Asmara (1964-1967)

Ambassador Samuel R. Gammon, III was born in 1924 in Texas. He received a bachelor's degree in 1946, a master's degree in 1948, and a doctorate in 1953 from Princeton University. He served in the U.S. Army from 1943-1946 and joined the Foreign Service in 1954. His career included positions in Italy, Ethiopia, and France, and an ambassadorship to Mauritius. Ambassador Gammon was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: Why don't we move on to the Ethiopia? You went to Asmara as consul general in 1964 until 1967. You had moved up rather rapidly hadn't you?

GAMMON: There were 1,200 Foreign Service officers when our new batch came in in the summer of '54, 1,295 is the number that sticks in my mind. The service then expanded to basically its present size, 3,500 FSOs. A rising tide lifts all boats, and I was one of the lucky crowd.

Q: How did you get your appointment to Asmara?

GAMMON: Network.

Q: How did this work?

GAMMON: The political appointee ambassador was a journalist, Edward M. Korry, who was close to leading Foreign Service people from his tours in I.N.S. Publications. He had been in eastern Europe so he knew people like Luke Battle and various other senior Foreign Service colleagues. Ed's wife was a childhood friend of my wife's college roommate. The was how it always works in the "system." Ed asked me to go as consul in Ethiopia. It was upgraded after I got there to consulate general, principally so that the chief State Department man would outrank the commanding officer of the large military communications station.

Q: This was the Kagnew station?

GAMMON: Kagnew; he was a bird colonel. Consuls general rank, with, but after brigadiers, consul's rank with, but after chicken colonels. See your colonel and raise it one on the part of the State Department

Q: What were our interests in Asmara in the 1960s?

GAMMON: This was partly due to the cooperative relationship between Korry, who was a great activist, a very able, extremely brilliant, journalist, very interested in the great game of diplomacy and General Paul D. Adams, who was the four star commanding CINC-strike, which was then the US military apparatus for the rest of the world, other than NATO and the western hemisphere. They decided that Ethiopia under the emperor was very important to US national security interest and a secure base, not in the conventional souse military base, but a secure place from which to maneuver in the same way that Kissinger tried to do with the Shah of Iran, though Ethiopia as an ally had a considerably longer life than Iran as the principal US ally in the area.

As the consul general in northern Ethiopia, where our single military communications establishment, plus some miscellaneous classified piggyback operations went on, the Asmara principal officership was largely a Pol Mil job.

Q: Political military?

GAMMON: Yes, trying to keep the military from doing stupid things, which is sometimes a full-time occupation. Total insensitivity to local feeling and the local situation is the curse of our military system in which we move the United States milieu with our forces--the PX, the commissary, the swimming pool, the bowling alley, the whole schmeer as little America.

Q: Can you give any examples of what you would do with the military to keep them from kicking over a particular can of worms?

GAMMON: You didn't always succeed, but you spent a lot of time with them and patted their hands. Some of the Ethiopian officials became smart enough to try and to manipulate the military's frequent innocence. At that time the still-ongoing, Eritrean independence movement was just getting under way, it really kicked on in late '60-'61, political banditry and guerrilla operations against the Imperial government. We obviously stood to gain by being as neutral as

possible in that situation because if there's anything more vulnerable than an antenna garden of say 250, 40 to 80 foot antenna towers held up by guy-wires, to a guerrilla operation, it would be hard to find.

The government was always trying to involve the US military as supporting the regime of Haile Selassie and the establishment. That was mostly the most sensitive thing--trying to keep the military at a lower profile.

Q: When the Ethiopian officials were speaking about the Ethiopian central government officials in Asmara, were they trying to get the military to show the flag?

GAMMON: A bit, in other words, if there was a school strike or something that was politically oriented, they would decree a state of emergency. On one occasion, a very naive commanding officer at Kagnev proceeded to set up machine guns at the corners of the post and sentries and steel helmets and the whole schmeer, which clearly gave the message we were backing the government. We were backing the government, but we shouldn't have been quite so ostentatious and that was the basic situation.

At one point, there was a lengthy negotiation which I did as an addendum to the treaty establishing Kagnev. I say addendum because it was not a formal treaty instrument. We did an agreed interpretation and modification of the treaty of 1953 between the United States and Ethiopia under which Kagnev Station existed. I found, and the embassy agreed, that we could make considerable concessions in the direction of doffing our hat to Ethiopian sovereignty. Such things, for example, as changing the license plates at Kagnev station to make them Ethiopian license plates, with a nominal fee to cover the cost of manufacture, but no profit. Flying the Ethiopian flag at various places on post. Little things like that.

Q: Sometimes these things are hard to sell to the military, aren't they?

GAMMON: We didn't have much trouble on that. Partly because the particularly naive commanding officer, while I was on home leave, got himself in a hideous scrape with the ambassador and the chargé.

Q: What happened?

GAMMON: The general particulars were, he proceeded to inform them that he was in command at Kagnev station and was not obligated to take any advice or anything whatsoever from any State Department people. That was bad news when you try that on a strong type like Korry. Of course, except for major military commands, the Ambassador does have authority. So basically, the embassy told the appropriate military command "this guy must go," which he did. What always happens when the military has a mess, owing to someone of limited competence, they send in a good man to clean up. That was exactly what happened, they sent in an able man as C.O. who was then properly attentive and recognized that the State Department might be an unwelcome meddler, but at least it had power. So he had to adapt to political advice.

Q: I think this is an important point that is often overlooked. Often a consular officer in the field, where there are American troops stationed, plays a role that is not particularly spelled out. But all the same, there are problems here, you should do it this way, not here. It's public relations.

GAMMON: It's really what in the military establishment would be a J-5 or a G-5 local government relations function.

Q: So one of the important ingredients to being successful is to use diplomacy on your colleagues within the American community?

GAMMON: And anticipate as much as possible. It was interesting work, I used to joke that on the old April Fool sheet where you express your onward assignment preferences, (it used to be submitted in the old days on the first of April--That was before the regime of bidding for assignments). I had always previously indicated Pol-Mil as a field of interest until I had actually done a lot of it in Asmara--at which point I said I didn't want to deal with the military again unless I could be Secretary of Defense. That was left to Frank Carlucci!

Q: What was our policy towards the Eritrean separatists? Did you have any contact with them?

GAMMON: I had a lot of contact with them. We also had a mapping mission going, we had Air Force, Army and Navy present at Kagnev Station. The Air Force was basically cooperating with the Ethiopians in doing photo mapping of all Ethiopia. On one occasion, near the end of my stay, a US helicopter with an Ethiopian interpreter and two US Air Force types, had a little engine trouble and plumped down into the midst of a group of *shifta*.

Q: Shifta being?

GAMMON: The political bandit, Eritrean Liberation Front guerrillas. Who promptly burned the helicopter and took them prisoner. There were flying around landing to ask local names for geographic, "What do you call that mountain? What's that stream?" so they could put names on the maps they were constructing.

We had terrific communications of course at Kagnev, much better than the embassy did in Addis. I got in a quick piece saying not to worry they would be released fairly soon because we were on polite terms with the political opposition, the ELF. I had pretty good contacts which I dusted off. Of course, the US military and the Ethiopian military went into a swivet at one point, CINCSTRIKE sent out a planning message for a US parachute regiment to drop into Eritrea. It was a planning message only and obviously would not take place. When a copy of that reached the embassy they went into almost terminal panic! It took two weeks before the three prisoners could be released because there was so much air patrolling and hunting for them. They were walked by night over to the Sudanese boundary and released.

Q: How did you maintain contact? In so many situations where you have a guerrilla force, we are under strict instructions you just don't talk to the opposition which is usually a bad mistake.

GAMMON: You talk as much as you can. The instructions usually come from the existing government and if you can get away with it you do. One of the leading types that I knew perfectly well and had contact with was one of the guys who had helped Haile Selassie take over Eritrea. Yet, I knew Senator Tedla Bairo well; we had been in social contact, and he was also in touch with the Ethiopian government.

It was a slightly murky situation. I was very confident that the captives would be sprung and they were.

The main thing was to keep us from diving totally into bed with the Ethiopian government's clumsy efforts to recover them by force. They were in due time released. The MAAG brigadier was up and MAAG was all over the place advising the Ethiopian Army which was blundering around hunting. I would say that probably the best reporting thing I did was the last message I sent before leaving Asmara after three and a half years, where I forecast that we knew that the emperor was elderly, we knew that he would be succeeded in time by a military regime and I predicted that Kagnew Station probably had, with luck, five or six good years left and then possibly five to six bad years before we'd be tossed out entirely. I left in '67, I think we were out in '74 or '75, something like that. I was not far off on that forecast.

Q: Did you find, from your point of view, that having a base like Kagnew Station began to be the tail that wagged the dog?

GAMMON: Not so much in my time or in Korry's time because then the embassy was upgraded from a Class III to a Class II mission in that period. I would say that the dominant foreign policy was that Ethiopia is a strong, stable and important country that can be a major asset to US foreign policy.

Kagnew was then probably our most important in-country objective along with growth and stability and MAAG improvement to the Ethiopian military.

Korrry was sharp enough to design something which we jokingly called the village team in Asmara, which was a model of the country team. The village team consisted of a MAAG representative, a couple of AID nurses who were attached to the nursing school at the local hospital, the USIS PAO, obviously the CIA station man, and the commanding officer of Kagnew station who came to my weekly staff meeting. This, we referred to, as the village team, which was equivalent to the country team in Addis.

We were very closely tied in with embassy operation. Also thanks to the capabilities of Kagnew Station in the ELINT area.

Q: That's Electronic Intelligence?

GAMMON: I had vast access to ELINT material relating to the entire Horn of Africa and southern Arabia, which I would peruse, and then I would do a weekly summation of things. I would type it myself and send it in a single copy up to the ambassador via the weekly courier, every Thursday morning. So that he was then plugged in, without having to wait for this material

to get back to Washington, to the intelligence community to digest and disgorge in much briefer and more sanitized form. That worked fairly well as a feed-in to the ambassador.

Q: So relations in this case, between the consulate general in a politically sensitive area and a strong ambassador were effective. Although being a political ambassador, he was very much aware of what we were about and had a policy.

GAMMON: Although he had his flaws later on in his other ambassador assignment in Chile, he was an excellent, hard charging semi-pro I would say, and really at times you would forget that he was not career. He did a quite good job.

CLARKE N. ELLIS
Economic Officer
Asmara (1969-1971)

Clarke N. Ellis was born in Boston, Massachusetts. He graduated from the University of Redlands in Salzburg, Austria, and Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. After entering the Foreign Service in 1962, his postings abroad included Munich, Naples, Asmara, Vienna, Zurich and Taipei. Mr. Ellis was interviewed in 1998 by Charles Stuart Kennedy.

ELLIS: I was not pleased with our Vietnam policy but it didn't happen. I got, instead, assigned to--again this was before the days of bid lists--Asmara, then part of Ethiopia, as the economic officer and the number two in the consulate.

Q: You were in Asmara from when to when?

ELLIS: I was there from December of 1969 until December of 1971, two years.

Q: Did you get any briefing about the situation in Ethiopia before you went there?

ELLIS: I had a brief area orientation course. I did actually get a briefing over at Arlington Hall Station, which was then before FSI. It was headquarters of the Army Security Agency. They were the tenant or the host command for the U.S. military installation at Kagnew Station.

Q: You have seen that our entire policy in eastern Africa revolved around Kagnew Station.

ELLIS: I think it did in good part. It was, of course, an extremely important military communications base both for satellites and for the fleet operating in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans and the Persian Gulf for eavesdropping.

Q: What was the situation in Eritrea when you were there in 1969 to 1971 and in Ethiopia in general?

ELLIS: It was a difficult time in that they already had the guerilla war underway with the Eritrean rebels wanting to cede from Ethiopia. At least one of the years we were there was a severe drought period as well. It was also evident that some, if not all, of the local leaders including the governor general of Eritrea were corrupt. On the other hand, there seemed to still be considerable respect for the emperor as a person, if not for all of his cronies or administrators.

Q: What was living like in Eritrea when you were there?

ELLIS: Well, it was very pleasant except for several months when we were on water rationing. Aside from that, life there was very pleasant. Asmara is only 7,000 feet high so it is a beautiful climate, sunny days for the most part and cool nights the year around. It is a very bracing and invigorating climate. I was assigned there as the Italian language speaking officer. There were still 12,000 Italians in Asmara, and two of the three local newspapers were published in Italian still and one in Arabic.

Q: You were the economic officer, is that right? But, it sounds like more than that.

ELLIS: Well, there was a political officer but he worked for someone else. What little economic and commercial work there was, I did. I did a good part of the political reporting and a good deal of base liaison work as well.

Q: Did you feel that there was almost an agreement from the embassy that you couldn't overtly report on the problems of Amhara rule in Eritrea?

ELLIS: Yes, that was definitely the case. This was the days before the dissent channel but I had a very good personal relationship with the Italian consul general who was, of course, the most important diplomat in the area. From him, I also heard things that the embassy didn't find convenient to have reported. There were excesses by the Eritrean guerrillas, and the Ethiopian troops, and massacres and so forth. There was tension there between the embassy and the consulate. There was also a period of interregnum between two consuls general, and I did not have a very easy or good relationship with the ambassador.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

ELLIS: He was William Hall, who became director general of the Foreign Service afterwards. On one occasion, I reported that a massacre by Ethiopian troops had occurred in a church and a mosque, and I had reported that to the embassy in a round up cable. I made the mistake of putting that item in something that went back to the Department. I got chastised for that even though everything that I had reported, which I had heard from the Italian consul general, was later confirmed through other sources.

Q: Was it the feeling that our government policy was to protect the emperor and his cohorts from criticism? Or, was it within the country of Ethiopia from our embassy to do this?

ELLIS: I think it was the latter because they were looking at it from the point of view of our interests in having the base and dealing with Haile Selassie. Therefore, they wanted to minimize the problems that were really occurring in Eritrea.

Q: Did the Kagnaw Station personnel there have problems?

ELLIS: For the most part they didn't. A couple of people sometimes might be stopped if they went out hunting or something like that. There were several incidents, however, that took place while I was there. The first consul general was halted by a rebel band and briefly detained before being let go. There was a National Geographic film team that was held for 17 days before being released. In fact, their special film on that part of Ethiopia was never shown, although it was supposed to have been. My pregnant wife, our infant son, and I were in a Jeep driving from Asmara to Keren, and we were stopped by an armed band. It was never clear who they were. We were told that well, no, they weren't rebels but at least a couple of them had automatic rifles that they stuck into the window. It was clear to me that they weren't local militia. I believe that they were a rebel band themselves.

Q: I know at one point they called the groups who were sticking rifles in peoples' windows shiftas or bandits. At the time you were there, had it become more apparent that these bandits were politically motivated?

ELLIS: As it turned out, a number of the consulate staff were rebel sympathizers. They never said anything, of course, but they were. There was a genuine desire for independence there. Another one of my jobs was as AID officer, particularly in Food for Work programs although I wasn't employed by AID. One of the toughest jobs that I had was, on a couple of occasions, going down to Massawa on the Red Sea coast in the middle of summer to inspect grain in the holds of freighters. On one occasion, the freighter was infested with bugs, and the outside temperature was probably 110 degrees. You can imagine what the temperature was inside the hold of that grain ship.

Q: Did you find that with the officers at the embassy it was hard to have them understand that there really was a feeling or desire for independence in Eritrea that seemed to run rather deep?

ELLIS: Yes, it was hard. The DCM was somewhat sympathetic and helped protect me from worse consequences than I would have had otherwise. Several years later - I think it was 1975 - I filed a dissent channel message on our Ethiopia policy. I got a nice reply from the director of Policy Planning, Winston Lord, saying my message had been read by the Secretary, and that our policy on Ethiopia by then was changing to some extent.

Q: Did our military have good feelers out, or were they sort of an alien force that was unaware of developments?

ELLIS: They were pretty much tied up in doing their business and really depended on the consulate for political guidance.

Q: At that particular point, your office was involved. Were there any problems with Somalia then?

ELLIS: No, there weren't.

Q: There were periodic forays into Ogaden and back.

ELLIS: That wasn't a major issue. One of the interesting organizations that was based in Asmara was the Desert Locust Control organization, DELCOA, which would fly sorties to see where the locusts were swarming and then try to take action against them. It was an interesting international organization and one that played an important role.

Q: In the area you were concerned with, what about getting food? Was there famine and food relief during the time you were there?

ELLIS: We had quite an extensive Food for Work program. There wasn't the terrible famine of the 1980s that made the headlines on CNN. There were shortages during the job period.

Q: When you say, "Food for Work," what does that mean?

ELLIS: In other words, AID would provide food for farmers and peasants to engage in local development projects like building dams, reforestation, and things like that. They were small dams, not like Aswan, but little reservoirs.

Q: Did you see a difference between the Eritreans and the Amharas?

ELLIS: You couldn't tell physically those who were Amhara or Eritrean. The highlanders in both cases were predominately Ethiopian Orthodox Christian. The lowlanders were Muslim. Those who were of the upper crust of the society in both cases had very aquiline features. You couldn't tell them apart physically. Indeed, the people from the northern part of Ethiopia, particularly Tigre province, spoke Tigrinya, which is the language of the Eritreans, as opposed to Amharic. Because of the separate development - Eritrea having been under Italy for 80 years - the Eritreans had, I think, more worldly consciousness and more education, sort of like the Ibos in Nigeria. They were the group that seemed to be most dominant. If you even went to other parts of Ethiopia, the clerks or the managers or the auto mechanics would be Eritrean. The Eritreans had a disproportionate number of places in universities throughout the country. This created problems.

Q: Were there major contingents of the Ethiopian army in Eritrea?

ELLIS: Yes, they had a major division stationed in Asmara.

Q: Did they play much of a role, or were they just busy chasing the dissidents?

ELLIS: I don't know about playing a role. I didn't have much contact with them.

Q: Who were the consul generals when you were there?

ELLIS: Murray Jackson was first and then Tony Rabida. Both have passed away.

Q: At that point were you caught up in the feeling of wanting to be an African hand, or was Europe still what you wanted?

ELLIS: No, Europe was still my area of interest.

ARTHUR W. LEWIS
Public Affairs Officer
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1973-1977)

Ambassador Arthur W. Lewis was born in New York in 1926. After earning his bachelors degree from Dartmouth College in 1966 and his masters in 1968 he served in the United States Navy from 1943-1946. His career has included positions in Bucharest, Lusaka, and Addis Ababa. Ambassador Lewis was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in September 1989.

Q: You went from a country with a relative tranquility to a very difficult one: Ethiopia. You were there from 1973 to 1977. Did you volunteer for this assignment?

LEWIS: I was ordered to go. For me, it was certainly an advancement because the position was at a higher rank than I was. It was a much larger post in terms of personnel, funds and branch offices-We had a branch office in Asmara and reading rooms in six regional capitals. It was an opportunity to go to a country which was terribly exciting and had the longest history in black Africa. The assignment could not have come at a better time.

Q: The political situation was, euphemistically, "challenging".

LEWIS: It is like Chinese telling you, "may you live in interesting times".

Q: What was the situation in Ethiopia in September, 1973 when you arrived?

LEWIS: There had just been a drought in Welo province which is in the Ethiopian north. This drought had been probably responsible for the death of a quarter of a million people. This was not the first drought that had struck Welo or that had struck Ethiopia. There is a cycle of droughts that occur there and about every 20-25 years you have these massive droughts, which someone mordantly said were like birth control because you lose a quarter of a million people--no one is quite sure of the numbers. The Emperor in his traditional fashion continued as if the drought did not exist. One of his grand-daughters was getting married. At the height of the drought, a cake that costs 3,000 pounds sterling was brought in. In taking it off the plane, in Addis Ababa, it cracked and was thrown away and another cake ordered. There was a British TV producer and cameraman who happened to record the cake caper. They also recorded scenes in the Welo area, with children dying. They also taped scenes of the Emperor throwing scraps to his dogs and the zoo animals that were kept at the palace. Earlier in the year, the teachers and taxi

drivers in Addis had gone on strike. There was a lot of unrest in the country. We were the major aid donors to Ethiopia. It is said that we did not respond to the drought with adequate force. It is said that for political reasons, the Emperor wanted this to happen and we allowed it. I am not sure about that. There were a number of things happening. Down in the Southern desert of Ethiopia in a place called Negilly, there was a mutiny on the part of some enlisted men against their officers over water. This was one of the first cracks in the formal institutional apparatus of the government. The Royal family members who were members of the Emperor's cabinet were being replaced with the hope that someone could pull the threads together. It was beginning to become clear that changes were taking place and something was happening.

Shortly after I arrived in September, the Emperor was arrested at his palace by members of the military--the Derg. This supposedly consisted of 120 military men. Shortly after the Emperor was arrested, a number of the royal family were also taken. A number of the "old guard" were executed one Saturday night. Changes began to take place; neighborhood organizations were set up; our political and military relationships began to deteriorate. Finally, our relationships went down to zero. Ethiopia became less important to the U.S. because the listening stations, particularly the one in Asmara, we had were overtaken by newer technological means. We no longer supported the military and our cooperation with the Navy went down to tube.

The next thing we knew is that the basis for our relationship with Ethiopia changed completely.

Q: As Public Affairs Officer during an interesting period, what instructions were you receiving? Were you being advised to be aggressive or reactive?

LEWIS: It was a little bit of a roller-coaster which we couldn't get off. Kissinger was Secretary of State and in the global scheme of things, Ethiopia's importance diminished. There were no instructions to try to preserve relationships nor instructions to allow relationships to deteriorate. It was "che sera', sera".

Q: There wasn't any dynamism either from State or USIA. No sense of urgency to solve a problem?

LEWIS: No. We felt somewhat adrift. For a lot of the time, we didn't have an Ambassador. There was Parker Wyman first, then Art Tienken as Chargé. He was there when I got expelled.

Q: Would you describe the USIA program when you arrived?

LEWIS: It was a program heavy on information and educational exchange. We had in Asmara a fairly large USIS center--that was the Italian speaking part of Ethiopia. We had reading rooms, which were basically medium-sized libraries in six provincial centers (Gondar, Dese, Makeli, Harar, Welo and Tigre). The purpose of this program was to provide information. We understood from the beginning that something was happening to the Emperor; that feudalism was coming to an end and that some preparation had to be made to try to help the country and its people prepare for the giant step which had to be taken. Information about the modern world was absolutely essential. My reading rooms and libraries played a very crucial part. We made available a lot of material about agriculture and basic health. The AID program was quite large in those days--one

of our largest programs in Africa. We were also involved deeply in educational exchanges--bringing American to teach in the Universities there and sending Ethiopians to get further education in the United States. Essentially, information and educational exchange were the two major thrusts of my operation. We did have one or two cultural events: one was a musical group which came and gave a concert with the proceeds given to drought relief. A lot of money was collected from that concert.

My biggest job was getting around the country to the different places, providing reassurance that we would continue this or that program.

Q: You were a member of the Country Team. You probably traveled more than the others because of your job. Did you notice a deteriorating situation in the provinces or was the uprising confined mainly to Addis?

LEWIS: The situation in the provinces as a matter of fact was relatively stable. The real difficulties were in Addis and Asmara. Those took place once the Emperor fell. It didn't take long for the situation to collapse.

Q: Did the arrest of the Emperor surprise everyone or was it anticipated?

LEWIS: It was a surprise. No one really thought that the Emperor would be harmed. No one really understood. As I look back on Ethiopia, it was a society which was fatalistic. It was a society in which violence was just below the surface. I am not sure I or anybody else could have said that then or could have perceived it. We didn't understand what was going on in Tehran until it was too late. Same in Addis. The institutions--so called-- of government had reached a point at which they could no longer be supported by feudalistic society.

Q: It is undoubtedly difficult for foreigners to perceive a revolution coming, particularly when the ruling group is also blind. Did your contacts change after the Emperor's demise?

LEWIS: Yes. The original contacts that I had made were arrested or escaped from the country because they were about to be arrested. One of the strange things that happened was that I became the informal link between the Derg and the Embassy. This came about because one of my local employees suggested to me that I really should go up to the castle to meet the head of the derg's public affairs operation--a Colonel Asarat. I decided I would do that. I didn't check with the Embassy--we were downtown and the Embassy was in its compound above the city. I went and he received me. We talked for a long time; he introduced me to his deputy--a young major--who knew all about USIS because before joining the Army he was a shoe-shine boy right in front of our building. The major was later killed in a shoot-out and was succeeded by his deputy with whom I remained in contact.

Q: Did the fact that you were a former naval officer help you?

LEWIS: I don't think so. It was probably just the fact that I made the effort to talk to them and that came without any preconceived ideas of their ways of doing things.

Q: The Derg seems to have been somewhat of a mystery to the Americans. Did you use it for your regular communications?

LEWIS: I talked with them. As some of my Eritrean employees were arrested, I would go to the Derg. Nothing ever happened, but at least I had a contact in the Derg. Most important for me was that the Embassy was given a diplomatic note on a Saturday which expelled me and all the Americans in USIS. My contact warned me about that note on the previous Friday night.

Q: That was in 1977. You had been in Addis for sometime by then. What were your views of your program between 1973 and 1977 as the local situation was changing?

LEWIS: The impact of the change on our operations was significant. First of all, my center in Asmara was bombed twice. Then Asmara was put under siege by Eritrean Liberation Force (ELF) and I was caught there for three weeks. It became clear that we could not sustain that operation and we closed it down temporarily. The fighting in Welo and Tigre and Gondar closed down my reading rooms there. From time to time, my center in Addis Ababa was harassed--once a fire-bomb was thrown through the window.

Q: Who were the perpetrators? Eritreans? Tigrenians? Members of the central government?

LEWIS: It was probably the Eritreans and Tigreans who wanted to use the incidents as an opportunity to bring to public attention their dissatisfaction with the Derg.

Q: How about the local employees? Were they harassed?

LEWIS: Certainly my Eritrean employees were harassed. A number were arrested and imprisoned. The secret and military police would come to the center to take people from their offices. We tried to stop them, but it was impossible. Across the street from us was City Hall which was bombed, shattering the glass in our offices. We did not operate a normal USIS program during this period. We published and distributed a lot of printed material.

Q: With all the various factions in Ethiopia in those days, were you not charged by one or all as putting incendiary propaganda?

LEWIS: The charge that was levied against me in support of my expulsion was "conduct inimical to the growth of socialism".

Q: Sounds like you were doing the job right.

LEWIS: That was what was printed in the newspaper when my expulsion was announced.

Q: Did the Embassy try to use AID or USIS to bolster our position?

LEWIS: I don't think so because we had a large military contingent in Ethiopia which was being reduced rapidly. We had a Naval medical team who were at the Pasteur Institute. The Embassy

had at its disposal a number of elements which were in the community and which were not closed off as the Embassy itself was in its compound. We had a large compound in Addis in which the Chancery and the senior officers' residence stood. These people did not live in the community, while the rest of us lived and worked did. The military was sent home fairly quickly. It became clear to the Derg that they were not going to get ammunition and military support from us. A lot of that took place in the context of the Somali attack on the province of Bale in the south. After the Derg came to power, the Somali nationalists attacked Ethiopian positions in the southern part of Ethiopia. The Ethiopians went through a most perilous period during which they almost lost all of that area--the Ogaden. Because of the relationship with the U.S., we did not make the kind of efforts that normally would have been expected to be made.

Q: Was the Embassy recommending some actions and not being given any guidance from Washington or did the Embassy prefer to stay out of Ethiopian affairs?

LEWIS: To the best of my recollection, the Embassy's recommendations were to be more activist than the Executive Branch wanted to be. A lot of it had to do with the way policy-makers in the State Department perceived Ethiopia--how important was it in a global context? We know that during the Kissinger period we saw things in a global context rather than regional. Therefore, Ethiopia became a "second-hand" player or less of a player because of the globalization of foreign policy.

Q: In retrospect, was there anything that could have been done, public affairs-wise, that might have made a difference and perhaps improved US-Ethiopian relationships?

LEWIS: I doubt it. What happened was that we changed places with the Soviets. We sided with Somalia and they left Somalia and came to Addis. The die was cast at that point because Mengistu was emerging as the power in the Derg. There had been two major shoot-outs within the Derg: the first was when General Addam, who was very popular, was killed supposedly by Mengistu or his aides and the second when General Bayu, who was the acting head of state, was killed. After this second shoot-out, it was clear that Mengistu was getting advice and counsel from the Soviets. Within a short period of time, there was a flip in Ethiopian foreign policy.

The Soviets had responded very quickly to Ethiopian requests for arms, which they felt would profit them. They certainly were not profiting in Somalia. Somalia had been a morass for them. The Ethiopians had been able to maintain military superiority with our assistance until we stopped providing that assistance with the advent of the Ogaden war. Once we went to Somalia and the Russians to Ethiopia, the possibility of any positive actions in a public affairs context became even less possible. The most positive thing that ever happened in that period was when the Soyuz and Apollo space-crafts hooked up together. We showed the movie at the USIS center. The Soviet Ambassador and couple of his staff came and we had a public handshake between Americans and Soviets. But that was about it.

Q: Were the Soviets active in the public affairs field?

LEWIS: Not really. They weren't doing much because they were busy making certain that the politico-military relationships were staying in good shape. There was a political struggle going

on concerning the direction of the revolution. There was the creation of ?????? which required the transfer of young people from Universities--Universities were closed--to parts of the country to educate farmers and provide literacy and agriculture training. The purpose of this forced migration was to break down the various ethnicities that had developed in the feudal context of the country. The Showas and the Amharans had become one thing, the Tigreans and the Eritreans another. The Derg sent Eritreans south to the Aroma country, the Aromians north to areas where a different language was spoken. There were cultural differences which manifested themselves in physical violence against the students.

All of that was going on at the time of declining US-Ethiopian relations. So it was not a propitious time for a public affairs program.

ARTHUR W. HUMMEL, JR.
Ambassador
Ethiopia (1975-1976)

Ambassador Arthur W. Hummel, Jr. was born to American parents in China in 1920. He received his master's degree from the University of Chicago. His career with USIS included assignments in Hong Kong, Japan, Burma, and Taiwan. He served as the ambassador to Burma, Ethiopia, and Pakistan. Ambassador Hummel was interviewed by Dorothy Robins-Mowry on July 13, 1989.

Q: How about the status of Kagnev Station?

HUMMEL: That was considered to be quite important. It was located in the city of Asmara in the Province of Eritrea. The Eritrean people belong to a somewhat different linguistic group, and they have a different history, too. Asmara is now the capital of Eritrea, which has been independent from Ethiopia since 1993. Eritrea was much more Westernized because of a much longer occupation by the Italians. As a matter of fact, a very large portion of the central, Ethiopian Government civilian and military officials were Eritreans and were not members of the main ruling group in Ethiopia, the Amharas.

Q: Was there any question about Kagnev Station? How to deal with the future status of Kagnev Station was always the problem in the Horn of Africa and was involved in the Somalia issue. It was something like the question of Greece and Turkey in the Eastern Mediterranean. We found ourselves in the middle in terms of giving aid and so forth. Kagnev Station was long considered an absolute, strategic "must" in the area. It was essentially a communications station, for the purpose of eavesdropping and also relaying messages. Had you talked to our military and gotten any feel as to whether this station was becoming outmoded at that time because of the existence of satellite communications systems?

HUMMEL: No. It was after my time in Ethiopia that the U. S. military began to admit, very reluctantly, that maybe, conceivably, they could get along without Kagnev Station. Later on, of course, the Ethiopian Government under Mengistu shut it down. At the time the station was shut

down, there were alternatives available for all of the missions which you mentioned-- eavesdropping, humint human intelligence gathering, communications relay, and the support of space flight.

Q: When you went to Ethiopia were you told that Kagnew Station was vital?

HUMMEL: That's right. It was considered vital.

Q: Were there any questions on the State Department side regarding Kagnew Station?

HUMMEL: No, not that I recall. I think that many of us took the military's insistence that Kagnew Station was vital with a grain of salt because we know the propensity of our military to exaggerate these matters. They exaggerate for their own reasons because they think that the wishy-washy, striped pants State Department might give away facilities of this kind too easily. So they err on one side and we may sometimes err on the other.

Q: So you arrived in Addis Ababa in 1975. How did you see the situation on the ground?

HUMMEL: Well, the famine period was over. The internal stresses were being handled by the military, except, of course, for Eritrea, where the insurgency had been going on for many years, fueled by supplies from Islamic countries outside--from Sudan and from across the Red Sea in Aden, Yemen, and Saudi Arabia as well. They acted for Islamic reasons because the Ethiopian Government was Christian. That was a continuing problem which threatened the continued existence of Kagnew Station in Asmara as well. So that was a worrisome matter.

There were frictions between the Amharas--who really are in the minority, although they claim to be a majority--and other ethnic groups, such as the people of the Province of Tigre, and so forth. These seemed to be fairly manageable. Southern Sudan was in a mess, but that had been the case for a very long time. I remember being instructed to try to get the Ethiopian military to halt their support for the insurgents in Southern Sudan, across the border. I was unsuccessful in these efforts. This situation was also related to the Central Ethiopian Government's need to have troops all over Eritrea and to safeguard the continued security of Asmara, in which we had a strong interest.

Q: How did you deal with the Derg when you arrived? Could you go and talk to any of them?

HUMMEL: Sure. I could easily get appointments whenever I needed them. They wanted to be friendly to the United States. They considered Somalia a serious threat to their security, as indeed it was, in view of the Soviet position there. They considered this a threat and therefore they were drawn to try to work out a modus vivendi with the United States so as to get continuing aid, both civilian and military.

Q: Since the Soviets were arming the Somalis, were we in a position where we felt that we had to arm the Ethiopians?

HUMMEL: Yes. We wanted to be a military counterweight.

Q: What were we doing with the Ethiopian Army?

HUMMEL: We provided them with some fighter aircraft, small arms, tanks, ammunition, and training.

Q: Was there any concern about what the Ethiopian Army was doing to the Eritreans? Were the Eritreans still called "Shiftas," rather than Eritrean bandits? That was the term used at one point. Was it a pejorative term? Were the Eritreans also called the Eritrean liberation forces? In those days were they considered liberators, rather than bandits?

HUMMEL: Of course, the government in Addis Ababa had its own words for them and didn't use the word liberation. However, neither did they downgrade them to the status of a bunch of shiftas or bandits. They knew that they were a very serious challenge to the government. Many of the Eritreans were Muslims. Actually, it turned out that Eritrea was about half Muslim and half Christian. However, the Muslim half was strongly supported by their Muslim friends in Sudan and also from across the Red Sea, as I mentioned.

Q: What sort of military mission did we have in Ethiopia at that time?

HUMMEL: We had a pretty large MAAG, or Military Assistance Advisory Group, supervising the military aid program. We had a large AID office, which was heavily involved in all kinds of developmental projects. We had a pretty large Peace Corps. The Peace Corps youngsters, who had to be pulled out shortly after I left Ethiopia because conditions became very tough because of security considerations, were quite dedicated and effective. The Ethiopians had their own views of the Peace Corps people. I had more than one Ethiopian say, "We thank you very much for these young Peace Corps people. They do good work. Also, it's very nice of you to send young ladies over, so we can sleep with them." The Ethiopians have quite a sense of humor!

One of the unlovely things about Ethiopian society was the way in which they looked down on and really discriminated against people with darker skin than they had and African features. This attitude was terribly hard on the foreign diplomatic community there. Ethiopians are very bright and lively people, and they were only half joking when they say that there are three kinds of people in Africa: there are the blacks, the pinks, and the whites. The blacks are the Bantus to the south, the West Africans, and those people who have Negroid facial features. They say, "You Westerners are the 'pinks.' We Ethiopians are the 'whites.'" I always enjoyed that. That comment went around as a "bon mot" every time the matter was mentioned. They were only half joking about their superiority. The wives of the West and southern African diplomats and their staffs who had to go to the markets to do the shopping were really despised and treated abominably by the Amhara shopkeepers. It was a kind of racial discrimination that was very difficult for them.

Q: They had their own minority group who were looked down upon. They were the Gullahs who had sort of "African" features. Did we make a practice of sending American Blacks either to the Peace Corps or in the Embassy or in AID?

HUMMEL: Yes.

Q: How did that work out?

HUMMEL: Anybody who was an American, no matter how he or she looked, had automatic status. I don't recall any signs of discrimination against African Americans who were assigned to Ethiopia by the U. S. Government.

Q: What was your impression of our aid program at the time you arrived in Ethiopia?

HUMMEL: I didn't have much to find fault with. All of it seemed useful and devoted to appropriate sectors of Ethiopia. I was not personally aware of any great waste or mismanagement. I'm sure that there was some leakage of aid funds through prominent Ethiopian officials. That happens in many societies. However, I didn't directly see any of that.

One thing that really burned me was the fact that the CIA people lied to me and refused to answer my requests for information about what the Israelis were doing to help the Ethiopian Government. As you know, the American-Israeli relationship was compartmentalized under Jim Angleton.

Q: He was the counterintelligence chief [of CIA].

HUMMEL: But he also handled the Israeli account in CIA. He wasn't going to let CIA officials tell anybody, especially people in the State Department, as I found out later, just what he knew about Israeli operations in Ethiopia or in any other country. I simply wanted to know about them both for planning purposes and to maintain my own credibility, so that the Ethiopians wouldn't think that I was so dumb that I didn't know what was going on. I also wanted to know from the point of our own interests. Who knows what the Israelis might have been up to? Later on, they were involved in some very difficult things in regard to Iran, for instance--I'm referring to the activities of Lt. Colonel Oliver North of the National Security Council staff and all that. But I could never get the CIA people to tell me what they knew. I tried leaning on the State Department and I may have written a personal letter to Secretary of State Kissinger about this. However, nobody was willing to jump in and say that I had a need to know.

Q: Were the Ethiopian Jews, the "Falashas" a factor at that time?

HUMMEL: No, that came later on, toward the very end of my tenure as Ambassador to Ethiopia. A man named Berger, the brother of Ambassador Sam Berger, a Foreign Service Officer and former Ambassador to South Korea, took up the cause of the Falashas, who were very dark-skinned remnants of a Jewish tribe who still carried on some Jewish religious practices, although they had lost any knowledge of the Hebrew language. Most of them were not literate, either. During my time in Ethiopia Sam Berger's brother was fighting a long drawn-out battle with the Israeli authorities, who did not wish to recognize the Falashas as people who deserved asylum in Israel. Eventually, Berger won out, and these people began to be airlifted out of Ethiopia to Israel. I think that they have all been moved to Israel by now.

Q: We played no particular role in this matter at the time you were in Ethiopia?

HUMMEL: No. But at the time I was there the protection or the release of the Falashas to go to Israel was not on the official Israeli agenda that I am aware of. The Israelis had policy problems with an issue like this. They had serious difficulties in maintaining footholds in many African countries, because they were expelled from so many of them. The Islamic countries put such great pressure on many African countries that the Israelis were hard put to have places where their airplanes could land and where they could conduct normal operations. So they cultivated the African countries where they were welcome and would not want to complicate relations with pressures on the government about what they considered side issues.

Q: What was the Embassy in Addis Ababa like--who was your DCM and how did the Embassy operate?

HUMMEL: My first DCM was named Parker. His tour was shortly completed, and he left. He was very good and very helpful in getting me started in Ethiopia. He was replaced by Art Tienken, who eventually became Ambassador to another African country.

Q: Mauritania, I believe.

HUMMEL: He was really a first class officer. He had had extensive experience in Africa. He was very upset when I would go off on bird shooting expeditions on Sundays with only one junior Foreign Service Officer, who was an Amharic speaker. Like me, he was very much interested in hunting as a sport. Ethiopia was a real paradise for bird shooting. The Ethiopian Christians, who belong to a branch of the Coptic Church, had adopted many Judaic traditions. They wouldn't eat pork, but they would allow pigs to be shot by others all over the place. They didn't eat wild birds or shellfish. Not eating wild birds meant that village boys were not killing birds, or disturbing them. My junior FSO friend and an AID Director, Ted Morse, a super guy, who would go out on these bird shooting expeditions. Sometimes there would be three of us and sometimes only two of us. We would drive out of Addis Ababa about an hour or so, up into the hills. I remember one time when we brought back 50 birds which we had shot.

Q: You kept the Embassy well-stocked with game birds?

HUMMEL: Yes, and other Embassies as well.

Q: Can we talk about developments while you were there? What happened when you were there as far as the Ethiopian Derg was concerned?

HUMMEL: I think that during the time I was there things were fairly stable. We had continuing trade problems. There's a spice company based in Kalamazoo, Michigan, which was more or less forced out of business. We had to threaten the Ethiopian Government with application of the Hickenlooper Amendment. We would make demands, but the Ethiopians never did very much about it. Aside from that, we didn't have any really serious difficulties.

Q: During the time you were there relations weren't tense, as they became later on.

HUMMEL: No. The Ethiopian Army was under pressure, not only from the Eritrean rebellion in the North, but also from continued incursions from Somalia. To this day the Somalis, I believe, have written into their constitution--insofar as Somalia has any constitution left--the need to reclaim the Ogaden area, which belongs to Ethiopia. Somalia also has a claim to part of Kenya.

Q: Yes, the five stars of the Somali flag represent Djibouti, Ogaden, Kenya, the former British Somaliland, and the former Italian Somaliland. It's an "aggressive" constitution, you might say.

Back in 1960-1961 I was the INR specialist on the Horn of Africa. Everything there was a "zero sum" game, so to speak. If we helped Somalia, the Ethiopians got mad. The contention then was that Somalia could always be "bought." How were your relations with our Embassy in Mogadishu? Did you get together from time to time?

HUMMEL: Yes, we did, and that's one of the things that I'm proud of. As far as I know, I invented this idea of having a mini Chiefs of Mission conference, originated in the field, among Ambassadors, only inviting Washington at the last minute. I did this again when I was Ambassador in Pakistan and we had meetings of the American Ambassadors to South Asian countries. We would send messages laterally which were not repeated to Washington to make plans. I organized a U. S. Chiefs of Mission conference for Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, and Kenya, which we held in Nairobi.

After we'd settled on a date and place we would use our own travel funds, so we didn't have to ask Washington for that. Only a few weeks before the meeting we let Washington know that we were going to have this conference and would like to have some modest participation by the Department. I say "modest," because I'd been through the mill, when I was Ambassador to Burma and also as Acting Assistant Secretary for East Asian Affairs, of having these enormous Chiefs of Mission conferences. They were attended, not only by all of the Ambassadors in the Far East (not very many--only 13 or 14). The bad thing was that the Department of Defense would send at least five people and AID would send six people, USIA, CIA, Treasury, Agriculture and all. The whole room would be crowded with bystanders sent from Washington, many just for a junket. They probably learned something from what the chiefs of mission were saying, but the whole process was terribly cumbersome and prevented confidential dialogue. It was to avoid that kind of chiefs of mission conference that I set it as I did. As I recall, we only had two people from Washington--and both of them were appropriate and welcome, and from the State Department.

There was one very contentious issue that eventually divided us in Nairobi. I flatly refused to participate in discussion of it. It involved something that had been in the American press--about aid to a rebel in Angola. The Ambassador to Kenya, a political appointee who was, I thought, quite naive, was trying to get us to send a message to Washington saying that the United States should withdraw support for that program.

Q: I think that at that point, when Henry Kissinger was Secretary of State, we were giving military assistance to Jonas Savimbi.

HUMMEL: I was not at all happy with American policy on this issue, but I said that I simply would not sign a declaration which only one side of the issue described. The draft he presented to us was not descriptive of the issue and only demanded one thing from the United States, stopping aid, without assessing its consequences or the alternatives to it. It was just a dumb and one-sided thing to do. However, that did not harm the conference. We got along quite well, personally.

Q: What about your views on American policy toward Somalia? Was Somalia considered a "write-off" at that time?

HUMMEL: Yes. It's a little bit odd, considering what we did later. However, Somalia was considered a "write-off" because the Soviets were deploying such substantial assets there. After I left Ethiopia the story of how the Soviets neatly switched their client relationship from Somalia to Ethiopia, while we took on Somalia as a client, has never really been told. It should be, because it is a rather astonishing sequence of events in the Cold War.

Q: Did you have any dealings with Mengistu?

HUMMEL: Yes, indeed, on several occasions.

Q: Would you talk about how you viewed him, or is this something that you haven't thought about much?

HUMMEL: I considered him to be intellectually several steps below the intelligence of his two superiors in the Derg. A triumvirate ran the Military Committee, which had about 40 members. The three men I refer to formed the Executive Committee. Taferi Banti was the top man, Atanafu was number two, and Mengistu was number three.

As I said earlier, Benti and Atanafu were pretty savvy people. I felt much more comfortable dealing with them than with Mengistu. I had no idea that Mengistu would turn out to be the monster he became. However, I certainly felt that he was of lesser quality as a leader, trickier, and somewhat hostile in his manner. I mean that he was not very sympathetic to the American point of view. The other two were more sympathetic, or at least showed some understanding of American positions. Mengistu didn't want to show such understanding. My talks with him were usually somewhat confrontational.

Q: Didn't we still have a Consulate General in Asmara?

HUMMEL: Yes, and we had a Consulate General in Djibouti, which was not, of course, part of Ethiopia.

Q: Regarding the Consulate General in Asmara, did they suffer from what you might call localities in their view of the Eritrean independence movement?

HUMMEL: No, they had a kind of siege syndrome. It was indeed a siege-type situation, and security was very poor. The people assigned there served for short tours because of the danger to everybody in Asmara. There was no real contact between the Eritreans and our people in the

Consulate General because of the civil war that was going on. If anything, they had sympathy for the efforts of the Central Ethiopian Government in its efforts to unify the country and not let it fall apart. The key port in Eritrea was Massawa. Land communications between Asmara and Massawa were continually being broken by the insurgents. This situation greatly affected the viability of Asmara itself. The North-South road, I think, was generally kept open to the rest of Ethiopia, so that food and other supplies could get in that way.

KEITH L. WAUCHOPE
Deputy Principal Officer
Asmara (1975-1977)

Ambassador Wauchope was born and raised in New York, graduated from Johns Hopkins University and, after a tour in the US Army in Vietnam, in 1966 joined the Foreign Service. His specialty being African affairs, Mr. Wauchope served in a number of African posts, including Ft. Lamy, Asmara, Bamako and Monrovia. In 1989 he was appointed Ambassador to Gabon, where he served from 1989-1992. In his several Washington assignments Ambassador Wauchope dealt with personnel, cultural, Latin American affairs and Sudan affairs.

WAUCHOPE: Now, let me set the scene a little bit about what Asmara was like.

Q: You were there from '75 to when?

WAUCHOPE: Well, I was there from July '75 to April of '77.

Q: Okay.

WAUCHOPE: I began studying up on the problems of the area. Haile Selassie had been removed from office, but was still alive, and was under house arrest in the country. The country was being run by a shadowy group of military officers who were making decisions for the government. The Eritrean civil war had been going on since 1959 or '61 depending on how you calculate it, when the Ethiopian government under the emperor betrayed the UN brokered agreement on Eritrea's semi autonomy. Haile Selassie occupied Eritrea and dissolved their local legislature. It started as a very low intensity insurgency, but that had been going on for some 15 years by the time I arrived. In January, 1975 there was what was later known as the uprising, at a point when the military clique that ran the country, the Derg, was at a weak point. Eritreans, including some who were in the military and those who had risen to positions of great responsibility, attempted to seize the capital of Asmara and thereby break the region off from Ethiopia by force. The insurgents, with the collusion with these Eritreans, overran the city and held it for several days. The Derg then sent more troops to Asmara and they eventually drove the rebels out of the city. But the impact on the city was staggering. I say this as preface to my arrival what this city was like. First, there had been a very substantial Italian community in Eritrea in general, and in Asmara, in particular. At its peak under Mussolini, who had encouraged migration there, there had been 135,000 Italians. Prior to this takeover in January of '75 there had been about 15,000 to

20,000 Italians still left in Eritrea. But after this uprising, in which there were firefights in every quarter and many buildings were damaged or destroyed. As a result, the Italian population dropped off markedly.

Q: Was this because of nationalist impulses and saying get these foreigners out of there? They decided it was a healthy place?

WAUCHOPE: The remarkable thing about the Italian experience in Eritrea, and this addresses the cultural issues and the differences in the way in which colonial experiences vary in Africa. Some Eritreans, and particularly the insurgents, were favorably disposed to the Italians. The Italians had invested in Eritrea, they had businesses there. They ran the brewery, a big textile factory and the Coca-Cola bottling plant, and they had trained Eritreans up to a certain level, mainly technical skills. Yet they had never established a college. It was only after the British administration under the United Nations mandate that they the first university was established. The Eritreans intermarried with the Italians, and they felt the Italians were sympathetic people. They got along with them quite well, so it was not the insurgents' intent to drive them out, but the Italians felt they were in danger of being caught in the middle. After the Derg drove the rebels out of Asmara, the Ethiopians were very harsh in repression and they shut the city down. Asmara became much less a pleasant place to live. For Italians who first colonized Eritrea in the 1890s this had been a sweet existence, I can tell you. There were third-generation Italians there who had lived in Eritrea all their lives. First, you have to remember that at 7,700 feet, so the climate is cool, pleasant, and sunny virtually all of the year round. In the rainy season, it rains from about 3:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon, and then that's that. They had these very productive farms, not to say plantations, and they ran all the industrial activity. They played bocce ball and sat around drinking and talking in the afternoons under the big shade trees. Life was very, very nice; not unlike what the British had in Kenya during its heyday. The possibility of being driven out was very difficult for these people to accept. Nonetheless, the Italian population dropped drastically, as they realized that this was probably not a long-term situation that they could hang on to. In any event, when I arrived in July of 1975, the population of the city was down probably by a third from what it had once been. There were whole middle class neighborhoods that were abandoned, including both Italian and matesse communities. All major buildings were pockmarked with bullet holes, and heavily armed guards in sandbagged positions at all the government offices. There were roving patrols and machine gun jeeps throughout the city. Most particularly, there was a rigid curfew. The curfew was from 7:00 at night until 6:00 in the morning.

Q: Oh, that's a rough one.

WAUCHOPE: It was a curfew for which you could have a pass, but it was worth your life to go out because the security forces would open fire on anybody who was out after 7:00. So, everybody had to be in by 6:30 because, being not far from the equator. daylight hours didn't vary very much. We felt it best to be in well before the sunset. We got everybody into our compounds, and every night there was gunfire. Some of it would be just trigger-happy sentinels, or sometimes the insurgents would infiltrate the city. The curfew gave them that opportunity, and with the help of people in the city who were sympathetic to the rebels, they could slip in. They

used the opportunity to communicate with their family, raise money, propagandize and then slip back out again. Occasionally they would attack some of the facilities. They'd shoot them up.

Q: Were the Ethiopians still maintaining that these were bandits or shiftas?

WAUCHOPE: Yes, that was their basic position that the insurgents were shiftas, and they denied that there was any real political underpinnings. The Derg maintained the fiction that Haile Selassie, now deposed and discredited, in incorporating Eritrea into Ethiopia and disbanding the autonomous legislature had acted in accordance with the will of the people. In reality that wasn't the case. The Eritrean people were very strongly opposed. Even though they agreed on that, that the insurgent groups were themselves split. The ELF was primarily a Muslim group with ties to the more radical Arab states.

Q: ELF being?

WAUCHOPE: Eritrean Liberation Front. Then later and more importantly there was the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front, the EPLF, which was a Marxist-Leninist, largely Christian group with some Muslims. It was more disciplined and it became the more powerful and more coherent of the two groups. But both of them were significant political organizations and had a structure and a leadership hierarchy. They were not people to be taken lightly. They had some successes in the countryside even after the failed January attempt to take over Asmara. They had excellent intelligence and they knew virtually everything the Ethiopians did. They made a point of taking actions that would tend to demoralize the Ethiopian garrison. For example, they blew up the Coca-Cola factory shortly after I arrived. There was great consternation over that in the expat community, no soft drinks and no mixers for their gin and tonics. Also, the rebels had factory owners they liked and the ones they didn't like. So, they tended to target the former.

I arrived in this situation in July 1975 the city very tense and the people feeling oppressed by the very tight security. In addition to the curfew, you could not travel out of the city. There were roadblocks on every egress. These rules applied even to consular corps officials. So, we would host these kabuki theater-like lunches with local officials. I remember asking agricultural officials what they thought of the coming harvest was going to be that season. They'd say, oh they think it's going to be better. Well, they hadn't themselves been out of Asmara because it was worth their life to travel out as they would be shot or kidnapped. They had no idea what was actually going on out in the countryside. That's essentially what the Ethiopian occupation was. They controlled all of the principal towns, and particularly the ones along the supply lines to the south to Ethiopia. The rest of it was effectively beyond their control. They didn't make heroic efforts to go and challenge the rebels. They'd occasionally bomb or shell certain areas or suspected infiltration routes, but they weren't carrying out any significant counterinsurgency operations per se. At that time, they just let things play out because they figured as long as they held all the centers of the productive activity in the territory; that was all they needed to do. The senior official there was called the Martial Law Administrator, a Brigadier General named Getachew. I got to know him reasonably well. He had been to the United States, and had attended the Army staff college probably under IMET, the International Military Education Training program. As a result he had a reasonably favorable opinion of the United States. This was at a time, however, when there was an evolution of attitude among Derg officials towards

the United States. The government was going increasingly moving to the leftist camp, and was now receiving assistance from bloc countries and Cubans. They had asked the Soviets and the Cubans to help them repel the Somali incursions in the past, and they were becoming more and more dependent on them for arms. Every time they would ask us for replacement weapons, as we'd been their principal arms supplier, there was a clear reluctance and often a long hiatus between the request and even the partial fulfillment of those requests. They were viewing the United States as an unreliable supplier of military equipment. Again it was a military government faced with insurgency not only in Eritrea, but in other parts of the country as well. They needed a reliable source of arms and they weren't getting it. They felt the United States was not living up to its part of the bargain. So, they turned more and more toward the Soviets, and more of the Derg's rhetoric had a Marxist tone. This fellow Mengistu was beginning to emerge as the leading figure in the group. Initially he had several lieutenants behind him, but increasingly as time wore on his subordinates disappeared from view. The next thing you knew, they'd been executed or exiled.

In any event, as that whole process was unfolding, there was a growing problem in terms of how the consulate viewed the insurgency in Eritrea and how the embassy in Addis viewed it. That is not an uncommon problem, yet we felt it was our obligation to report things as we saw them. In the time that I was there, some 21 months, there were at least 450 Eritrean civilians killed in reprisal actions by Ethiopian government security or military forces. In some cases it was parallel police. Shortly after I arrived there had been an assassination of an Ethiopian officer in a certain neighborhood. That very evening, troops from units that he had commanded came into that neighborhood and dragged people out of their homes and eviscerated and left their bodies around the assassination site. There were 45 people killed in retaliation. We quickly learned of it. The Eritrean staff, our FSNs, would tell us without embellishment what happened. So, we would attempt to confirm it, to get good solid information, and then we would report it. We had the right and authority to report directly to the Department, and we'd also send copies to Addis. That was never really challenged. Our embassy was trying to retain a shred of proper and friendly relations with the Ethiopians, and these atrocities placed a strain on this process. We still had a functioning military mission in Addis. We had a fairly large defense attaché office as well. By reporting these things and sending them to Washington, we could be seen to be undermining that effort to retain the basics of a relationship. The Embassy conveyed a sense that we could be a little less sensational in reporting these incidents. We said when one person is assassinated and 45 people are killed in retaliation, it's very difficult to put any other face on it than as an atrocity. To be fair about it, Art Tienken was the DCM and he's a very good and decent man, and he could see our perspective. As such, there was no real effort to censor or quash what we were reporting, thank God. This was not always the case with his successor, Peter Sebastian.

Q: Who was the ambassador?

WAUCHOPE: Art Hummel was the ambassador. When his tour was up, the U.S. didn't send anybody out for a long period of time so Art Tienken became the Chargé. Art Hummel was sort of an odd choice for Ethiopia. He was Old School, an old Asian hand. He was born in China, a missionary child, and he actually fought in the Chinese nationalist resistance against the Japanese occupation. China was his area of expertise, and he ended up going to China eventually. He was a very elegant and decent man. His wife was very nice and gracious, of the old Foreign Service.

The Embassy had this fantastic compound in Addis, the former Japanese Embassy and residence. We used to get down to Addis fairly frequently because it was important to maintain our contacts with the Embassy. While we had all the restrictions on our movements, etc., they had no such restrictions. There was a curfew in Addis, at 10:00 pm, I think, but you could show a pass and no one would open fire on you. So, we would visit the Embassy to make sure that we understood one another and that knew the personalities we were dealing with in Addis.

As I say, Ambassador Hummel was a very decent fellow, of the old Foreign Service, but there was one issue that I brought to his attention that I was disappointed with how he reacted. In Asmara, whenever you went for an official appointment the Ethiopian security guards insisted that you submit to a search. I remember going to see the mayor of Asmara and the guard kept insisting that I had to go through a body search and of my briefcase. I had an appointment made well in advance, so I just got my back up. I refused as a consular officer to be searched and insisted that the guard call the mayor to tell him I would not be coming because of the search requirement. I tried to make it clear that they had to respect my rights and immunities. Of course, that effort went over the guard's head, but he did call the Mayor's office and was told not to search me. I was trying; one by one, to preserve my rights and the respect to which a consular officer is entitled intact. Another time, I was a non-pro courier bringing a classified diplomatic pouch to Addis and airport security insisted that I open the pouch. I told them that, if they insisted, I would take the pouch and go back on the plane to Asmara. The confrontation kept escalating to higher and higher levels. Eventually, I won the point, although it took over an hour. It took that kind of willingness to face these people down. So, I brought this issue to the ambassador hoping for his and the Embassy's support. He said that even when he went to the movies the Ethiopians insisted on searching him and he didn't it was big deal. So I didn't get any satisfaction on this, so we just had to carry on the fight ourselves. I must say, however, we pretty much made the point and increasingly they didn't hassle us. They eventually realized that we did have certain rights and privileges.

Q: Now, in Eritrea, was Kagnew Station, had that gone?

WAUCHOPE: No. In point of fact that's why we still had a consulate there at all.

Q: Why don't you explain what Kagnew Station is?

WAUCHOPE: Yes, that's a good idea. The history goes back quite a way. What is extraordinary about Asmara is the location is not only is it 7,700 feet, but it has beautiful, clear weather most of the time. It's a superb location for telecommunications, communications relay going back to the establishment of Radio Marconi in the 1920s by the Italians. It was used by the Italians to communicate with their east African provinces and navy. They could get radio signals from Rome or from Libya and then retransmit them into the Indian Ocean and along the coast. In the Second World War the British Captured Eritrea in 1940 and they set up their own facility. They realized that you could not only receive and relay communications, but you could also intercept their enemies' signals. It became a very important interception location. If you read some of the literature on this, for example "The Bodyguard of Lies," we helped the British even before we entered the war in these interception activities. In particular, just before the D-Day invasion, the Japanese military attaché in Berlin had inspected the West Wall and prepared a very detailed

report on the fortifications in Normandy and in Calais. We had broken the Japanese diplomatic code. We intercepted this report, broke the code and had a fairly detailed idea of what the allied invasion forces would confront. It proved to be a remarkably important facility during that phase.

Beyond that when the war ended the British continued to maintain their communication, telecommunication facility there so they could communicate throughout south Asia and relay communications, and they probably did some intercept work. In 1952 when the U.N. mandated Eritrea's semi-autonomous federation with Ethiopia, the Americans negotiated an agreement to set up a telecommunications facility in Asmara called Kagnev Station. It became more and more sophisticated as time went on, and at its peak in the mid-1960s, there 6,500 Americans there. It was a massive operation with 13 sites. It did telecommunications relay, and telecommunication intercept work. Increasingly, Kagnev got more and more sophisticated equipment. It had a huge dish antennae that was some 80 feet across and it took them weeks to get it up from Massawa, up the winding road to the heights of Asmara to install it. It cost millions of dollars. I remember in my time we sold it for scrap for \$6,000. In any event, Kagnev had been a tremendously successful operation over the years. For example, it had provided the communications relay for Kissinger's early trips to China, first the secret mission and then the Nixon visit. It had the capability to communicate directly to Beijing from Asmara and then relay to Europe and then to the U.S. Telecommunications technology was constantly changing, and while I was there, DOD was considering its options. First there were the costs versus the efficiency of the technology; then there was the threat from the insurgency which included safety risks to its personnel. Our profile, while much reduced from its peak of 6500, was still very high with some 60 Americans and three sites plus the main base compound still in operation. We were still viewed as we had been in our heyday when Kagnev employed thousands of Eritreans. We had operated our own television and AM/FM radio stations. They had a big R&R facility down in Massawa for the Kagnev families. They could go to the Red Sea and go swimming and rent boats and all that. They had helicopter communications between those R & R sights. They had a hunting lodge in Keren and other recreational activities in the region. The Americans had also become involved in charitable activities. They supported an eye hospital, and had programs to fly people, especially children, back to the United States for medical treatment. Americans had an excellent reputation. The Eritreans really liked the Americans because of all we had done there and because they had treated the Eritreans with decency. Our reputation, however, had begun to erode by the time I arrived. There were about 55 to 60 Americans operating three sights at that stage because satellites had taken up much of the burden. We still had interception capabilities and other telecommunications relay capabilities. The U.S. Navy was now operating the facility primarily for communication relay for the Indian Ocean fleet. Kagnev still provided useful and reliable telecommunications relay activity. There were 11 or 12 U.S. Navy personnel and the rest of the Americans were contractors. They lived on the main base, the American part of which was one tenth of what it had once been, the rest having been taken over by the Ethiopian military. The outlying facilities had been automated to a certain degree and they were at some distance from the main base. The issue of whether the DOD was going to retain Kagnev was an open ended question. From a budgetary perspective, they basically wanted to retain it at a minimal cost since no money had been budgeted to replace it. This was fine for the near term, but as the political situation evolved and the tensions between the U.S. and the Ethiopian government increased, the future was very uncertain. Among the insurgents, the "fighters" as the Eritreans called their countrymen, out in the bush, there was a sense that the need to maintain Kagnev was why the

American continued to support the Ethiopians despite the increasing friction. Despite the residual friendly and cordial relations between Americans at Kagnev and the Eritreans, the insurgents tried to figure out ways to get this message across to the American government. This resulted in their actions against Kagnev operations and particularly the Americans operating them. The insurgents had just begun a campaign of kidnapping foreigners to get some international attention. They seized the British honorary consul, a British businessman and marched him off in broad daylight into the bush. He was released almost a year later, and was the better for the experience reportedly having lost weight and being more fit than ever. The first kidnapping of Americans was when they overran one of our outlying facilities at night. There was a just skeletal staff there, and no real guards to speak of. They took the two Americans hostage and marched them off into the bush. In total there were five Americans kidnapped; two more at a remote site and one from his home in Asmara. They were all eventually released, having been held for about 10 months to 15 months. They were all treated well. When they were released, in Sudan in every instance, they had no complaint. Things became much more somber however, when two Americans were killed. I remember as I was the acting principal officer at the time when the two Americans were killed in a land mine explosion. The insurgents had planted a land mine on the roads to one of the outlying sites. It was placed in a mud puddle and, as such, the American couldn't see any sign of it. Two civilian contractors were driving a pick up truck when they hit the mine. They were blown right through the roof of the cab and were killed instantly. That event cast a pall on all of Kagnev's operations. We were surprised and much taken aback that the insurgents did this. We never learned whether they were after us or whether they were after Ethiopian patrols. We were certain that they knew damn well that the Americans came down that road and, if they really cared to avoid harming Americans, they would not have done that. That was the only such deadly incident, but it was bad enough and it accelerated planning for alternatives to Kagnev. We did close down that sight; it was just too remote. The Navy shifted to using two sites closer to the main facility. The Navy's general sense was, whatever the threat, they were tolerable for the time being, so let's try to keep this thing going if we can. We did, and Kagnev personnel came in and went out. The contractors were paid well, and they were basically self-sustaining. Kagnev hired very substantial numbers of Eritreans on construction and maintenance crews and this kept whole facility running at a relatively low cost. All the costs were largely sunk costs and they had already been amortized.

Kagnev was the key rationale for the Consulate being there. There were six positions at the consulate, although that included a secretary who was sent down to Addis after the situation began to get dicey with the kidnappings. In addition to the five Americans, all males, there were six marine guards. That was our total complement.

Q: Who was the, was it consulate general or?

WAUCHOPE: There was a consul general, yes.

Q: Who was the consul general?

WAUCHOPE: George Sherry was the first one, and Bob Slutz was the second. Again, neither one was really an African area specialist, but they were good solid officers, and did a credible job. There was a very small consular community in Asmara. The British had an honorary consul

who was kidnapped six months or so into my tour, and not replaced. There was a small French consulate and a Sudanese consulate as well. There was an Italian Consulate General because of the number of Italian citizens, which, after that initial January of '75 attack, had dropped to perhaps 3000. As the situation returned to a degree of stability, the numbers then returned to as many as 9000. The official policy of the Italian government was to have the Italians out of harms way and it was paying resettlement allowances for them to return to Italy. I got to know a number of Italians in Asmara, and they were really nice and gracious people. Of course, they were all neo-fascists, if you will. You could find Mussolini buttons and other fascist memorabilia in stores throughout Asmara. Many of the Italians were brought to Eritrea under Mussolini and they harked back to the glory days. The Italians in Asmara thought that Italy was in the grasp of the communists, or worse yet the socialists. They had no use for any of these groups, and the idea of going back to live in Italy was just an anathema. As I said, they had a very good life in Eritrea and they wanted to hang onto that.

Again, their community went back up to over 9,000 after the January '75 draw down. The Ethiopian government preferred that the Italians not come back to Eritrea, and they put restrictions on their return, in part because it thought that the Italians were colluding with the rebels. In some cases, the Italians would sneak back through Sudan to Asmara through the rebel side. They were welcomed by the Eritreans, who felt that the Italians, at least recently, treated them decently. I will say that, while the Italians didn't provide the Eritreans a university, they did provide them vocational training. As a result, Eritreans learned to do just about anything a European could do in terms of operating and maintaining equipment and doing whatever was necessary to keep things running. For example, the Eritreans ran the power plant and the water pumping station in Addis. As there had been some acts of sabotage in Addis, the Ethiopians decided that the Eritreans were a threat to the security of their capital, and began to expel the Eritreans. Once they started the process, they quickly realized that the Eritreans ran all these vital operations and that there were no Ethiopians who could do it. Then they had to relent and allow them to stay. Of course, Ethiopian Air Lines was operated almost entirely by Eritreans. Likewise, most of the pilots, both air force pilots and the airline pilots were Eritreans.

So there was some appreciation for what the Italians had done for them. During my time there, I saw the Italians treat the Eritreans reasonably well, although sometimes they could be harsh and critical. Given the extensive intermarriage at the lower socio-economic level, this is not surprising. The Italian consul general had large responsibilities. Besides himself, there was a consul, vice-consuls and had a technical staff. The French consulate officer was a career officer, a vice consul with some African experience. The Sudanese consul general was a really nice fellow, both honest and frank, and obviously sympathetic to the Eritreans. I learned later that he was in contact with the insurgents. I met him later when I was Sudan Desk Officer and he had become the chief of protocol at the Sudanese foreign ministry. He told me that the insurgents knew about our movements and where I lived, but he told the fighters not to give me any trouble; not to come after me. For much of my time there, until the kidnappings became a serious threat, I was living off the compound, and they knew where I was. There weren't that many foreigners and they knew where everybody was. He told the rebels to leave me alone, because I was a good guy and was sympathetic, which I was. I suppose it's not very professional, but I felt that their cause was not being properly represented in the West, that we had gone so far down the line to try to maintain a relationship with the Ethiopians. In doing so, we had forgotten some of our

basic values. After all, the Eritreans were fighting for self-determination, it was their country, they had been betrayed by the West. The UN mandate for federal autonomy had been ignored albeit by Haile Selassie and we had acquiesced in that action. We saw American-made aircraft dropping American bombs on the Eritreans. They would come to us and ask, how could you do this to us, we have been your host for many decades and we've never mistreated you and now you've given the weapons to our enemies to kill our people. We in the Consulate heard what they were saying, but beyond telling the story as accurately as we could to Washington, we could little more. We tried to make the point, but ultimately we were losing our ability to persuade the Eritreans of our sympathy. It was to the time that the U.S. military mission would learn about military activities, but would not share this intelligence with us. This really riled me because our security could be at risk. I got the consul general riled up on this as well. The MilMish (US Military Mission) had contacts in the Ethiopian military, and they even occasionally visited counterparts in Asmara without advising the consul general of their visit. They would discuss with their contacts in the Ethiopian garrison about what they needed which was indicative of their operations. They would return to Addis and make their recommendations to DOD, and never share their information on the security situation with the consulate. We took great offense at this and eventually we required them to obtain our clearance before they visited. The MilMish was apparently concerned that, if it shared what it learned with us, it would compromise its relationship with the Ethiopian military which was increasingly tenuous. When you think about it, putting its relationship with the Ethiopian regime over the safety of their fellow Americans is a sad commentary. Ultimately the Ethiopians prevented them from traveling to Asmara. As the kidnappings continued, we reached a point where it was considered too hazardous for dependents and they were sent to Addis or back to the U.S. Even the RMO would only come up for an afternoon. He'd come up and he'd say. . .

Q: RMO being?

WAUCHOPE: Regional Medical Officer. He'd say, I'm responsible for these people, but I don't think I want to spend the night. He met with whoever needed advice or an examination, inventory of the medical cabinet and then he was gone. Basically, if you wanted to see him you had to go down to Addis. Basically the routine of life in Asmara at that time was a repetitive routine. It would start at 6:00 when the curfew lifted and suddenly the streets would buzz with activity. Because of restrictions on travel to the countryside, food was oftentimes in short supply. For example, they'd run out of the peppers that they put into their zighani, their meat or vegetable stew. There was great consternation when there were no peppers. Teff, a kind of wheat that they used to make the injera was often in short supply. Gasoline was tightly rationed; 20 liters a week per vehicle. Twenty liters wouldn't get you very far, but then you couldn't drive very far anyway. So, a lot of horse carts were brought back into service. Eritrea was going backwards in many ways. Once the daily activities would get underway, usually in a beautiful sunny day in the mid 70s, people would go about their business. It was an industrial city, with the textile plants, the brewery etc. in full operation. The Melotti beer was probably the best of the three breweries in the country. There were several big textile plants as well factories making tiles and building materials. There was a active Ethiopian Airlines operation at the airport. By the afternoon, business people would take a siesta and then return to work between 3:00 and 6:00. There was a great rush to the stores and bars, and some would be open to 6:30 and then everything closed down. By 6:30 everybody was off the street, and by 7:00 the curfew went into

effect. The streets were empty and quiet. With the kidnappings, we were all eventually moved onto the Consulate compound with the Marines, the CG's residence and another residence which became a sort of BOQ. Everybody would then have dinner and then assemble in the consulate reception area and projected movies from the Army-Air Force movie circuit. We'd settle in and then start the movies about 8:00. Often by 9:00 the gunfire would start in the city. So we'd shut down the projector and the marines put on their flak jackets and helmets and would take their firing positions on the perimeter. In addition to the six marines, we had eight locally hired guards who were armed with 45 caliber pistols. We had some seven Ethiopian military personnel armed with two machine guns. Our marine NCOIC was the commander of the guard force, and he was to ensure that these other guards didn't do something stupid like shoot at anybody on the street. They were to fire only if someone tried to come over the wall. We would go over and over the rules of engagement. Old Radio Marconi facility, which was now the Ethiopian naval headquarters, shared our south wall. They had a cement guard box at either end of this wall on the adjacent streets. So when the insurgents would dash along the shadows in these streets, the Ethiopian navy security force would open fire down these streets on either side of us. We'd just sit tight, turn out all the lights and the marines would radio us what was going on. We sat in the doorways so that you'd stay out of the line of fire, and hear bullets going through the trees. Consulate officers were not part of the defense force, and I had full confidence in the marine detachment. They were good people, solid guys. The shooting would go on for an hour or an hour and a half. Finally it would subside, lights would begin to go on in the neighborhood again and then we'd go back and flip on the projector and see to the rest of the movie.

We used to have official visitors spend the night in Asmara, and some thought we were putting this on for them; that this was part of a show. We said, this is pretty much the routine every night. Sometimes flares would go off and we could see who was moving up and down the streets. You could see people like rats scurrying across the street as the insurgents were circling around.

Q: Were you able to talk to Eritrean insurgents?

WAUCHOPE: Well, not directly and we were not authorized to establish contact with them. That was clear and we had to respect instruction from the Embassy in Addis because it would have undermined the credibility of our bilateral relationship. We knew we were talking to people who were talking to the rebels, and we knew that our own staff was talking to them as well. These contacts would give us insights into rebel thinking. As in most African countries, the elites knew one another. They often shared educational experiences whether it was the schools in the city or overseas in Italy or elsewhere. They often knew rebel leaders and had some idea of their perspective. We could cross check information with other sources. We talked to the Italians who had excellent contacts. They may well have been in touch with the other side the Italians still living in insurgent held areas. The Sudanese consulate had good sources as well, and we knew they were in touch with the rebels.

Q: During this, well '75 to '77 period, were you picking up from your contacts in Addis and what you were observing the growing nastiness or whatever you want to call it of the dirge and who was the man?

WAUCHOPE: Yes. I'll tell you we had one story that was later confirmed by the Embassy, but we picked it up first even though it happened in Addis. There was an army colonel named Daniel, an Eritrean, and a formerly a trusted lieutenant of Mengistu. There rumors of a conspiracy to overthrow the Derg leaders. So, Mengistu called a conference of the Derg leadership, the composition of which was not known to anybody outside the group. Our PAO in Addis, Art Lewis, a black guy and a very capable and intense officer, seemed to be the only one who had reliable contacts with the Derg. Our CIA people only seemed to know one or two members, but Art must have known a dozen. We thought there were maybe as many as 40 members of the Derg. In any event, on this particular day Mengistu learned that something was cooking among elements of the Derg. Mengistu convoked them to a meeting hall in the old royal palace. They all appeared at the appropriate moment except for this colonel Daniel fellow who was late to arrive. At the appointed moment Mengistu stepped out of the meeting with a couple of his trusted people, and suddenly the doors opened, his bodyguards burst in and machine gunned everybody in the room. Daniel arrived just as the attack was taking place and when he heard gunfire he figured out what was going on and he took off. He eventually made it into rebel territory.

Another time, I was down in Addis when a member of the Derg, Colonel Sisay, also an Eritrean, and the deputy commander of the air force met his fate. He had been sent by the Derg to Eritrea to do an assessment of the possibilities of winning the war there. He returned to Addis and told the Derg that there was no way that it could win militarily. They had to make peace, had to find a political solution. Mengistu was not happy with this. The officer returned to his home after giving this report, and the Derg sent armored vehicles to surround his house. They did not give him a chance to surrender. They opened fire and absolutely leveled his house. They killed him, his family and his servants. They just fired until the house was rubble. That what happened when you told the Derg what it didn't want to hear. They were getting increasingly vicious and repressive. During this time the Derg launched the red terror in Addis. It created a group of the parallel police to eliminate its enemies. There was a group of even more radical Marxists who were proselytizing among the young people. The parallel police were picking up young students in the Addis area just before curfew. They were tortured and their bodies were found the next morning. In Asmara there was a similar process. Our sources among the Eritreans would give me the license numbers of some of the cars that they were using This process of red terror reflected the Derg's paranoia. One of the reason that Mengistu's paranoia was that he was a graduate of an inferior staff college and was viewed by other Ethiopian military officers as having risen by the back steps of the hierarchy. He also had a reputation in the military as a troublemaker who had been moved from one post to another, one garrison to another, because he constantly created trouble. He was an agitator for one cause or another. Therefore he was not well regarded by the more serious and more traditional Ethiopian military leaders. He was only a lieutenant colonel. He had retired or imprisoned most of the generals, but there were still some full colonels around. These feelings of inadequacy were said to motivate him to eliminate his potential opponents. As I said, his fellow Derg members periodically disappeared and were later found to have been executed. During this time he also apparently poisoned Haile Selassie. The Derg claimed he died of natural causes, although no one really believed that. There was very little in way of mourning in Eritrea for the departure of the Emperor; only in the sense that he had to some extent protected them from some of the worst excesses of the Derg had he continued to live. But when the Emperor died, the Eritreans knew things were going to get worse which they did. During the red terror in Addis Mengistu's would shoot these young students and their bodies would be laid out

in the yard outside of the hospital. Then the parents came looking for their children and the police would say, if you find your child you can have the body if you pay for the cost of the bullet used to shoot them. So, there was seething resentment against the Derg, but it ruled with an iron hand and they had all the elements of the security apparatus completely and thoroughly under their control.

Q: I had back in 1960, '61 been in INR and I had the horn of Africa and I had never been there, but anyway of course everything at that time was predicated on Kagnew Station. That meant that we gave very short shrift to Somalia, you know, if you had to and Haile Selassie of course was firmly in control. There must have been sort of a real sort of title change wasn't there? I mean as satellites replaced antenna, Kagnew was no longer important; it was becoming less and less important. Then you had this very nasty government which we were finding I assume harder and harder to stomach in a way. Were you watching this?

WAUCHOPE: Yes, we used to ask why we are going down this path with the Ethiopians so slavishly. Part of the explanation we were told at that time was that, under Kissinger with the withdrawal from Vietnam in April of 1975, there was a question about American reliability and about its commitments to other countries. As a result the U.S. felt it was important to maintain our credibility by trying to maintain a relationship with Ethiopia even though Haile Selassie who had been our special friend was gone. Haile Selassie, in his later days, became increasingly repressive because, like many of these chiefs of state in the Third World, he had created the conditions for his own overthrow. He established the national university, actually Haile Selassie University. It was highly regarded and was very successful in its international connections. There were many academic exchanges; the Ethiopians went overseas, Americans came to Ethiopia on the Fulbright program and other schemes. At universities people asked questions; for example, why do we live under an absolute monarchy; there's got to be a better way to rule our country. It was these university students who led to the popular uprising, which the emperor tried to suppress, and after many bloody confrontations, the military said enough, we refused to shoot anymore young people. They rose up against the emperor and their leadership formed the military that became the Derg. Even as this group became increasingly radical under Mengistu, the U.S. government still tried to maintain a relationship, claiming that it was important because of the withdrawal from Vietnam. We recognized the emperor had his shortcomings and tried to moderate his actions. We hoped that this military government would transition in to a more democratic process. It didn't prove to be the case and increasingly it went the other way.

Now, with Washington parroting this line about maintaining relationships, the consulate then had to wrestle with the recognition that things was going sour, and we were trying to bring Washington around to realize that we were reaching a point of diminishing returns. About the only way we could reflected U.S. concerns was by our responses to request for military equipment. We would examine their requests, we would hesitate and then we would provide only a small percentage of what they asked for. We told them up front this aid was to be used to address external threats, like the Somalis, or the Sudanese, not to repress their own people. They gave us all the assurances, then immediately used it in Eritrea. That was a betrayal of our agreement and we had to call them on it. So, increasingly, each time they asked for something, they had more difficulty getting it. And so, we became an unreliable arms supplier in their minds.

Q: Were you at all an observer of what was happening down in Somalia?

WAUCHOPE: I did not have much a sense of that. When I later came back to AF/E we became very involved in that issue. There were other crosscurrents at work as well. For example, the Israelis played a role in Ethiopia as well. They were very concerned about the ELF's ties with radical Arab states. They were concerned about Sudan and were interested in seeing if Sudan would become the sort of soft underbelly of Egypt, to keep them sort of off balance. They were providing security assistance to the Derg.

Q: Were there still the Falashas there?

WAUCHOPE: The Falashas were still there, that's right.

Q: The Ethiopian Jews.

WAUCHOPE: Right. The Ethiopian Jews. They were not at that time the particular focus of anybody, nor were they being subjected to the abuses that came later. In any event, the Israel connection was reflected in the fact that most Ethiopian security forces on the streets carried Uzi submachine guns. There were Israeli advisors assigned to the police and the internal security organs as opposed to the army. They thought that they were ensuring that Eritrea not fall into the hands of Islamic groups and become a radical Islamic state on the Red Sea, i.e., Eritrea under the influence of some nation like Iraq. In reality, that was not really likely because, while Islam bound the ELF together, it was not what motivated the insurgency. Ethnicity was a more important division in Eritrea, which was split almost a 50/50 between Muslims and Coptic Christians, with the Muslims being in the low-lying areas and the Christians in the highland areas. The Christian groups were the more sophisticated and the more connected with the larger ideological movements, where the Arabs were more traditional and local in perspective. The rebels went to the Iraqis only because the Iraqis would help them create trouble wherever they could. While the rebels received some help for the Iraqis in the early 70s, they were not beholding to the Iraqis. The Israelis were misled as to the threat that radical Islam constituted in Eritrea, but they wanted to keep their finger on the pulse because it was an area of importance to them.

In any event, the Horn of Africa is sort of a crossroads in a lot of ways between Islam and Africa and of the Christian-Muslim conflict. There are lots of longstanding feuds and territorial disputes in the region. There were not only the Eritrean separatists, but the Tigrean separatists just to the south of Eritrea. They were pretty quiescent at that time. As history has shown, however, they became the dominant force in Ethiopia when they took over the government in Addis. There was also the Oromo liberation movement in southeast Ethiopia which was becoming more active. There was also an insurgent group along the Sudanese border. The Derg were really under siege in a lot of ways, hence, it became more autocratic and more disinclined to listen to other points of view. Mengistu himself felt that he had to eliminate all potential opponents or contestants for power. The government became more and more distasteful as time went on, and the U.S. conducted assessments to determine how important Ethiopia was to our regional and global interests. The response from DOD focused on the ongoing commitment to support the U.S. military forces in the Indian Ocean and in the Gulf, and that was working well. As I said, there

was no budget for any replacement facility at this time, as it seemed to be a relatively cheap operation. Given the Department's policy horizon at that time, Eritrea fell below the radar. To take a cynical perspective, all the costs of the political upheaval including the kidnapping of five Americans and the death of the two technicians were all civilian contractors. The navy complement was only 13 and it administered the operation while these civilian technicians operated the facility. It was a low cost operation and no one was ready to pull plug saying it was no longer important. If Kagnev shut down, then the consulate general would have shut down as well. Our other interests in Eritrea were limited and increasingly not worth the risk. There were some American missionaries there and we wanted to follow events there, but it would never have been enough to warrant maintaining a consulate.

Q: Did the Soviets play much of a role?

WAUCHOPE: Well, there was some concern that the Soviets were looking for a Red Sea port for rest and refit, and refueling their ships. Ethiopia's relationship with the Soviets began to improve under the Derg because it was looking for alternative source of weapons, and the Derg leaders started parroting leftist jargon. Mengistu declared that he was a Marxist-Leninist. The Soviets were very pleased, they thought they had a convert, and did not have to try very hard to persuade them. Marxist Leninism, as was the case in many other Third World countries, was an instrument of maintaining political control over their people more than it was philosophical conviction. If you had asked Mengistu what the tenets of Marxist Leninism were, he would have a damned difficult time telling you. Basically it was it was a unifying concept that allowed him to require loyalty of all his subordinates, and he was the head of the Supreme Soviet, if you will, of Ethiopia. As this process developed, there were concerns that the Soviets moving in to replace the U.S., and there were reports that the Soviets were seeking the right to take on fresh water and to refuel in Massawa. This had a very sinister tone. We didn't like the concept of the Soviets being in the Red Sea in any capacity, but the Ethiopians were going to do what they were going to do. We didn't have much influence remaining as we were increasingly viewed as an unreliable arms supplier by this time. So, we were concerned.

Q: Did you go down to Massawa?

WAUCHOPE: I did, yes, God, it was the hottest place I've ever been in my life. It was in October, which was supposed to be the coolest time part of the year. We had two Americans stationed in Massawa to conduct liaison with the authorities and to handle Kagnev material which occasionally still came through Massawa. When I first arrived, there was still some private travel by the spectacular road with its hair-raising switchbacks to Massawa, but following several ambushes, all such travel was by air. The air distance was about 35 miles and by land it's over 100 miles while dropping a mile and a half. It became too hazardous to try and drive down there.

Q: That was because of insurgency?

WAUCHOPE: Yes, the insurgents attacked even in daylight hours. The Ethiopians hadn't made a heroic effort to keep the road open. They didn't have large forces deployed to try to keep the rebels away. I traveled by air to visit our little liaison facility and I was able to see what we used to control in Massawa. We had several large warehouses, a barracks and recreational facilities

and as well as docks. When I got off the plane, which had basically just taken off and then glided down the escarpment, I was floored by the heat. On the Red Sea, it is not only hot, it is oppressively humid. This was in October and the American liaison officer said, what are you talking about, this is the cool season. It was about 115 degrees I guess when I landed. I guess in the dead of night it got down to 100. We were put up in an Italian villa right on the Red Sea that had electricity, which much of Massawa did not.. There was no interruption and the unit air conditioners made it tolerable. It was clearly a city under siege with about half of its original population. It wasn't so much that it was shot up; there was just no activity to speak of. The port was virtually shut down because there was no place to transport the incoming freight.

Q: Where did Addis, Ethiopia proper get its supplies?

WAUCHOPE: Assab, which is the only other port along Ethiopia's coast. It was also claimed by Eritrea, although I think that they have now agreed to allow the Ethiopians unfettered access to the port. Assab at that time had become their principal port for fuel and commodities. There was a rail line running to Addis. There had been a rail line from Massawa up to Asmara, but it was out of operation. It had been knocked out for some years before I got there because it had been sabotaged many times. The port of Assab became the principal reason why the Derg said it would never permit an independent Eritrea. Ethiopia would be cut off from the rest of the world and become a landlocked country. They acknowledged that Massawa was part of Eritrea, but they tried redrawing of maps to claim that Assab never really was part of Eritrea. That was a great concern to all Ethiopians; to become landlocked was intolerable.

Q: Did Djibouti play a role in what you were doing? Wasn't it under French control?

WAUCHOPE: Yes. Djibouti was an alternate port for the government of Addis, but not a very important one. They weren't so sure whether they could depend on the French and its port indefinitely. They wanted a port they could control and Assab became the port for them. We knew that Eritreans insurgents operated in and out of Djibouti and, I think the French would turn a blind eye to their activities. The Sudanese insurgency in southern Sudan was a continuing problem for Ethiopia. Those rebels would be driven out by the Sudanese government into Eritrea in some cases and in others into Ethiopia. The Ethiopian forces would drive them back across the border. There were occasional incursions and this was one of the Derg's justifications for its need for arms. They were concerned about the protection of their borders with Somalia and Sudan, and they tried to make that a rational case. Ironically when I got to AF/E later we were then listening to the Sudanese concerns about the threat from the Ethiopians. In any event, in terms of its neighbors, the Derg was concerned with Kenya in that Somali insurgents were operating in the eastern Kenya which has a very significant Somali population, and this might spill over into Ethiopia. This Kenyan component was one of the five points on Somalia's flag's five-pointed star. There is Italian and British Somaliland, now Somalia, and then Djibouti, the Ogaden region of Ethiopia and Kenya. They are the five parts of the greater Somalia. The Ethiopians were concerned that some day Somalia would unify all these elements and, because Somalia is supposedly the most rational national entity in because it has one language, one ethnicity and religion, they would pose a threat to its neighbors. . Yet look at Somalia today. It's in complete meltdown.

Q: Broken down into warlords, absolute chaos, it's not even a nation anymore.

WAUCHOPE: Exactly, but there was the concern that they would bring it all together and then Djibouti would be threatened and then the Ogaden, which some thought might have mineral resources and oil, and then northeast Kenya.

Q: Well, then as a political officer, what was your job? I mean it doesn't sound like a hell of a lot of politics.

WAUCHOPE: Well, I was the DPO, I was the consular officer, political officer, and the economic officer, as well. In the consular we had a very fine consular assistant who did most of the work, and I didn't have too many problems in that area. The economic and political side of it was very difficult because all representation efforts had to be done at lunches. Some people used the few hotels to host a decent lunch. But, generally you would do representation at our homes. The first residence I had was right across the street from the Consulate. When I went in to look at this place which they were fixing up, there was a 50-caliber bullet hole all the way through the house. It had come from the pillbox at the Naval HQ and had gone from the living room, through the dining room and out through the kitchen. I thought, this isn't really very encouraging. They did patch it up, and I lived there for a few months until there was a fire right across my house and I spent an hour or so on the floor. For security and representational reasons they found me a very nice villa on the other side of the Consulate. That one had 36 bullet holes in it, but it was above the Naval HQ so no one could shoot across it. They fixed it up and furnished it. I hosted lunches there as it had quite elegant gardens. I was the only consulate officer to live off the compound, and after the kidnappings, I was required to move back to the compound. We retained this villa so I could continue to host representational functions. I had a adequate cook and a gardener who did quite a good job. Representational lunches were confined to businessmen and government officials. Businessmen were very constrained in what they would say because of the threat of nationalization, and the government officials would blatantly lie to you because they didn't know what was going on and they were terrified of departing from the party line. I did get to know General Getachew, the Martial Law Administrator, but he would not come to my home. Most military officers kept their distance from the Americans, although our Kagnew managers were in contact with the second division commander

I'll digress for a moment to give you a sense of the complete authority that Getachew had. One morning I arrived at the consulate and as I passed our senior local Mesfun Hailu, I asked "How's it going today?" He said, "Not very well." I thought that's strange. I said, "What's going on?" As background, his wife had been arrested for being an accomplice with the insurgents, and she was detained in jail. He had been in contact with her and found that her conditions were okay. Although the charges were bogus, they were trying to force her to confess because two other Eritreans were arrested up from Ethiopian Airlines for whom she worked. The authorities were persuaded that they were raising money or channeling money to the insurgents. He was fairly confident that this thing would blow over as there were no grounds for it, and she'd be released. He said he received a call this morning from my wife saying that she was going to be executed this afternoon. I thought Holy Christ, and asked, "Well, what can I do about it?" He said, "Well, I don't know. I'm at a complete loss. I'm trying to contact people I know." I offered to call the martial law administrator and talk to him about it. I have a reasonably good relationship with him.

He said, "Well, okay, he may get really angry about it and it may make things worse, but what can I do? They're going to execute my wife?" So, I got Getachew on the line and started talking in very general terms about how things were going. Then I said, "By the way, one of our senior employees here, Mesfun Hailu, whose wife has been arrested and he received a phone call this morning from her saying that she'd been told she's going to be executed this afternoon." God, this guy exploded like a volcano. I'd never seen him react like this before and he said, "Mesfun Hailu is a spy. He's a rebel and his wife is giving them money." He obviously knew the case. He said, "It's no business of yours. He's an Ethiopian national and you have no right to intervene or you are covering up for spies." He ranted on and on. I let him vent for about five or ten minutes. Then I said, "Well, general, could I ask you just one thing? Would you see Mesfun and talk to him to see what can be done?" So, he said, "Send him down right away," and he hung up. I thought, oh my God. I explained it all to Mesfun and he said, "What can I do?" He went down directly to Getachew's office, and I learned later because he too was arrested. Apparently what happened when he went down to the office, he was made to wait for two hours sweating it out right up to the time when the wife was supposed to be executed. Then a detachment troops came in and hauled him before the martial law administrator who just lambasted him, never letting him speak.

The martial law administrator just blats him for being a spy, for his disloyalty for bringing this to the attention of the Americans, and threatened to shoot him. He ranted at him for ten minutes, and then had the paratroopers haul him out and took him to jail. His brother also worked for us, and I found out from him that Mesfun had been jailed. I thought what the hell am I going to do? At the same time, I realized that he was an Ethiopian national and there are limits in what we are going to be able to do. As it turned out, he was held in jail for about ten days, although he was not abused. Then an agreement was reached. He was released and his wife was expelled from Eritrea and sent to Addis, which was okay. They had four daughters and the daughters then went with the mother down to Addis, and she resumed her employment with Ethiopian Airlines. It's quite a story. She's written a book about her entire experience, as a matter of fact. In any event, Mesfun was then transferred to our Embassy in Addis so that he could be with his family. They both had their families in Asmara, and after Getachew was killed, which I'll explain in a minute, she returned to Asmara to test the waters, flying back and forth. She then brought her four daughters up with her. One night they all slipped away and crossed the lines into rebel territory intending to go to Sudan. They hoped to go to Sudan and then from there to the United States, which they eventually did. The two older daughters decided to stay behind in Eritrea and fight. They were 17 and 19 at that time. They spent the next ten years in the struggle. One was a nurse and the other was a schoolteacher, and of the two was injured in a bombing. In any event, the mother got away and eventually settled in the United States. But the irony was that Getachew, this hardheaded military officer, went to Addis on periodic briefings of the Derg, and finally said to them that the war was unwinnable. There had to be a political solution. He'd seen the way things were and that the resistance was implacable; there was no way to win out. He was sent away from the Derg meeting and returned to his Addis home. Later the same day, the military surrounded his home, destroyed it, and killed him and killed his family and his servants as well.

This was just one more example of the Derg's ruthlessness and recourse to violence. That was the way in which the place operated. We had another FSN employee, whose brother was picked up on an Asmara street, hauled off and hanged without trial. Other people were summarily

executed by Ethiopian authorities. Our sympathies were with those people we knew. Our nationals were suffering. Some of them would leave or would transfer or just couldn't continue to live there any longer, and were driven out of their homes.

This brings me to the closure of Kagnew and our expulsion from the country. It turned out that the relationship was now very bad and we were receiving reports that the Soviets and the Cubans were gaining influence in Addis and that they were prodding the Ethiopians to change the relationship with the United States because the Americans were unreliable. Our consul general, Bob Slutz had long planned a trip to Europe for R&R. He departed on a Friday morning. I remember because it was the Saturday afternoon that we learned of the expulsion order. We had just come back from playing volleyball over at Kagnew when I got a call from Addis saying that they had just received a diplomatic note saying that five U.S. activities in Ethiopia were to come to cease operations and depart the country in four days. They included Kagnew and the consulate general in Asmara. Also it was the U.S. military mission, the DAO and a naval medical experiment facility. Those three were in Addis. We were to make plans right away to how we would carry out the closeout. I said, all well and good you in Addis, you can move around without a curfew. We were facing in one hour's time a curfew that's worth your life to violate. I got on the phone with the Kagnew navy commander, and the ranking leader of the contractors, and we started our planning. The next day was Sunday. Of course they the expulsion order on a Saturday because they knew Sunday was a non-functioning day and it would make things that much more difficult for us. The expulsion was an extraordinary exercise that ended up lasting six days. We got a two-day extension on the third day. I was the Chargé. The thought of getting Bob Slutz, the CG, back quickly vanished when they figured they couldn't get him back in any reasonable period of time. So they had to count on me, an FSO-3, to manage the evacuation. It turned out to be just constant chaos. I remember the first night we had all these plans by phone and radio, constantly calculating what we would need to do, what the phases would be, what we needed to get out and how we would get the people out. I got two hours of sleep that first night. On Sunday we started to get things together and immediately found that we had two Americans down in Massawa on R&R. The two liaison guys had been transferred out; but Kagnew folks still went on R&R down there. I went to the new martial law administrator and asked his help in getting these people out. He immediately saw an opportunity to essentially he them hostage to be sure that we behaved ourselves and followed their orders. Unfortunately, at the first facility that we started to shut down things went awry. The Ethiopian guards, who were supposed to protect us, now turned against our people and came onto the compound. They went into the buildings and prevented them from destroying the classified equipment, and there was a confrontation. The men at the site foolishly tried to sneak out some firearms in the trunk of a car, and they were caught at it. That tore it. The Ethiopians said we could no longer go back to this compound. Well, we had a lot of classified equipment still there. We communicated the situation to Washington in a flash message because American lives are at risk. The Navy said we had to destroy this communications equipment that is very sensitive, but they had no suggestions as how to do so. So, on Monday we started negotiations with the Ethiopian authorities. I had taken a course on emergency evacuation several months before, and this was one of the times when training actually served some benefit in the course of this negotiation. In the negotiating course we were told that every detail is important. The first thing you want to figure out is what should be the physical location of the talks. You want to take the opposite sides of the table and put them at the greatest disadvantage that you can. Things like having the sun shine in their eyes. Also, they said, if you

know the size of the other delegation provide one less chair than that number so they are scrambling around for a chair and it puts them at a disadvantage. So, I dredged up all the things that I had learned in this course, which at the time thinking I thought was kind of silly.

The Ethiopian delegation was all senior military officers and there was the pre-planned scramble for seating. I was able to lay out for them the issues that we absolutely had to have, and one of them was access back to this facility. Among other points, I asserted the that we were immune from search. They countered that everybody's baggage would have to be searched. We went back and forth on this point. Just to give you an idea of this issue, at the consulate we had something like 30 or more firearms. We had perhaps seven carbines left over from when Kagnew was a bigger operation. Our local Ethiopian guards were paid off and told to leave the compound. .So, in the dead of night, I had our marines, smash all these weapons into pieces and threw them down the defunct well. We didn't want to turn weapons over to the Ethiopians. They did insist that we turn over the 45 automatics from our contract guards. The marines had several Uzis, shotguns and their side arms and we just simply weren't going to turn them over. We had seven classified communications machines at the consulate. We immediately destroyed five of them along with all of the classified material in the consulate. We kept two machines operating, and one principal and one backup. Throughout the negotiation, I sent messages to Addis and Washington and asked that they squeeze the Ethiopians because they are the host of the Organization of African Unity. We had friends among the African delegations, and I wanted the U.S. to go to the government in Addis and demand that the not search our materials. The argument was Ethiopia cannot be the host of the OAU and yet treat consular officials without regard for internationally recognized privileges and immunities. The embassy did prevail upon the authorities, and after awhile the Ethiopians relented. They let us go back to the abandoned facility and agreed that they would not inspect our effects. Before we went back to the site we worked out a destruction plan in advance. First, we decided the essential equipment that we had to destroy, and then a strategy to do so while the Ethiopians weren't paying attention. We decided to have our people carry clipboards as if they were inventorying everything. When the guards got bored with following them around, then they would actually remove what they had to destroy. Things worked out remarkably as we had planned. Those pieces they couldn't disable they destroyed by putting them in a drainage sump with an automatic pump. They would detach as much of the components from the circuit boards as possible and put the pieces in this sump. Whenever anyone put their hand in the sump, the pump would automatically roar into action which would make people disinclined to probe into the sump. They were able to take every element out of it that was classified and needed to be destroyed.

We were able to pack and ship out some of the unique equipment. On Tuesday, the Ethiopians agreed to extend the evacuation by two days. On Wednesday, the first two C141s landed. These 141s they brought in some Air Force cargo handlers with a forklift trucks and by now the Ethiopians were more cooperative on what we were being allowed to take out. So, we sent out about a third of our people including the two from Massawa who had just returned by air that morning, as well as most of our people's effects. When the first C-141 was loaded and departed, the second aircraft was barely half full. The Air Force guys said, "Don't you have anything else to take out? We're headed back out to Greece." They saw the principal officer's Chevrolet, which was armored, and it had arrived about three months earlier after months in transit. They said just drive it in the back of the C-141, but make sure it has let than a quarter tank of gas. That

was not a problem, since there was gas rationing, the Ethiopians guards quickly siphoned out the gas, and we drove it into the back of the plane. We later got to use it when we were evacuated to Athens. Besides the two people from Massawa, we had a senior contract employee who had a common-law marriage with an Eritrean woman and she had a child He wanted to evacuate her and the child together with him. This proved a major problem as they were Ethiopian nations and not subject to the expulsion order. So after several attempts, I dug out a copy of the Ethiopian law code and I cited the law to the Martial Law Administrator. I knew I had him nailed as the woman qualified under their law for a common law marriage. After a long hesitation, he replied, "Maybe Ethiopian revolutionary law will have to prevail in this case." I asked if that law had been codified, if not, the prevailing law is what the Ethiopian code says. Unless you can show me that it has been superseded by some subsequent law, it is still the law of your land. In the end, he let the woman and her child leave with us. It was a very exciting and exhilarating time. The DOD was moving ships in toward the Red Sea from the Indian Ocean. A destroyer was dispatched into the Red Sea to provide support if it were needed. Realistically, the Navy would have had to come to Kagnew by helicopter, and at 7,700 feet, a helicopter can't carry much in the way of a payload. So, the C-141s were the way to go. As an operational manager at that time, what I felt was necessary was not only to give clear directions to everybody but also to get them all working together and to prevent our people from doing stupid things. One of our contractors who was packing out his household effects at his villa downtown had too much to drink and he started throwing his clothes and possessions over the wall. This created a disturbance. Of course the police arrived and threatened his arrest. This is just what we didn't need. This fellow was sent out on the first plane.

Another minor crisis was that our local employees, including the unions at Kagnew demanded to be paid off before we departed. The Ethiopian authorities supported this demand. So, I sent a message to the Department and DOD, and they authorized the payment in the form of statements of obligations to pay, which fortunately satisfied our Eritrean workers. Without the cooperation of these employees, our evacuation would have been much more difficult. Then the telephone company said we couldn't leave until we paid their bill as well. I said, talk to the Derg, they ordered the evacuation. I told them to send the bill to our Embassy. I even had to deal with an Ethiopian who lived across the street from me. Weeks before, my gardener had left the brake off in my car and the car had rolled across the street and damaged the neighbor's cement block fence. He now said that I couldn't leave until I'd paid to fix his fence. When the Eritreans heard the Americans were leaving after 35 years, they just wanted their piece of the pie before we closed down. That said, we had a very clear sense that the Eritrean people felt that the forced evacuation of the Americans was the last straw. When the Americans go, they feared that the Ethiopians would be unleashed to conduct ethnic cleansing which would result in great suffering once all the foreigner observers were gone. We tried to reassure them. We also had to try to reassure our FSNs that we would help them. We would have loved to taken them with us on the plane with us, but we couldn't. Nonetheless, they helped us right to the last minute with the pack out, getting our gear aboard and liaison with the local authorities. It was really extraordinary. Thank God, all of our principal FSNs got out of Eritrea. Mesfun's brother went down to our embassy in Djibouti. The consular assistant went to Khartoum and was hired there in the consular section. Virtually everybody who wanted to get out did. In the last days we made a point of sanitizing of the consulate offices destroying all calendars, schedules, calling cards etc. On the other side of the coin, we did plant some things in our desks. I left papers that looked like codes slipped them into

stacks of blank paper. They were from Dungeons and Dragons. Even more lethal than that, out at the Kagnev site we were forced out of, they placed a destruction packet in a closet. This phosphorous blanket, meant to melt a safe, was detonated by a ring on a string. Some guy put the blanket on a high shelf in a closet, and then had the string hanging down like a light cord, thinking that would teach them. We were persuaded that the Soviets were going to come in right after we left to search for intelligence. This motivated us to see to it that we did the most thorough destruction possible. We retrieved about three and a half million dollars worth of equipment; unique classified equipment. We left nothing that they could use.

In terms of executing our evacuation, I think we all did an excellent job. My only regret was not packing up the CG's silverware, but I did make the Ethiopians sign for the compound. On the very last day, it was a Friday, I made out a receipt for the Consulate and our property. The last C-141 was to take us out that early afternoon. I organized a ceremony formally closing the consulate with our heads up. We had three marines left, and they were in their dress uniforms. We ceremonially lowered the flag. All the FSNs were there, we played the national anthem on a tape recorder. The marines lowered the flag, folded it and they handed it to me and I marched out with it. We then got into a convoy joining the last people from Kagnev and drove down the main streets. People lined the streets to see the Americans leave. Some people were in tears to see the Americans go. In part, they were concerned for themselves, but also, they were sorry to see the end of that relationship which had been a very good one for both sides. We headed to the airport and we said tearful goodbyes to our FSNs on the tarmac, and wishing them the best. We got on the plane and taxied to takeoff. When we were wheels up, we all had a great sense of relief. In that six days of the evacuation I'd probably had a total of ten or 12 hours of sleep. When the plane lifted off there was a great cheer from all the people on board. Off we went to Athens. My one regret was that my wife at this point was assigned in Nairobi. After a few weeks in Athens for debriefings with the embassy and talking to people who came out from DOD, I wanted to try return to the U.S. via Nairobi to see my wife, as we had been married for just six months. Unfortunately, any flight going from Athens to Nairobi went through Addis. So I asked the embassy if they would see if I could get an Ethiopian transit visa. I found out through this effort that I had been PNG'd. I was not allowed even to transit Addis. So, I didn't get to see my wife for another five months. Anyway, I received a presidential letter of commendation and a superior honor award and other recognition. I sent out a final telegram from Asmara explaining what we had done, how our group had operated superbly as a team, and of course, praise for all the help that they'd received from all American agencies. I tried to make our evacuation an exercise we could take some pride in doing professionally and with dignity. I had served in Vietnam and the departure of Americans from Saigon was, I thought, disgraceful, and I just wanted to make sure that we weren't being driven out with our tails between our legs. So we made a proper show of it. Everybody seemed to appreciate the effort that we had made in that regard.

Closing the consulate and Kagnev station was the end of an era. Ironically, the U.S. is now back in Asmara. We reestablished relations when Eritrea became independent in 1993. We are back in the same compound, which the Eritreans turned back over to us.

ARTHUR T. TIENKEN

**Deputy Chief of Mission
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (1975-1977)**

Ambassador Arthur T. Tienken entered the Foreign Service in 1949 after serving in the U.S. Army and graduating from Princeton University. His career included assignments in Zaire, Washington, DC, Zambia, Addis Ababa, and an ambassadorship to Gabon. Ambassador Tienken was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1989.

Q: Okay, we have just come back from lunch on the same day. Art, at that time, I guess it was a major revolt in Eritrea, isn't it? How did we view that?

TIENKEN: Yes, there was a major revolt in Eritrea, and it had been going on since 1960. There were two main Eritrean resistance units, if you like, both of them leftist in orientation. But we had taken the position beginning in 1960 that Ethiopian territorial integrity should be preserved. Therefore, we never did support, and do not to this day, the Eritrean separatists. They are politically more left than we would like, in any case, but that has not been the major concern. The major concern has been, as it has been in much of Africa, to avoid this sort of thing that would break up the Ethiopian state, which the succession--

Q: We have quite a consistent policy throughout Africa. We just don't want to see it breaking up into a whole series of places.

TIENKEN: That's right.

ell, while you were there, was our consulate in Asmara playing any role at all? Or was it just sort of a housekeeping organization?

TIENKEN: Yes, it played a role to the extent that it could. For much of the time until it was closed by one of those four notes that I told you about before, their movement was restricted to the city of Asmara itself. Any time they got out of that, if they could even get out, and they couldn't, you were in dangerous territory. You used to be able to go down to the Port of Massawa, but you had to fly. There is a road down, and I gather a fairly decent road, but I don't recall any of our people ever being able to drive it. I almost got to Massawa once, and then the Ethiopians decided that they wouldn't be responsible for my safety if I did go down there.

Q: In Massawa?

TIENKEN: Yes. And turned it off. But the major role of the consulate general was observing and reporting, which you could do within limits. And it was virtually the only information that we had that we felt had any reliability at all as to what was really going on in Eritrea. They did a good job, again, within the limits of what they could do.

Q: We are referring to Ambassador Korn's time in Ethiopia. One of the things I should mention is that Ambassador Korn wrote a book "Ethiopia, the United States and the Soviet Union," which

was published by British publisher Croon Helm in 1986. It is a solid study of the time you were there as the Chargé from...what was the time...

LARRY C.WILLIAMSON
Acting Director, East Africa
Washington, DC (1980-1982)

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

Q: Let's pick up the various areas. Let's take Somalia. During the '80-'82 period, what were you up to?

WILLIAMSON: Up to that stage of the game we were very busily engaged in trying to keep the embassy open in Addis which was not easy.

Q: The DIRG was in.

WILLIAMSON: The DIRG was in and was becoming more and more anti-U.S. The Soviets were really nesting in there. The short lived and ill fated Somali drive for Ethiopia had burned itself out in the late '80s. "Maintenance" is not a word in either language. Both Ethiopians and the Somalis drove as far as they could get their tanks, and that's where it stopped. Then we had the civil war breaking out in Ethiopia.

Q: This was the Eritrea.

WILLIAMSON: The Eritrea and the Ethiopians. The DIRG was taking a creaming at that stage of the game. The Somalis decided that this would be a great time to take the Ogaden back again. There was a great hullabaloo in the Socialist bloc.. Fidel Castro came out and with the Soviets tried to talk Siad Barre out of an invasion. Castro argued that these were Socialist comrades. You can't go to war with them. Barre answered in effect, "The hell I can't. What's this Socialist brotherhood stuff? These are Ethiopians, and that's my land!" The Russians apparently told Barre, the president of Somalia, that if he went ahead with his plans to invade the Ogaden they would drop him as a client. By that time Ethiopia looked like it was falling to pieces internally.

Q: Was Kagnew station closed?

WILLIAMSON: Kagnew station was still intact. That was the other thing Fidel Castro raised with Barre. His brother came out and talked to him about Socialist brotherhood and uniting against the Imperialists.

Q: Raul?

WILLIAMSON: Raul. The idea was to form a great, huge Socialist power in the area: Yemen, Somalia and Ethiopia would all be Socialists together and protected by the Soviet Union. All that was fine but Somalia didn't want to be protected by the Soviet Union. They wanted and indeed Siad needed to reintegrate the Ogaden into Somalia. The Somalis took off and damn near occupied the entire Ogaden, but the Ethiopians with the aid of Cuban troops beat them back. The Somalis were left high and dry, the Soviets did drop them. Bam! Left everything. They lost the war, and the Ogaden: clans in Somaliland were pretty irritated about the whole thing anyway as well as the fact that what had been the old British territory up there in British Somaliland was in then a state of clan warfare. We showed up and said, "We'd like to talk to you about Berbera," and it was like manna from heaven as far as the Somalis were concerned. We had a huge effort to come to an agreement with Siad: Access to Berbera in exchange for a security package of some sort.

Dick Moose came in to do the negotiating. The first Somali demand was for, in effect, free access to the U.S. Treasury in perpetuity. We talked them out of that!. We were talking and talking and talking and talking, and we tried another agreement where we would come in and fix the airfield up and make it work. There was some land involved in it. We put a minimum amount of money into it. The Somalis began to talk about their brothers in the west, the benefits of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Alliance, etc. We accepted some Somali students in our military colleges around here.

The fact of the matter was when we got to Berbera and everybody took a look at what we had there, it wasn't much. It was a hell of a long way to anyplace. Even your drinking water would have to be flown in. You couldn't put a permanent base in there. The harbor was very shallow, and extensive coral reefs would need a lot of dredging. You could probably get destroyers in there but not much more.

I think we actually used Berbera for three or four exercises staged through Egypt, all of them satisfactory but nothing brilliant. In no way could you put in ahead of time the stockpile that you would need to mount an effective operation in Iran. You can imagine, every Somali tribesman in 50 counties would be down there pilfering and sniping away. Besides, I kept telling everybody -- it didn't seem to make an impression, but it's true -- that the minute we started talking about using Berbera strategically, i.e., bringing the Soviets into the operation with a possible Soviet strike down there, you could watch that permission to use being yanked out from underneath you and the wells poisoned if necessary. It never came to that, but that was how I occupied myself. That was about nine months of work.

Q: The military at the Pentagon, were they as dubious as you were?

WILLIAMSON: I think at heart they were, but it was a whole different atmosphere. Dick Moose didn't like the deal at all, and I thought it was stupid and told everybody including the military. The military however received orders to do it. Brzezinski said, "Get that airfield," so that was all there was to it. There were no ifs, ands, or buts about it. I started talking about the price and so did Dick, and we actually got a price reduction. The overthrow of the DIRG brought the whole issue to a halt and we never consummated the deal. The next year Siad was overthrown and Berbera was forgotten.

Q: What about in Ethiopia. We had Kagnev Station. In a way technology was beginning to move away from...

WILLIAMSON: You know how the military is. Something like that's always vital to the security of the U.S. – faced with a fait accompli they discover that they can live without it after all.

Q: We still have forts to deal with the Apache.

WILLIAMSON: That's exactly right. Actually, the rebels had some of our guys kidnapped and that cooled our contractors down no little end. You probably know there are several substations out there. They were inviting trouble, and finally one of the rebel forces got well into Asmara. There was street fighting, and we decided to evacuate the thing and never got back in.

Q: By the time you were there, had we essentially written off Ethiopia?

WILLIAMSON: Officially, of course not. Unofficially, there was nothing much you could do. The DIRG was dependent on the Cubans and the Soviets. It wasn't until the up-country tribes decided that they didn't want any more of this stuff...

Q: Tigrean?

WILLIAMSON: Tigrean! The big problem came when—and I don't know enough about the internal workings over there in Ethiopia—somehow or another, Mengistu and his merry men seized upon land redistribution as the wave of the future. This is what a good social state does. That's what set the flames burning out in the districts. Pretty soon there were three or four good sized rebel armies marching on Addis Ababa, and the Tigreans are relatives to the Eritreans, so they joined up forces right off the bat. The Eritreans came out of the trenches and came on down to Asmara. The Tigreans marched down along the border beside them and outflanked the Ethiopians who were not too charmed about the whole thing anyway.

Q: Being the Soviets and the Cubans had thrown their hands in with the Ethiopian government, the DIRG was a military consul..?.

WILLIAMSON: It was a military consul.

Q: Were we tempted or did we say, "Well, their enemy is our friend." Did you try to do anything to the Tigreans and friends?

WILLIAMSON: The spooks may have.

Q: When you say spooks you mean...

WILLIAMSON: CIA (Central Intelligence Agency). It was very low key and very small effort.. The big supporters of the Eritreans were, of course, the Sudanese. The Sudanese and the Saudis always kept enough stuff going in there to keep the insurrection alive. It wasn't until the Tigreans particularly but other tribes, too, starting mounting these militia attacks that news of what was happening on the land redistribution front reached a lot of the troops, and the troops were very affected. Their mothers and fathers were being thrown out of their farms. The army was very disaffected and mutinied. Eritreans and Tigreans met at the border, marched straight down and beat back the Ethiopians. Internally the other militia had gone down to Addis Ababa. It looked for a long time like we were going to have a real debacle in Addis with the DIRG settling into the fight to the last man.

Q: At the time and, again, we're going back to '80-'83ish, did we feel that we had any real interests in that? From your perspective, what were American interests and concerns?

WILLIAMSON: Our concern was that the biggest geo-political factor in East Africa was Ethiopia, not Somalia, for God's sake. It wasn't then; still isn't. Ethiopia is well worth our time, an essentially viable country, which is hard to come by in Africa. We were very interested. In fact, you know the Irv Hicks story.

Q: No.

WILLIAMSON: You don't know the Irv Hicks story? I don't think it's a secret. The Somalis were again trying to do something in the Ogaden, and it looked like they might succeed in reuniting the Bantu and Nilotic Ethiopian tribes against the outside aggressor. But the Somalis blew it and Siad was pretty well castrated by then. It did look like there was going to be a hell of a battle for Addis Ababa with the militia and the Eritreans outside; and the DIRG, and what was left of the army inside.

Q: I know Irv Hicks.

WILLIAMSON: Irv was a deputy assistant secretary. He went out to the Horn. He was sent out there. We had gotten an agreement from the Rhodesians that they would offer refuge to Mengistu. Irv went into the city with all that fighting going on. God bless him, he went in there, and he talked to Mengistu, and he said, "We can get you and your family and anybody else you want to take out of here, but you've got to get out now before the fighting starts because we can't abide that." Mengistu gave it about the same consideration that I gave the assignment to London, and we got some unknown aircraft into the airport, packed that whole bunch in, sent them south, and the next thing you know there's a triumphal entry into Addis Ababa by the Tigreans and the Eritreans. We worked hard at that one.

Q: What did we see coming out of this from our perspective?

WILLIAMSON: The place was a potential Soviet human base. It was certainly a base for exporting trouble. The Saudis were very interested in getting the Soviets out of there. This was a cheap, easy way to get about.

Q: Basically we weren't looking at this as a base but trying to strategically deny that area to the...

WILLIAMSON: Yes. The Soviet Union was beginning to look a little shabby. We were not able to put a lot of resources into this thing. We could handle it without doing that. We didn't want the 82nd Airborne dropping in for God's sake because nobody likes foreigners as we're learning once again in Iraq. We had a lot invested in that. By the way, the Hicks thing happened after I left AFE.

Q: That was later. While you were there, one of the potential problems in that area was the perennial draughts. Did that happen in your time?

WILLIAMSON: With great regularity, I'm afraid. What's happened is the growing population pressure has moved towards the north. There's no more land down south. Destitute and poor people moved north looking for new land to farm, into this really bad part of the world where rain is not as regular as it is in the south, face more and more failures of seasonal monsoons. When the rains fail, the people don't have any way out or anywhere else to go. They go up there and although they know people will starve to death over a period of time, they have no other option. We have a very extensive network of European and Japanese and American philanthropic NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) who are very accomplished at drought relief. Being up there begets its own problems because once you start putting in great stores of food, that becomes a cash crop as it were for bandits and thieves and everyone else. That got us in trouble in Somalia later on.

Q: At the time, how entrenched did we feel the Soviets and the Cubans were?

WILLIAMSON: I don't know what the official line was in those days. I was always under the impression that the Ethiopians didn't like the foreigners, period and that the only reason these foreigners were acceptable was because Siad Barre of Somalia, the idiot, had taken the one step that could unite the Ethiopians behind this group, the DIRG. They invaded the motherland. No Ethiopian worth his salt could deny the call to spring the colors and shoot the first Somali you see. Self-inflicted wounds -- the Somali inability to be self-critical at all!

Q: By the time you left, the place was still...

WILLIAMSON: It was still a fiefdom of the Soviets, but it was at a very shaky stage.

Q: These forces were beginning to gather.

WILLIAMSON: Yes.

DAVID A. KORN
Ambassador
Ethiopia (1982-1985)

Ambassador David A. Korn was born and raised in Missouri. He entered the Foreign Service in 1957. His career included positions in France, Lebanon, Mauritania, Israel, and India, and ambassadorships to Ethiopia and Togo. He was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 1990.

KORN: June of '82 to July of '85.

Q: So we are going to be covering some of the things that weren't covered in that.

KORN: The main thing was that the Reagan Administration came in with the idea of roll-back. This applied to Ethiopia and one of the things was that the Reagan Administration took covert operation that had been begun on a very small scale under Carter and made it into an activity to be carried on inside of Ethiopia. Not a great threat to the government of Ethiopia. This was something I didn't believe could go undiscovered and tried to get stopped. I was sure that given the surveillance the Ethiopian government exercised over us that this would be discovered. It was and the Agency officer who was involved, assigned to run it, was arrested along with all the poor Ethiopians who had been brought in to this activity by the Agency. The man was held for 40 days and beaten, kept in an unlighted cell most of the time, and kept on a restricted diet and interrogated, etc. Our main effort was concentrated on getting him out. The Ethiopians did not tell us they were holding him. At first I couldn't imagine that they were holding him because it seemed so naive. This was an accredited diplomatic officer and you just didn't hold officers. They seemed to have the idea that they could blackmail the United States over this and thus made certain demands. This is how we got confirmation that they were holding him. At that point we tried to find various ways that we could put pressure on them. One of the points was that we had agreed to sell the Ethiopian Airlines two Boeing 767s on which the Ethiopians had paid \$20 million down on but the delivery was not scheduled until some months later. At one point the pressure was that we would keep the airplanes and the money too. The way it was worked out was that Mengistu finally came to realize that this was a game he couldn't win at. Reagan wrote him a letter clearly warning him that if this matter wasn't cleared up there would be serious consequences in our relations and offered to send Vernon Walters out to talk to him. So when Mengistu accepted Walters' visit we realized that this was going to be the way out. Walters came out. He was a very savvy operator--quite a showman; having dealt with many enormous egos and knowing how to flatter a leader and manipulate him. It was a very intense time. There were a lot of Ethiopians arrested.

Q: Did you have the feeling while you were there that we were on the right track? It must have been tempting to say, "Oh, the hell with this, is it worth keeping an embassy there"?

KORN: The main concern was that we were going to get involved with all the various regional insurgencies. I very much opposed that. There was constant temptation for the Reagan Administration to get involved with the Tigreans or the ELF's.

Q: ELFs [Eritrean Liberation Force]? Were the Eritreans more leftist than the left, or something?

KORN: Not so much. I think there was a general recognition that an independent Eritrea would really pose more problems for the United States than it would solve.

Q: How would that be?

KORN: If Eritrea becomes independent it has no resources whatsoever. It is an absolutely impoverished country. No government would accept the independence so you would have an Eritrean government who would turn anywhere for aid and assistance and being in perpetual war with Addis Ababa. So I think there was a realization that if we helped the Eritreans they might well succeed and then we really would have a problem. But there was constant temptation to get involved with the Tigreans who were much less a threat but who could weaken the government in Addis Ababa. My own feeling was that we should not get involved with these groups but should wait it out and see what happens.

Q: How about the role of the Israelis at this point?

KORN: The Israelis were delighted to be chosen the recipient of this information about the arrest of the Agency man. They came rushing in to Addis Ababa thinking they were going to play the role of savior by pulling the American chestnuts out of the fire and we would then have a great debt of gratitude towards them. But the Ethiopians didn't want to deal with them at all. They stayed a couple of days and then turned around and went home. The Israelis were carrying on a kind of clandestine relationship with the Ethiopians. It was one that they were buying. They very much wanted to have a presence, some influence in Ethiopia and Mengistu was playing on this. The Israelis would sell the Ethiopians various items of military hardware--not weapons at that time that I knew of, but communications, etc.--and the Ethiopians could not pay for them. There were also commercial ventures that the Ethiopians would not pay for. At one point the Israeli representative there who was supposedly the representative of one of the major state-owned industries, became so discouraged with the whole thing that he just packed up and went back to Israeli. His bosses in Israeli sent him back.

Q: They were, as we have done, sort of buying their presence.

KORN: Yes. The one thing that they did get was overflight rights over Ethiopia. They could fly over at midnight, once a week on their way to South Africa.

Q: Did we get very much involved in efforts to get Ethiopian Jews out?

KORN: Well, the embassy got involved to a certain extent but most of them went out through the Sudan. That was where we got involved. The embassy did get involved with those who came through Addis Ababa and helped them to work with American organizations which came there to try to get them out. We got them visas--you had to have a visa for a foreign country in order to get out of Ethiopia. So once an American organization came and got the various other permissions we arranged with the Department to give them visas.

Q: Did you see a sort of a change during the time you were there under the Reagan Administration--one obviously having been burned with this one very minor operation of sort of learning that these were local problems and not to put everything in East-West terms?

KORN: The Reagan Administration never looked at things like that. [laughter] The Reagan Administration wanted to shut down the humanitarian aid program for Ethiopia. When it came in, the first think it did was to make a note to take out the CRS program for Ethiopia in the next year's budget. But we managed to get it kept in. When the big drought and famine came along, the Administration went much further then I think anyone expected it would in extending humanitarian assistance.

Q: You already had the infrastructure there...

KORN: Not for such a big program. No, the embassy supported CRS (Catholic Relief Service) and got grants from them. You are talking about 20,000 - 30,000 tons of food. In fall of 1989 it went up to the hundred of thousands of tons and the AID mission was established. Then CARE came and everyone else and his brother came in wanting to get a part of it.

Q: What was your feeling as you were there and had a chance to look at the situation about whether Ethiopia...?

KORN: Clearly Mengistu's regime was ruining the country. It was splitting it apart and causing it to fall further and further behind economically. At the time there didn't seem to be any solution to this. He was firmly whetted to the Soviets and the Soviets were whetted to him. He saw a military resolution to his problems. I left in the summer of 1985 and that was the way it looked.

Q: On your own part, did you say, Well, although maybe the Administration in power was also in a way seeing things in a military way....I mean who is with the Soviets and who isn't with the Soviets and all that. Did you see this as being a morass and let the Soviets get involved in it?

KORN: There was no way that the United States in short of accepting Mengistu's regime that we could hope to gain good relations with Mengistu at that point. But things changed afterwards. No, I felt it would be a mistake to get involved with the separatist movements and there were people in Washington who toyed with that idea.

Q: Did you get any emanations from the National Security Council which was being very activist in things like this?

KORN: The NSC was where the radicals who wanted to toy with the various secessionist groups were. But the NSC didn't really play a very big role in all this because... there were a bunch of unreasonable people in the NSC and throughout the Administration who wanted...

We did set up a public affairs program. My wife set it up and ran it. We had a great deal of trouble getting approval for this, because the initial reaction was that we wanted to do something favorable to the Ethiopian government. We wanted to re-establish the cultural relations with the

individual Ethiopian which would undermine the stance of the Ethiopian Government so it took a while to

Q: Is there anything else that wasn't covered in your book?

KORN: No.

Q: I found the book a very interesting one. I take it this is what you did when you went to the Royal...when you got yourself a year at the Royal Institute and you wrote your book. Did you have a chance to sort of pick up some of the official British view but at a different level? Were you working with other seconded British foreign affairs officials?

KORN: It was a year's sabbatical during which I wrote a book. I went to a number of lectures and wrote articles...

Q: And that was what you did. Well then you were appointed as Ambassador to Togo from '86 to '88. How did this come about?

KORN: Well, Togo was what there was left after a certain number of other things went by the way. It was of no political or substantive interest. There was nothing of particular interest going on there.

Q: Was the dominant presence in Togo still the French?

KORN: Yes. They were pouring an enormous amount of money into the country. We had a small AID program as well. Then President Eyadema felt it was a good thing to hedge his bets on the French by having some Americans around. I always had plenty of access to him and he was always very friendly. There is nothing going on in Togo basically.

Q: How about United Nations vote?

KORN: ...at all small posts, as you well know, the main value of the host government is to get them to vote the right way at the United Nations.

Q: I interviewed somebody who was in Mali, I guess, and was saying that he had to go in and try to get support for a "save the whale" vote in the United Nations and had to start out by explaining what a whale was since it was a land locked country. He was assured that if a whale ever appeared up the Niger River they wouldn't kill it.

In a way things were going well and there were no particular problem?

KORN: Right.

Q: Were there any American business concerns?

KORN: We had an American who leased the government steel mill when it went broke and got it back into operation.

Q: Well, how did you spend your time?

KORN: (Inaudible). I decided to retire while there.

Q: Because at some of these posts "challenge" wasn't even a term.

KORN: Well, because of the nature of the regime people were not free to talk. You would have Togolese over and ask them the most harmless questions and they were afraid to talk.

Q: What type of regime was there?

KORN: It was a dictatorship. In many ways a benign dictatorship--it wasn't a bloody one. Eyadema didn't kill anybody unless he felt threatened. This never happened while I was there. People could be thrown in jail if on the wrong side of him and they could suffer materially. So not many people wanted to speak out. During the time I was there my wife was very active in promoting a local human rights organization. Eyadema got on this band wagon and the organization was actually set up and has been functioning since then. If I have to look back and think of a contribution that was made there that would probably be it.

Q: Just a final thing. How did you feel about the Foreign Service as a career?

KORN: That is hard to answer in a few words. It has advantages and attractions. I don't know if I would necessarily do it again. Maybe I would, it is hard to say. There are other things in life. It has changed a lot over the years. Certainly the Foreign Service today, I am not sure I would want to go in to. The one that I joined in 1957 I would.

Q: You also were fortunate with Ethiopia and the part you played in the peace process.

KORN: What I am referring to is the bureaucratization of the Foreign Service. When we entered the personnel system was a rather simple one and as the years passed it became more and more complex. Now it would be the admiration of some Byzantine....

Q: You really need to have a lawyer or agent to represent you when you enter.

KORN: To guide you through all of this. It has become so rigid and bureaucratic in so many ways. Not just the personnel system but the whole system of embassies, having to file reporting plans, etc. All this is fine in theory but what it promotes is people going around making busy work. You have to put something in the plan so you have to do it. That part of it probably would discourage me now from going in if I had to start all over again.

Q: I think this is not an uncommon reaction.

JOSEPH P. O'NEILL
Chargé
Asmara (1992-1993)

Joseph P. O'Neill was born in New York in 1935. From 1953-1956 he served in the US Army. After joining the Foreign service in 1961 he served positions in Laos, Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines, India, Portugal, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Sudan, and Eritrea. Mr. O'Neill was interviewed by Thomas Dunnigan in May 1998.

Q: After leaving Khartoum, you came back to Washington?

O'NEILL: No, I was direct transfer to open up the embassy in Eritrea.

Q: So, you became the chargé in Asmara.

O'NEILL: That's right. One of the reasons I was made the chargé there was that when Jim Cheek and I first entered Khartoum, we had other interests beyond bilateral relations. Washington had finally decided that Mengistu was going to lose and that Meles and Issayas were going to be the new leaders. We knew nothing about them. So, Jim Cheek assigned me to start having contacts with these people. So, I did. I started to have contact with all of them. In fact, Isaiah was sitting in Jim Cheek's home when I walked in and told the ambassador that Asmara had fallen without a shot. Issayas could not believe it, because the Amharas said they would destroy it and burn it to the ground like Berlin before they would give it up. Issayas said, "I don't believe it." I went back out and reconfirmed with BBC and then with the Agency. I went back there and I said, "Mr. President, the Ethiopians have surrendered Asmara." He still remembers, I was the first one to call him "Mr. President." So, one of the reasons I was sent over was I didn't have an assignment and the other was that I knew the President.

Q: Well, you had, of course, the requisite background in the area, which was very important. You were there for the independence in '93 then.

O'NEILL: Again, this is where my arrogance becomes my *bête noire*. There was a referendum to see whether the people of Eritrea wanted to be independent or not. In May, when there was an independence vote and celebration, who would recognize the country? The referendum went off flawlessly. I was involved, the United Nations, everybody was involved. Flawless. No cheating, no nothing. It just went well. Some weeks after this, not very far after, the United Nations answers itself "Completely clean. We believe the referendum was free and fair." The Italian Minister comes down from Rome and says, "We're going to recognize the country today." The president and the foreign minister say, "We're not prepared to be recognized. We were going to be recognized on independence day. Everybody wants to recognize us on that date." The Italians say, "We can't give you any money. If we return saying you don't want to be recognized by us, what can we say in Rome?" So, the foreign minister goes hustling around and his deputy goes hustling around. They say to the Sudanese, "This is what's going to happen." The Sudanese ambassador says, "I intend to recognize you. I am an ambassador with plenipotentiary [powers]."

The Egyptians say the same. They come to see me. They say, "What are we going to do?" I said, "First of all, I'm going to have to think about this. I can't do it immediately." They said, "Alright." So, I go running back to the embassy. They came to see me at lunch in the house. I put a NIACT on the wires to Washington and through Addis Ababa because I'm still de jure working for Mark Baas, but not de facto. Though I'm separated, I still technically report to him. So, I send out this thing: "I know we're supposed to do this. This is what I intend to do unless if pressed to the wall." Then I write out a letter which I cannot recall. It says, in effect, "The government of the United States has every intention to recognize you, etc." I send this off. Then I don't get any response. I wait hours for a call. I finally get a call. They said, "We just got the cable." I said, "It's a NIACT." They said, "Don't you know the Department?" I said, "What am I supposed to do?" They said, "Well, we're going to the White House." So, I then sent out another cable saying, "The Italians, the Sudanese, and the Egyptians are going to recognize. I think it's incumbent upon me not to wait until we get all the papers done or we will be something like the 85th country to recognize. It will cause us terrible problems." I don't have any answer. I get no answer back, no cable back. So, I type up the letter and I stick it in my pocket because there is going to be a ceremony at the hall to officially announce that the referendum is approved. So, as we get up and start to leave, I notice the Italian ambassador has taken his minister in. I start to move toward the door, trying to take with me the Sudanese ambassador, who is a good friend. The Sudanese ambassador doesn't really care one way or the other, but the Egyptians hang. Then we look together and we decide that we can't just let the Italians and the Egyptians do this. So, we wait and then the deputy foreign minister comes and says, "You'll have to make your mind up." I said, "Well, I have a letter." I had the embassy seal on it.

I tell Washington what I have done. Washington was not pleased. They said that they knew why I did it, they said I should not have done it; they weren't happy. I would like to make a point here. Some year or two later, when my efficiency reports were being reviewed, I am low ranked for exceeding instructions, though Mark Baas, who is the officer who wrote the efficiency report, said I showed courage, etc., as did the inspectors. It was just awful. To this day, it's a day on which I recognize the government, that it stands. We're the fourth in the line. Four countries recognize that day. That's why we're number four. It upsets me.

Q: Of course. It was the delay in Washington that probably caused it.

O'NEILL: We finally brought all the papers out. All the papers came out on May 15th. By that time, when we handed in the formal papers, 87 countries had recognized Eritrea by that date.

Q: This was, of course, in the first months of the Clinton administration. The probably weren't well organized for this sort of speedy action.

O'NEILL: They weren't all there. They weren't organized and nobody was willing to take them on.

Q: No, even though your old friend, Tony Lake, was back as NSC advisor.

O'NEILL: He had not put his stamp on it. He hadn't gotten set up. The other thing was, when I came over to Eritrea, there was more than just me coming over. Hassan El Turabi started to get

worried. I state this with some care. He sent a message to his ambassador in Khartoum that I was to be watched very carefully while I was in Eritrea because I knew them very well, I knew the Koran, the politics, and that I should be considered dangerous.

Q: Not friendly, but dangerous.

O'NEILL: Dangerous. But even at that time, as long as I was in Eritrea, senior Sudanese officers would come over from Khartoum by private plane to talk to me and ask me to report to Washington this or that. We had a fine ambassador there, Peterson, but they still kept coming to me. I had Somalis start to visit also.

Q: Were you there for the independence day? Did we send out a special delegation or not?

O'NEILL: No, we didn't get that done. We sent out one officer, who later became our ambassador, Houdek. Everybody else sent deputy heads of state, ministers, the rest. We sent out one officer.

Q: Did the Ethiopians send anybody?

O'NEILL: They sent their president, who made a great speech in Tigrean, which then comes back to what we talked about before. It's now the Tigreans who are the major influence in the Horn of Africa. They hold most of the influential positions in Ethiopia. There are a number of tribes there.

Q: Any other comments about your days as chargé there?

O'NEILL: Yes. It was not easy. Eritreans are not easy people. We had a consulate general there in the old days, a great big compound which was still there. I wanted it back. It was my property. It was diplomatic property. We had bought it. They said they couldn't find the papers on it. I spent \$100 and somebody found the papers and then put the new stamp of the new government on the papers. The Minister of Defense wanted it. He's now Minister of Foreign Affairs. The Eritreans wanted me there because they knew me from Sudan. They knew I was a friend. They knew I had contacts. I said that I would not fly my flag, I would not issue visas, and I would let no other officer be assigned me until I got my consulate back. They stonewalled me. Finally, Hank Cohen came up. Hank is not the most effusive character you'll ever meet. So, I briefed him on what I wanted done. He had done all the things and he had talked with President Issayas. There we were at lunch. I said to Cohen, "Mr. Assistant Secretary, I really would like to take you around to the old consulate building, which I expect to get back, but I can't get it back. If I can't get it back, that's why I didn't fly any flags on the car to come and receive and why I can't ask you to stay overnight." Cohen wasn't going to stay overnight.

Q: But you couldn't ask him.

O'NEILL: It didn't matter. Cohen wasn't staying there. The President turns to his minister of defense and is very coarse. He said, "I thought we had agreed to give the consulate general back." Petros Solomon didn't say anything. Issayas looked at me and said to me something. I said,

"I couldn't think of a more appropriate time to bring this matter up." He said, "You'll get the consulate general back." I said, "When?" He said, "This week." I said, "Thank you." So, I got the consulate back.

Q: That was a real feather in your cap, I think, and Hank must not have forgotten that one.

O'NEILL: Oh, he did. He forgot. But the point is, it saved the United States Government in excess of \$10 million. All the buildings and grounds, etc.

Q: Did you ever have military attachés with you?

O'NEILL: No, when I got there, I had one car and one typewriter.

Q: That was it.

O'NEILL: That was it. I found my old chauffeur, a driver from Addis Ababa, had retired in Asmara. I rehired him. Because we knew nothing about the country (Nobody had been through that country in 15 years), I started to travel. This was before Josephine and the children came out and even later when she was there. They went home from Khartoum and then they were going to come out again. I traveled all over the country. I was the first American officer in 30 years to drive from Misawa to Asab through the Donakel Desert. It's called the Donakel Desert. No roads, no nothing, absolutely barren.

Q: For four wheel drive vehicles.

O'NEILL: Yes, we did it. It was from Misawa to Asab through Donakel. The first officer to have done it in 30-odd years.

Q: Whatever happened to Kagnew Station?

O'NEILL: It was taken over by the Ministry of Defense, is still used by them. They, I think, now have moved all the soldiers out further along to a new area. But in the process of giving it up, it was a relay station, but then as technology got better, we didn't need it. In addition, the Eritreans, who were later my friends, were kidnapping our soldiers and shooting at us. One of the things in dealing with the Eritreans is that they knew that I was traveling through their areas when I was DCM in Addis Ababa, 1983-1986, with the Ethiopian Army when I was moving food and doing the rest and trying to find them. They knew about that. They said to me in '89 or '90, "How come your policy has changed towards us? We haven't changed intrinsically." I said to them, "Because you're going to be winners and we don't back losers." They appreciated that.

Q: Yes, I'm sure they did. Well, that came to an end; your chargéship there. A new ambassador came out?

O'NEILL: Houdek came out. It also was the end of my career. I became involved in Somali affairs. Somalis came up to see me. The President was involved in Somalia. I made TDY trips into Somalia.

Q: Out of Djibouti?

O'NEILL: Out of Asmara. I told the Department it should never get involved in this area. When we got involved, I said we should withdraw and let others take over. I compared Somalia to a "poison chalice." In fact, I wrote a cable on it: "Somalia: the Poison Chalice." I suggested we pass the poison chalice to those who thought they had an antidote for it who were willing to drink it. We had neither an antidote nor were willing to bear the pain. I also, which was the crowning blow, wrote to the Secretary in a NODIS cable. He liked the cable. He gave it the 6th floor.

Q: That did it then.

O'NEILL: That did it.

SUSAN KEOGH
Deputy Chief of Mission
Asmara (1995-1996)

Mrs. Keogh was born and raised in the United Kingdom and educated at the University of Dublin, the University of Cape Town and the National Defense University. After several years of teaching English abroad, she married State Department Foreign Service Officer Dennis Keogh and accompanied him on his assignments in Mbabane, Bogotá, Niamey and Cape Town, meanwhile continuing her profession at these posts. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Keogh joined the State Department as Foreign Service Officer and served several tours in Washington as well as in New Delhi, Asmara (Deputy Chief of Mission), Quebec City (Consul General), Lima, and LaPaz. Her assignments included Country Desk Officer, Public Affairs, Human Rights and Anti-Narcotics Officer. Mrs. Keogh was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2013.

KEOGH: At the end of two years on South African affairs, I went to Eritrea as the DCM.

Q: Eritrea, from when to when?

KEOGH: I was supposed to be there for two years but only did one year for family reasons. We went to Asmara in 1995. It was the period after the 30-year war with Ethiopia. We were in the process of rebuilding the embassy on the ruins of the previous compound. It was one of these rare moments of peace in Eritrea. There were lots of ex-combatants in wheelchairs, lots of demobilized women soldiers -- they were still walking around Asmara with their boots on and wild hair. The whole society had suffered terrible deprivations, being bombed and living in catacombs underground. So there were many older fighters with young children who were enjoying the respite.

Q: Who was the head of the government?

KEOGH: It was President Isaias -- he's still the president.

Q: How was he at the time?

KEOGH: He was very popular. He'd spearheaded Eritrea's effort against Ethiopia. He and President Meles of Ethiopia had joined forces to bring about the overthrow of Mengistu. They marched into Addis together. But they subsequently fell out. When Houdek and I were there, Isaias was readily available. One night, we were having supper in a café when Isaias walked in, sat down at the table and ate with us. He didn't travel with bodyguards. He could walk around the streets. He lived in a small bungalow, drove a small car. There was a lot of hope for Eritrea. For a brief period it had the most U.S. commercial investment of anywhere in Africa. There were potential hotel projects in the Red Sea. Eritreans had a reputation for being incorruptible. Some of the leadership remembered having Peace Corps volunteers as their teachers, they used to listen to an American radio station in Asmara...so they were generally pro-American.

Q: So what happened?

KEOGH: There were indications of combativeness when Eritreans got into a skirmish with Yemen over the Hanish Islands in the Red Sea. The ongoing confrontation was averted through French diplomacy, I was involved somewhat in that.

Q: You were involved?

KEOGH: France sent out a senior diplomat to broker a proposal that would head off a conflict (we learned later that Yemen was pointing scud missiles at Eritrea). This person had no experience in the region so I assisted on briefing and backgrounding him. He successfully worked out an agreement between the two countries that they would abide by the ruling of an arbitration panel on the territorial dispute.

Q: Who got them?

KEOGH: In the end, the UN ruled in favor of Yemen.

Q: Were there political factions in Eritrea?

KEOGH: Yes, there were, and there had been historical faction fighting during the war. Many of those people had left Eritrea, went to Sudan and elsewhere. When I arrived, some people were in prison, mostly Jehovah's Witnesses who had refused national service on religious grounds. We regularly raised these cases with the government, which was unsympathetic. After my departure, the situation changed drastically for the worse. Many people, some close to Isaias, were imprisoned. USAID left the country, also the Peace Corps. In 2000, a local staff member who had worked to promote investment in Eritrea was arrested on a pretext and disappeared into the jail system. Ali Alamin – a tremendously talented and good man. We were never able to secure his release.

Q: This is after you were gone.

KEOGH: Yes, after we left. A couple of years later, the war restarted with Ethiopia over a border town called Badme. There was huge loss of life again, a human disaster.

Q: Did you see President Isaias as having megalomania?

KEOGH: No, not when I was there.

Q: I've heard subsequent reports that it's really quite bad now. It's sad when Eritrea seemed to be on such a roll.

KEOGH: Yes, it seemed like a very positive period. I felt very down after Ali's arrest and when the war broke out again. We knew quite a few young men and women who were sent to fight. There was so much suspicion and aggravation. The whole country is now pretty locked down. Mandatory national service can go on for years, in order to build roads and other reconstruction projects.

CLAUDIA ANYASO
Department of Defense: State/ DOD Exchange; Joint Chief of Staff
Washington, DC (2000-2002)

Ms. Anyaso was born and raised in North Carolina and was educated at Morgan State University and American University. She joined the State Department in 1968, where she specialized in Education and Cultural Affairs, with particular regard to African countries. She had several tours in Washington as well as abroad. Her foreign assignments include Lagos, Abuja, Port-au-Prince and Niamey, where she served primarily as Cultural and Public Affairs Officer. Ms. Anyaso was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2009.

Q: During the time you were there I mean Africa, of course, back in the '90s the attack on our embassies in Kenya and Dar es Salaam was this looking at terrorist activities this must have been a big part of your job wasn't it?

ANYASO: Well I was spending a lot of my time on Somalia. The other big issue I was working with the peace-keeping office on this was Ethiopia and Eritrea because they had had their war and there was a military operation that was set up under the UN auspices, peace-keeping mission there to keep the sides apart. But they were trying to demarcate the area. So we spent a lot of time on getting them together on that; these were people who could not...although to look at them to listen to them they were the same people but they would not speak face to face so there were a lot of meetings. One group of people would be upstairs the other group of people would be downstairs so we were trying to resolve this particular issue, this border conflict.

Q: Border conflicts, one of these stupid things was killing a lot of people.

ANYASO: One town on the border had caused all of this and we wanted the Ethiopians to go back to where they wanted to go to their country. There was an aviator I think it was an Ethiopian plane that had been shot down and they wanted to get his body back so that took up a lot of time. As far as the embassy bombings were concerned they were aware of them and certainly the Cole bombing...

Q: The destroyer that...

ANYASO: The destroyer...they were just beginning to connect the dots on all of that.

Q: CINCPAC?

ANYASO: Yes.

RONALD K. McMULLEN
Ambassador
Eritrea (2007-2010)

Ambassador Ronald McMullen was born in Iowa in 1955. He graduated from Drake University (B.A.), University of Minnesota (M.A.), and University of Iowa (Ph.D.). He joined the Foreign Service in 1982. His overseas posts include the Dominican Republic, Sri Lanka, Gabon, South Africa, Fiji, Burma and as ambassador to Eritrea. Ambassador McMullen was interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy in 2012.

Q: So you were in Asmara from when to when?

McMULLEN: The nomination process went forward with Eritrea. The government of Eritrea granted agrément in March of 2007. I waited, along with a number of other State Department nominees, for a confirmation hearing with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, which was at that time headed by Senator Joe Biden. Biden was campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, although his support was near zero. He kept us all twiddling our thumbs until November, when he finally got around to doing his job as chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and called the hearings. I had to put my life on hold for seven months while convicted plagiarist Joe Biden ran for the presidency. I eventually had my hearing – Biden didn't attend, of course – and my nomination was quickly confirmed by the Senate. In November of 2007 I was sworn in by Undersecretary Nick Burns in the Ben Franklin room. It was a wonderful ceremony. My dad and mom flew out from Iowa, lots of A-100 classmates were there, as were colleagues from previous postings. Wyatt held the family Bible for my swearing-in. My only regret was that I forgot to kiss Jane immediately after the swearing-in. I'm still trying to live that down. We had a nice reception afterwards at the DACOR Bacon House where I visited with the

guests, including friends from college and other relatives that attended the ceremony. We flew to Eritrea in November 2007 and served there until July 2010.

Q: OK. Can you give me an overview of the situation, government and Eritrea in 2007?

McMULLEN: After Eritrea's independence in 1993, Embassy Asmara included elements from the State Department, USAID, Peace Corps, a military assistance group, a defense attaché's office, and other agencies of the U.S. government. But in subsequent years the government of Eritrea forced us to close all offices and programs apart from the State Department presence. When I arrived, we had a lone sergeant in the defense attaché's office. When her tour was over, the Eritrean government refused to issue her replacement a visa, so we shut the defense attaché office. Embassy Eritrea had about 230 Eritrean employees and around 15 American employees of all kinds when I got there. There'd been a long gap between ambassadors. Morale was bad and tensions were high between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Eritrea fought for 30 years to secede from Ethiopia, finally gaining its independence in 1993. From 1998 until 2000 Eritrea and Ethiopia fought a bloody, World War I style war with trenches, artillery and human wave assaults over the disputed border town of Badme. Badme, in the course of the peace settlement, was deemed to be part of Eritrea, but has remained occupied by Ethiopia. Ethiopia refused to abide by the outcome of the border commission and give Badme back to Eritrea. Thus, Eritrea viewed itself as being in a state of no war, no peace and its huge conscript army was still mobilized. Eritrea had the second largest standing army in Africa, and the nation's economy was still on war footing because the border problem with Ethiopia remained unresolved.

There was a UN peacekeeping mission in Eritrea called UNMEE, the UN Mission for Eritrea and Ethiopia. It had about 1,500 troops from India, Kenya, and Jordan and was headed by an able Jordanian major-general named Mohammad Taisir, with whom I had very good relations. A condition of the peace settlement was that Eritrea could not place military personnel within 15 kilometers of the border with Ethiopia, a buffer area designated the Temporary Security Zone (TSZ). UNMEE observed the TSZ to ensure that the previous combatants were making no military moves in the area. We had good relations with UNMEE and exchanged information with them about what was happening along the border. Eritrea accused us of not pressing Ethiopia to abide by its word and give back the disputed town of Badme, so relations between Eritrea and the U.S. were antagonistic. I arrived with hopes of building bridges of understanding with the government of Eritrea and improving relations between the Eritrean and American people.

The main U.S. interests in Eritrea were to promote human rights and regional stability. Eritrea was a menace to the region – many regional rebel and opposition groups had operations based in Eritrea with the backing of the Isaias regime. The dictatorial government of Eritrea was horribly oppressing its own people and trying to destabilize the region. We went head-to-head on a number of these issues.

Q: Can you tell us about Eritrea?

McMULLEN: Eritrea's main concern, at least officially, was getting Ethiopia to comply with the ruling of the border commission and returning Badme. Some observers felt the Eritrean regime

used Ethiopia's non-compliance as an excuse for maintaining its dictatorial grip on the nation. Our concerns were regional stability, including terrorism, and human rights.

Q: Can you talk about the personality and the composition of the leadership in Eritrea?

McMULLEN: The government of Eritrea was dominated by the president, Isaias Afewerki, who led the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) to victory over Ethiopia. He was a brilliant guerilla fighter and military commander who failed to make the transition to democratic president and statesman. I've never been a big fan of George Washington, but he managed to make the transition from rebel military leader to democratic statesman. Isaias failed miserably in making that transition. It reminds me of the old saying, "When your only tool's a hammer, every problem begins to look like a nail." Isaias was good at mobilization, guerrilla warfare, and strategic planning. He was willing to suffer and was patient. The country fought for 30 years to win its independence -- many Eritreans thought they had been patient enough and suffered enough. Isaias hoped to transform Eritrean society into his Maoist vision of utopia in the Horn of Africa. He and his henchmen exhibited the need to be in complete control of all aspects of society. Some people refer to Eritrea as the North Korea of Africa, given the ruthless state control over every aspect of society.

As a young man, Isaias went to China for political commissar training. Mao's China offered support to the EPLF cause, but only if their struggle was more politicized. So, Isaias and a few other Eritrean rebel leaders went to China in 1967 to learn how to become revolutionary political commissars. This was during the depths of Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution. Mao was nationalizing land, destroying traditional religions, trying to break up family life, and sending teachers to the fields and university students out to do manual labor. Isaias soaked it up like a dry sponge. If you look at what Mao was trying to do during the Cultural Revolution, Isaias is trying to do that now in Eritrea. The Eritrean regime has nationalized land, controls the economy, and tightly restricts religion. Only four kinds of religious worship are allowed in Eritrea -- Islam, Orthodox, Catholic, and Lutheran. Everything else is illegal, and anyone worshipping in an unauthorized manner is subject to arrest, imprisonment, and torture. Students must attend a militarized, isolated camp for 12th grade if they want to graduate from high school. A student in the upper half of his or her graduating class is assigned to national service position working on road construction, digging irrigation canals, building terraces, or working for a government office for about three cents a day, indefinitely. This is open-ended labor conscription, the equivalent of involuntary servitude. If you're in the bottom half of your class, you're handed a rifle and a uniform. You'll sit in a trench facing Ethiopia for as long the government of Eritrea wants you to.

Isaias is the world's last Maoist ruler. China realized what damage Mao was doing to the country and Deng Xiaoping launched a reform movement. There is no Deng Xiaoping reformist visible in the Isaias regime. Interestingly, the Chinese ambassador in Asmara said that whenever a new book on Mao was published, Isaias would often ask for a copy and the ambassador would dutifully send it over. Sometimes the ambassador would include a book on Deng Xiaoping, but Isaias would send it back. He didn't want anything to do with reformists like Deng. Isaias apparently played a mean game of ping pong and likes Chinese food. Isaias periodically asked the Chinese ambassador's chef to send him a meal. Isaias watched Chinese international news.

There are strong policy parallels between the Isaias regime and policies Mao Zedong championed in China in the mid-1960s. In short, Isaias' experience in China infused him with revolutionary Maoism that he is now inflicting on poor Eritrea.

Q: Well now, did the Chinese have an embassy there?

McMULLEN: Yes, there were 17 embassies in Asmara. The Chinese had a generous, unconditional assistance program. Basically, they gave Eritrea a gift card worth millions of dollars. An Eritrean official would take the gift card to China, buy whatever the regime wanted, and have it sent to Eritrea on a Chinese ship. The purchases were supposed to be related to development projects jointly endorsed by China and Eritrea, but no questions were asked and there was no follow-up. It was an effective kind of foreign aid in terms of winning friends in the Eritrean government, because there were no conditions or oversight except that the good had to be Chinese and transported on Chinese ships. The Chinese were influential.

Probably the most important embassy in Asmara was that of Qatar. The emir of Qatar was very fond of Eritrea and visited regularly. He sent his private yacht from Qatar over to the Eritrea's Dahlak Islands in the Red Sea. The emir and some pals, escaping the restrictions and pressures of Doha, sailed around the archipelago, occasionally trying their hand at spear fishing. The emir got to know Eritrea and enjoyed his time there. When Isaias traveled internationally, the emir lent him an aircraft and crew from Qatar Airways. The emir of Qatar was very generous in terms of investment projects and credits for Eritrea. So the embassy of Qatar had probably the most influence, given the emir of Qatar's very generous support of Isaias and Eritrea.

Q: Did you have much contact with Isaias?

McMULLEN: No, I didn't. A person who knew Isaias well told me that Isaias had a vision that he would die in a U.S. missile strike on his residence in Massawa. I attended several events where he spoke, but the only time I talked to him was during the visit of New Jersey congressman Donald Payne, who came to Eritrea with Mia Farrow and her son Ronan. Mia Farrow was a UNICEF ambassador and wanted to talk to Isaias about Darfur. I presented my credentials to the Eritrean foreign minister, whereas other ambassadors presented theirs to Isaias.

We were an embassy besieged. Between 2001 and mid-2010, 48 FSNs from Embassy Asmara were arrested. Some were released after a relatively short imprisonment, but others had been jailed, in chains, for years. Several FSNs were religious prisoners arrested for secretly worshipping with unauthorized Protestant or Evangelical groups. Another FSN was arrested and held for 15 months because his son, along with his entire artillery unit, had deserted from the Eritrean army.

Young people fled the country in droves. The Eritrean national soccer team lost half its players every away game. The regime required exit visas and normally issued them only to men over 54 or women over 48. Border guards had shoot-on-sight orders for people fleeing Eritrea. It really was very dangerous. The regime implemented a system of collective punishment. If a young man or woman in national service fled the country, the regime would arrest the parents and seize their business or home. Two FSNs were arrested in 2001. We believe one of them died in prison and

that the other is alive but continually shackled. Another FSN was arrested for belonging to a banned Christian denomination and was kept in an underground prison for many months. He eventually was paroled and came back to work. He shared chilling details of the plight of religious and political prisoners in Eritrea.

Embassy Asmara operated in a very difficult environment, as we were specifically targeted by the Isaias regime for extremely tough treatment. For example, at one point the regime stopped 11 of our diplomatic pouches at the airport and refused to allow them into the country. This happened three or four times, particularly if we had crates of telecommunications equipment or cartons of new computers coming in. We repeatedly protested the detention of our diplomatic pouches in both verbal and written form, citing the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, etc. Finally, I ordered the consular section to close and even refused to provide visa services to official government of Eritrea travelers. This was particularly effective when Eritrean officials needed to go to New York for the UN General Assembly. We said, "Because you've excluded our diplomatic pouches containing consular supplies such as visa foils and materials that we need to process visas, we're unable to do any visa processing, even for official visits." I told senior foreign ministers officials, "You're welcome to go to any other American embassy in the world and apply for a visa to New York. Because we are obligated to allow you to travel to the UN General Assembly, you'll get a visa. But due to your actions against my embassy, I'm physically unable to issue you a visa because of your exclusion of our diplomatic pouches." They didn't like that at all, but eventually we got our pouches in. Even a routine activity like receiving a diplomatic pouch was a struggle.

Another restriction the Isaias regime placed on us was the requirement for internal travel permits. To travel more than about 12 miles outside of Asmara you needed written permission 10 days in advance. During my three years in Asmara, I requested domestic travel permits 65 times and was granted only 14. The regime didn't want us gallivanting around the country seeing what was going on and talking to people. Our phones were tapped, public internet was monitored, and members of our household staff and FSNs were forced to report to the Eritrean intelligence service. We were hassled on all fronts. Ajani Husbands was a first-tour political officer who enjoyed helping with public diplomacy events. At one function regime security thugs roughed him up and pointed a cocked gun at him. The RSO and I heard about this, immediately went to the scene, grabbed the senior security officer present, and tried to diffuse the situation. The regime attempted to stymie us on all fronts, but they were unsuccessful in forcing us out or curtailing our efforts to promote American interest and values in Eritrea.

However, the regime was successful shutting down the UN peacekeeping operation, UNMEE. Starting in January of 2008, UNMEE couldn't get diesel fuel, which was controlled by the government of Eritrea. Regime officials told UNMEE, "Your allotment of diesel fuel isn't available now, but you'll get it soon." It didn't appear. Repeated queries by UNMEE went unanswered. UNMEE asked, "Can we purchase and import our own diesel if you're not able to sell us our allotment of fuel?" The government of Eritrea refused. UNMEE badly needed fuel to conduct mechanized patrols of the Temporary Security Zone. It also used diesel to run generators that supplied electricity to isolated outposts. The electricity powered security lighting and refrigerators that held food and medicines. Finally, because the Isaias regime cut off the fuel UNMEE needed to sustain its operations, General Taisir and other senior UN officials decided

that peacekeeping operation was no longer viable. UNMEE was forced out. Isaias could have told UNMEE that it had done a great job, noted that peace prevails along the border, and thrown a victory parade for UNMEE on the way out to the airport. In that scenario, UNMEE would have gone out with flags flying and heads held high, and Eritrea might even have garnered a bit of international good will. Instead, the Isaias regime shot itself in the foot by forcing UNMEE out, thus garnering the antipathy of the United Nations and the troop-supplying countries of India, Jordan, and Kenya. The UN Security Council terminated UNMEE's mandate on June 30, 2008.

We hung on. Embassy Asmara rarely got TDY visitors, as the regime wouldn't issue them visas. When the regime refused to issue a visa to a defense attaché nominee, we closed the defense attaché's office. We couldn't even get visas for the OIG (Office of the Inspector General) inspectors, so we did a self-inspection and sent the results to the OIG. In short, Embassy Asmara was isolated and struggled daily with the antagonistic government of Eritrea.

Q: Well, how did you get anything done?

McMULLEN: We did have good personal connections with a number of senior party officials. Cabinet members came to my house for receptions and the occasional dinner. We saw a temporary thaw when President Obama was elected. The Eritreans thought there'd be a new beginning with a man whose father was from East Africa. Shortly after President Obama's inauguration, Jane and I were invited to a senior party member's farm for a picnic with a cabinet minister and several high-ranking officials. But that opening closed relatively quickly as it became apparent that the Obama administration was not going to radically alter policies toward Eritrea or Ethiopia. It was tough to do anything. We kept our embassy open to voice our support for human rights and democracy, even though the Isaias regime continued to deny the Eritrean people the fruits of their hard-won independence. It was a constant, interesting battle.

Eritrea hosted rebel movements from Sudan, Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Somalia. We regularly met with Somali exiles. Ethiopia invaded Somalia in December 2006 and kept troops there until early 2009. Leaders from the Somali Union of Islamic Courts fled to Asmara when Ethiopia invaded, forming an umbrella group called the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia. I met with them quietly a number of times in an old Asmara hotel to convince them to join what was called the "Djibouti Process" of national reconciliation. About half of them agreed, attended a national conference in Djibouti, and eventually became part of Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG). The hardcore Islamists didn't take this path towards reconciliation and returned to battle the Ethiopians and the TFG. Eritrea particularly supported Hizbul Islam, a group that later merged with al-Shabaab.

Jendayi Frazer, the assistant secretary for African affairs, was keen to designate Eritrea a state sponsor of terrorism. I didn't think it was a good idea and we butted heads on this. I argued the case for multilateral UN sanctions, rather than unilateral U.S. action against Eritrea. Bad blood between Jendayi Frazer and Isaias Afewerki was legendary. They hated each other. Personal animosity, in my view, clouded the policy judgments coming out of the Isaias regime and the Jendayi Frazer-led AF Bureau.

I tried to slow the bureaucratic progress of the designation of Eritrea as a state sponsor of terrorism as much as possible. However, by January 2009 the designation papers made it to Secretary Rice's desk, awaiting formal approval. All that Secretary Rice had to do was sign the memo and Eritrea would have been on the state sponsor of terrorism list. It came right down to the wire. I went into the embassy on January 21, 2009 to check the cable traffic see if Secretary Rice had signed Jendayi's memo on the last day of the Bush Administration. She hadn't. After that, I worked closely with Washington, our mission to the United Nations, and allied countries to win support for UN sanctions against Eritrea for its support of Islamist terrorists in Somalia. In December 2009 the UN Security Council passed a sanctions resolution against Eritrea. The United Nations sanctions on Eritrea were more helpful and appropriate than the unilateral U.S. move that Jendayi Frazer favored.

Q: Why were we going after the unilateral declaration? Was it just to show we really didn't like Eritrea? Was this personal?

McMULLEN: Jendayi felt close to Condoleezza Rice. To designate Eritrea a state sponsor of terrorism, Jendayi only needed to shepherd a decision memo from the Africa Bureau to the counterterrorism office and then to the secretary's desk. Frazer thought this would be easier, I think, than going to the UN where we had to worry about a Chinese or Russian veto. Designating Eritrea a state sponsor of terrorism would not have affected Eritrea's willingness or ability to continue supporting radical Islamists in Somalia. Jendayi detested Isaias and told me she considered the U.S. to be at war with Eritrea.

Oddly, Isaias disliked radical Islamism but was supporting Hizbul Islam, which later merged with al-Shabaab. Isaias sees Eritrea as being locked in an existential conflict with Ethiopia, which has a population 20 times larger than Eritrea's. The Isaias regime's strategy for cutting Ethiopia down to size begins with Somalia. Eritrea hoped to install an anti-Addis Ababa government in Mogadishu, which then might assist Somalis in the Ogaden in breaking away from Ethiopia. Eritrea would then support the separatist Oromo rebels in freeing Oromia from Ethiopia, eventually whittling Ethiopia down to a rump state of consisting of just the Amharic and Tigray regions. Isaias' strategic plan seemed to be to dismember Ethiopia by supporting radical anti-Addis Ababa groups in Somalia as the first step in breaking up Eritrea's large enemy. I met with members of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia and got to know the president of the Oromo Liberation Front quite well. We met with members of Sudan's Justice and Equality Movement and other Darfuri rebel groups. We had warm relations with the Asmara-based representatives of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and I once met with the leader of the Ogaden National Liberation Front.

In 2006, Eritrea had brokered a cease-fire agreement between the government of Sudan and the Eastern Front, a collection of rebels from the Red Sea region. USAID Khartoum provided Embassy Asmara funds to conduct a series of peace-building workshops in Eritrea. The workshop participants were young members of civil society organizations from eastern Sudan. We invited 25 to 30 people to each workshop, which focused on how to promote development and civil society. The participants came by bus across the Sudan-Eritrea border. We held the workshops in a hotel on the outskirts of Asmara. Many participants were experiencing international travel for the first time. They were young leaders of local environmental groups,

women's micro-finance groups, education volunteers, election observer groups, and many others. I enjoyed talking with the young Sudanese about the importance of civil society and how they could play a constructive role in their communities. This was all aimed at cementing the 2006 Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement. These civil society workshops were about the only cooperative undertaking between Embassy Asmara and the government of Eritrea.

Eritrea fought a three-day border war against Djibouti in June of 2008 near Ras Doumeira, a rocky peninsula located where Eritrea, Djibouti, and the Red Sea meet. The French and Italian colonial powers never got around to demarcating the exact border in this area. In early 2008 there were Eritrean and Djiboutian trenches within yards of each other along a rocky ridge running inland from the coast. On June 10, 2008 a group of Eritrean conscripts jumped out of their trench and, in an effort to desert, dashed towards the Djiboutian lines. Eritrean officers began to fire at the deserting conscripts. The Djiboutian troops, thinking they were being attacked, returned fire. There wasn't much damage done. Things quieted down. The Eritreans said, "You must send back the deserters." No reply from the Djiboutian side. About four hours later an Eritrean officer jumped out of his trench and raced toward the Djiboutian trenches. Eritrean troops shot and wounded the officer to prevent him from deserting. When it became apparent that Djibouti was not going to hand back the deserters, Eritrea attacked. Tough Eritrean soldiers drove the Djiboutian troops down the ridge and knocked them back a number of kilometers. The disorganized Djiboutian units began to disintegrate in the 110-degree weather. Just in time, about 100 French Foreign Legionnaires arrived to save the wavering Djiboutian line from complete collapse.

Djibouti is home to the only U.S. military base in Africa, Camp Lemonnier, which we use for counter-piracy and counterterrorism actions in the Horn of Africa and Yemen. So the country where I served as ambassador had attacked a friendly country hosting the only U.S. military base in Africa. On the second day of the war, June 11th, the government of Eritrea refused to take our calls. That evening I encountered four senior officials at a diplomatic reception and said, "The message from Washington is: stop attacking in Djibouti now." And I said, "Or else."

The Eritrean officials flatly denied they were fighting Djibouti. It was very odd. One of them said, "What war? There's no war. We're not fighting. We have good relations with Djibouti." This short border clash produced 200 to 250 casualties overall. The vast majority of the Eritrean troops captured by Djibouti didn't want to go back to Eritrea and requested political asylum. Many of them were resettled in Canada, Italy, or the U.S. Eritrea captured 19 Djiboutian troops, but refused to acknowledge that it held any POWs. It was a very odd border war. Although sparked locally by the desertion of Eritrean conscripts, Eritrea was angry that Djibouti sponsored the Somalia reconciliation effort known as the Djibouti Process. This was an attempt to establish a broad-based government in Somalia, which Eritrea perhaps saw as threatening its plan to install a radical anti-Addis Ababa regime in Mogadishu. I believe the Ras Doumeira border clash was an effort by Isaias to destabilize or punish Djibouti for thwarting Eritrea's plans for Somalia.

Several parties sought to halt the fighting, separate the combatants, and resolve the border dispute. The United Nations couldn't do it. The Africa Union couldn't do it. However, the emir of Qatar offered to dispatch Qatari troops to separate the warring sides and delineate the border. Eritrea and Djibouti agreed. The emir of Qatar played a constructive role in resolving this issue.

Q: Did you feel that the embassy was providing a positive role?

McMULLEN: Every month we had access to an auditorium that held maybe 150 people. We hosted an evening lecture series, where we'd invite someone from the United States, Embassy Asmara, or an Eritrean who had studied in the U.S. to talk on some noncontroversial topic like marine biology in the Red Sea. We'd pack the auditorium with young Eritreans eager to interact on an academic topic -- and have a free snack afterwards. The regime shut down the University of Asmara because students think freely. It was illegal for five people or more to gather without government permission. But young people could come to the American Center auditorium for a sociable evening, hear an interesting speaker, and have a piece of cake and a cup of lemonade afterwards. The American Center also provided uncensored, unmonitored internet connections to the outside world. The American Center's small computer lab was always full, as it offered internet access unmonitored by the regime's censors. It was used by students applying to American universities, looking for information about the outside world, and much more.

I volunteered to be the monthly speaker at the American Center auditorium. I was interested in early anthropology and how *Homo sapiens* probably left Africa through southern Eritrea about 65,000 years ago to populate the rest of the world. My talk was entitled, "Eritrea: Africa's Bridge to the World." We had permission from the ministry of foreign affairs. However, when I went to the auditorium I found about 150 or 180 people milling around outside. Eritrean intelligence agents had chained the doors of the auditorium. I said, "We have permission from the ministry of foreign affairs to have this event."

A plain-clothes Eritrean security official said, "We don't care about the ministry of foreign affairs. The ministry of communications doesn't approve."

So, on the spot we invited all 150 people standing outside the American Center auditorium to a patio just inside the gates of the chancery. On a moment's notice, we relocated the event into the embassy compound. The Eritrean security officials couldn't prohibit me from speaking to people inside our own embassy. That was one way we managed to continue our outreach programs in the face of direct opposition from the regime.

Q: Well, did the Chinese -- were you able to sound out the Chinese about how they saw the situation there?

McMULLEN: The primary Chinese interest in Africa is access to commodities. China is consuming vast quantities of oil, minerals, and agricultural products from Africa and wants to maintain or expand access to these commodities. There were a number of Chinese mining companies with interests in Eritrea. Geologists discovered a couple of billion-dollar gold deposits in Eritrea that drew the attention of Canadian, Australian, Chinese, and South African mining interests. Because Eritrea was at war for much of the previous 30 or 40 years, modern geological surveys had never been conducted in Eritrea. Now, with the stability provided by the authoritarian dictatorship, mining companies could properly prospect for gold and other minerals. China was also interested, I think, in demonstrating to Eritrea and others that it didn't interfere in the domestic politics of other sovereign states, one of its foreign policy principles.

Speaking of commodities, it was really hard to come up with daily bread. As U.S. ambassador I received rations from the government of Eritrea, as very little was available in local markets. Eritrea has the highest rate of malnutrition among newborn infants of any country surveyed by the World Health Organization.

Q: Good grief.

McMULLEN: The American employees of Embassy Asmara received ration allotments from the government of Eritrea enabling us to buy on a monthly basis flour, sugar, cooking oil, and sometimes coffee or tea – things that were not generally available in the market. We would always buy the maximum amount authorized, then give it to our domestic household staff who didn't have access to basic necessities like flour and cooking oil. It was hard to find many consumer items, but, thankfully, Eritrea produced good fruits and vegetables. We probably had a healthy diet with some fish up from the Red Sea and lots of fruits and vegetables. Even bread was hard to come by. There had been a Coca-Cola plant and a brewery in Asmara. Both were shut down for long periods due to the lack of foreign exchange needed to buy inputs. There was almost nothing available in Eritrea in terms of basic foodstuffs. Thanks to the State Department, we had a consumables allowance of 5,000 pounds of that kept us fairly well supplied. Hosting a diplomatic function in a country with no food is a real challenge. Jane and our cook, Abeba, somehow managed to come up with food for diplomatic receptions and dinners that provided a semblance of normal representational entertaining.

Q: You must have known about this situation there. So why did you pick it?

McMULLEN: I have great empathy for the Eritrean people. I had cheered them on during their liberation struggle. When I was an intern in Khartoum back in 1979, I met many Eritrean exiles, young people from Eritrea who had fled to Sudan. They were optimistic, confident, dedicated, and interesting. I was interested in Eritrea due to my experience in Sudan and because I had followed their long independence struggle against Ethiopia. I had sympathy for the Eritrean people, their struggles, and their cause. I thought that being in Asmara when the Isaias regime opened up or collapsed would be an opportunity to see the long-suffering Eritrean people finally get the fruits of the freedom they had so dearly earned. It would have been akin to being ambassador in Budapest in 1989. I hoped that there would be either an opening or a change of regime while I was there. It didn't happen on my watch, unfortunately.

From December of 2009, when the United States voted for United Nations sanctions on Eritrea, until May of 2010, the regime did not approve any requests by U.S. diplomats to travel outside the capital. It was a tough time. I hoped to normalize relations with Eritrea, but Isaias was not interested. He thought he was smarter and more “strategic” than the U.S. government and could outlast or outfox us. Meanwhile, he's done great harm to Eritrea and its people. What a shame. Eritrea deserves better.

Kagnew Station, the former U.S. military listening post located in Asmara, was an important element of U.S. – Eritrean relations. There were 4,000 Americans stationed in Eritrea in the early 1970s. Embassy Asmara today occupies one end of what had been the main compound of

Kagnew Station. Access to Kagnew was an important reason for our support of Ethiopia for much of the three decades of Eritrea's independence struggle. The Eritrean defense minister told me that when he was in junior high, GIs from Kagnew Station helped teach math and science classes. If a student did well on a quiz, the GIs would sometimes give the student a stick of Juicy Fruit as a reward. The U.S. recognized Eritrea's independence in 1993 and we had good relations until the 1998–2000 war with Ethiopia.

Q: How about marriages? Many American GIs marry Eritreans?

McMULLEN: I don't know of any Eritrean wives of GIs who served at Kagnew Station. Perhaps the U.S. military didn't allowed it

I tried to use a shared interest in military history to build a relationship with the minister of defense. About 50 miles south of Asmara was a former Italian airfield at a place called Gura. The Italians built Gura Airfield and used it during their invasion of Ethiopia in the 1930s. Once World War II started, the British invaded Eritrea from Sudan and conquered the Italian colony. Meanwhile, the British were battling the Italians and Germans on Libya's border with Egypt. The Royal Air Force (RAF) put damaged Hurricanes and other aircraft on ships in Egypt, sent them down the Red Sea, and trucked them up to Gura Airfield, where they were repaired and flown back to the front. President Roosevelt authorized a secret operation under the Lend-Lease Act to send 3,000 American employees of Douglass Aircraft Corporation to Gura. The Americans patched up the British planes to keep the RAF flying in North Africa. The Douglas Aircraft employees made the most of the situation and even had a golf course and made ice cream. When Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and we entered the war, all the Douglas Aircraft Corporation employees in Gura were drafted on the spot and Gura Airfield became a U.S. military facility.

In 1876, the year Custer's command was wiped out at the Little Big Horn, Gura witnessed a bloody battle involving several American Civil War veterans serving in an Egyptian army. Egypt, which then controlled Massawa on the Red Sea coast, sent an army inland to conquer Ethiopia. The Egyptian expeditionary force of about 12,000 troops included nine American mercenaries, veterans of the Civil War. One of them was a West Point graduate from Iowa. Several of the American veterans wrote accounts of their time with the Egyptian army and the battle of Gura. The Egyptian expeditionary force marched inland as far as Gura, where it was attacked and nearly annihilated by a much larger Ethiopian army. The Egyptian retreat left the territory open for Italian colonization in subsequent years. In 1876 there were nine Americans at Gura, during World War II there were 3,000 Americans there, and as late as the early 1970s there were scores of Americans working at the Gura annex of Kagnew Station.

One of the last big battles of Eritrea's independence war was an armored clash that took place at Gura in 1991. The defense minister himself had commanded the Eritrean side. I invited the defense minister to go with the Egyptian ambassador and me to Gura, but he declined. I did, however, get a rare travel permit to visit Gura. Jane, Owen, and I found remnants of the airstrip and the hangar facilities used by Douglass Aircraft Corporation. We even came across several old men who remembered when the Americans were at Gura during the early days of World War II. Abraham, the wizened sexton of the local church, told us he worked for "Douglas" as a young

man. Thus, we tried to use military history to forge personal connections and some common ground with the minister of defense to develop a bit of traction with the Eritrean government.

Q: How did the long guerilla war play out in Eritrea?

McMULLEN: Eritrea's 30-year struggle for independence was a bloody, hard-fought guerilla war. The Eritrean victory, like that of the Vietnamese, was a classic example of guerilla fighters facing a large conventional army. The fighting ended only as the Soviet Union neared collapse. The Iron Curtain had opened and Gorbachev was about to dissolve the Soviet Union itself. The communist Derg government in Ethiopia found it couldn't get supplies from the Soviet Union. The Eritreans and allied rebel movements overcame the collapsing Derg regime, the Soviet-backed government in Addis Ababa, only in 1991. It was partly the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War that changed the international playing field and enabled the Eritrean guerillas to win.

Almost every Eritrean family lost members in "the Struggle," as the guerrilla war is known, and had property damaged or destroyed. There were minefields all across Eritrea. Farmers, children, and livestock lost legs to landmines. The whole country suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. Many problems of Eritrea stem from the horrible conditions that people endured for decades. I think President Isaias has mental problems. He is very good at what he does, is ruthless and dedicated, but I think he too suffers from 30 years of war. We're learning about the traumatic effect on American troops of fighting in Afghanistan or Iraq. Consider what 30 years of constant warfare must do to people and societies. One can understand the tribulations of Eritrea, the paranoia, the xenophobia, and the feelings of supremacy. Eritreans say, "We beat Ethiopia backed by the Americans, we beat Ethiopia backed by the Soviets, we can beat all comers, and we're going to build the best society in Africa." Unfortunately for Eritrea, and for America's interests in the Horn of Africa, Isaias is using Mao's failed vision as a blueprint for a model state.

At the 2010 Fourth of July reception, I gave a very hard-hitting speech on the freedoms and liberties that Americans and Eritreans fought so hard for during our respective independence struggles. I made the point that these freedoms and liberties – government of, by, and for the people -- are enjoyed in America but has been denied to Eritrean people by Isaias. Afterwards, many Eritreans came up to me and said, "Oh, we've been waiting so long to hear that!" The regime apologists were apocalyptic, but the vast majority of Eritreans seemed pleased to hear an American ambassador speak so clearly about Eritrea's longing for the freedoms stolen by the Isaias dictatorship.

Q: How did you and your wife, maybe it's not the right word, but survive under these difficult circumstances?

McMULLEN: Our son Wyatt went to the Asmara International School for part of tenth grade. The high school had a total of 28 students and three teachers. For his 11th and 12th grades we sent him to boarding school in the U.S. That was hard on us and him.

Asmara is a unique, decrepit, and faintly charming place. In the 1920s, when the Italians were building the city, Eritrea was the place to be if you were a young architect. Before WWII there were 50,000 Italians living in Eritrea, mostly in Asmara. It was the workshop of East Africa with cement factories, breweries, mills, glassmaking factories, and a railroad workshop. Downtown Asmara has a large collection of modernist architecture from the 1920s and 1930s. Because Asmara is at 7,700 feet above sea level, it's cool and dry, so even though there hasn't been much maintenance on the old Italian buildings, they're still in pretty good shape. Asmara's main street is lined with large palm trees and features a beautiful Catholic cathedral built in 1923. There are little espresso bars with vintage Italian espresso machines frequented by old Eritrean men in suits. On a crisp, sunny morning, it's still possible to imagine the charm of colonial Asmara.

While we couldn't travel far outside the capital very often, we did lots of walking and exploring in the 12-mile radius around Asmara that we could access without a travel permit. One could go from a 1930s Italian city to medieval villages in 15 minutes. There were picturesque towns perched on the lip of the dramatic escarpment that dropped down to the Red Sea lowlands. Many villages featured stone buildings with thatched roofs, muzzled oxen threshing barley, farm implements fashioned from olive wood, and dung cakes, used as cooking fuel, plastered on rock walls to dry in the sun. Some Orthodox churches suspended long, flat stones from a frame of wires, which, when struck by a mallet or small rock, served as homemade chimes. The Eritrean people were very nice. We'd hike over a hill and down a path into some village, visit the Orthodox church, and see the school. That's kind of what we did for entertainment. We walked a lot and explored what I called the Near Abroad, the area we could reach without a travel permit.

The weather was perfect in Asmara. Every day was 75 degrees with low humidity and a robin-egg blue sky. Again, it was cool and dry and just an ideal climate. The diplomatic corps entertained itself a lot because we were all so badly treated by the regime, apart, perhaps, from the Chinese and Qataris. Other diplomatic missions had pouches seized and travel permits denied, and the Dutch ambassador was even roughed up by security thugs at a checkpoint. We were a very sociable and cohesive diplomatic corps by necessity. Embassy Asmara had a swimming pool and one of the few tennis courts in the country. I occasionally rode my bicycle to work, and of course I didn't have a security detail. I sometimes led what I called my 75¢ tour of Asmara, a two-hour walking tour of historical, architectural, cultural, and funky aspects of the city. That's some of what we did to keep our sanity and our spirits up.

Q: I assume there were no fleet visits or anything like that?

McMULLEN: While I was in Eritrea there was one request for a ship visit, but the government of Eritrea didn't agree to it. So we had very limited contact with the U.S. military. When the last person from our defense attaché's office left, the regime refused visas for any DOD replacements and we had to close the defense attaché's office.

Q: What about activities from Djibouti? We were flying drones over there in Somalia. Were you getting any reaction to those?

McMULLEN: Yes, the U.S. government was quite concerned about al-Shabaab, the radical Islamist group in Somalia supported by Eritrea and financial backers from the Gulf, including

Qatar. I went to Doha once to talk with Qatar's foreign ministry about private and foundation support from the Gulf going to al-Shabaab in Somalia. Another worry was the fact that al-Shabaab had recruited about four dozen Minnesotans who had gone to southern Somalia and had been trained by al-Qaeda in suicide bombing techniques. Two or three of the Minnesotans carried out suicide bombings against international peacekeepers or the government of Somalia. Another killed himself in northern Somalia, bombing a UNDP office.

In January 2009 there was news that al-Shabaab assassins reportedly planned to travel through Europe to Canada, and from there across the northern U.S. border to assassinate President Obama at his inauguration. Part of the beefed up security we saw in Washington on Inauguration Day of 2009 was due to the reports that al-Shabaab planned to kill President Obama and his family on January 20th. It didn't happen, thank goodness.

We tried to convince the government of Eritrea to stop supporting al-Shabaab, which we saw as a direct threat to the U.S., particularly as it was training Somali-Americans from Minnesota. The UN sanctions imposed on Eritrea in December of 2009 were appropriate. It was a multilateral effort to isolate Eritrea for its attempts to destabilize the region. In 2012 we've seen al-Shabaab rolled back a bit, as Kenya got involved in the AU peacekeeping operation in support of the new government in Somalia. Perhaps the pressure on Eritrea since 2009 limited al-Shabaab's outside support, weakened the radical Islamists in Somalia, and thereby reduced threats against U.S. interests. Maybe.

Q: Well, were you under threat from al-Shabaab?

McMULLEN: Not that I know of. I met with members of the Alliance for the Re-Liberation of Somalia accompanied by our entry-level political officer. At other times Embassy Asmara staff met with Somali or Darfuri representatives without incident. As mentioned, I didn't have a protective security detail, often rode my bicycle to the embassy, and hiked many weekends in the countryside around Asmara without a security escort. One of the silver linings of living in one of the world's most ruthless dictatorships was that there was relatively little crime or risk of terrorism. Isaias had such a tight grip on the country that not much happened that he didn't know about. Embassy Asmara had lots of concerns and challenges, but crime and terrorism were not among the most pressing issues.

Q: Well, whatever contacts you had in the Somali Military interested in --

McMULLEN: Our Somali contacts were political leaders and we didn't knowingly deal with militants. Part of the Somali group in Asmara joined the U.S.-backed Djibouti Process, but the Eritrea-backed hardliners returned to Somali and fought alongside al-Shabaab.

End of Reader